

*When a 5000 year old cult begins the domination of mankind...  
only the return of a legend can save the world.*

THE  
**LONE GUNMEN**  
AND  
**DARK ANGEL**

in  
**"FINAL EDITION"**

**"Whatever it takes..."**

**THE LONE GUNMEN / DARK ANGEL CROSSOVER**

*"Final Edition"*

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*Once upon a time, there were three men who were trying to make a difference. Three more unlikely heroes there never were. Brave but naive, they fought the good fight without regard to the danger they might face.*

*It wasn't long, however, before their naiveté nearly got them killed. So, being driven but not unintelligent, they hooked up with an FBI agent named Fox Mulder and began publishing a conspiracy newspaper called "THE LONE GUNMAN".*

*From their cramped basement office they pointed fingers at powerful forces. In their own unique way, the three gunmen really were patriotic idealists fighting 'a just cause', and provided expertise for their friends at the FBI.*

*For a brief time it looked like they might actually make a difference in the world. They acquired an intern named Jimmy who believed in their cause, and a beautiful nemesis named Yves who eventually became an ally and friend.*

*But the world is not kind to idealists, and those who fight "The Good Fight" don't always win...*

## **PROLOGUE : "Jump The Shark"**

April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2002 : 8:00 p.m.

"No, Jimmy! Don't!"

John Fitzgerald Byers was trying to come to terms with knowing that he was seconds from the end of his life. He and his two partners, Ringo Langly and Melvin Frohike had just brought down the fire-doors of the hallway to prevent a bio-toxin from killing thousands of innocent people.

Of course, it meant the three of them wouldn't survive. He knew in an instant that he would never leave one of the guys to die alone, and knew them both well enough to judge that they felt exactly the same. And so the heavy doors had come crashing down, sentencing them to death together.

Unspoken, all three were aware that none of them knew just when the toxin would become contagious, and so they hadn't even tried to get past the firewall as it sealed them to their fate. They knew, simply enough, that they couldn't risk infecting the rest of the city.

It had taken him a moment to register that the strange man on the floor beside them who was leaking florescent purple foam was in the midst of a death seizure.

Another few precious seconds passed before he realize that the Gunmen's friend, Jimmy Bond, was attempting to lift the fire-door. Frighteningly, he suspected that given time, the good-hearted young man might actually succeed.

Yves Adele Harlow, the group's mysterious competitor and ally, stood beside Jimmy on the other side of the fire-door. She put a hand on the man's shoulder. "Don't. They're already exposed."

The three men looked out into the eyes of Jimmy and Yves through the fire door window that sealed them off from their friends.

"No, guys!" Jimmy anguished. The pain in his voice was as unrestrained as it was compassionate in his realization that the men he admired most in the world, who also happened to be his closest friends, were dying. Tears began streaming down his cheeks.

Byers knew that while Jimmy definitely wasn't the brightest man he knew, he had as much heart as the three of them put together. He had become an invaluable member of the team.

Jimmy brought his hand up to the glass. Byers mirrored the action, and the two other Gunmen instantly respond with the same. This was goodbye.

Frohike spoke first. He placed his hand on Byers' hand on the window. "Fight the good fight..."

Strangely calm, Langly added, "Both of you."

"Never give up." Byers finished.

He looked at them through the window, hoping they understood. The world desperately needed the few who not only could but would stand up for those who couldn't. Jimmy would do so in an instant, but lacked direction. He felt Yves had more direction than even the three of them could follow at times but Byers knew from experience that she sometimes lacked motivation to help others over her own personal agenda. He hoped they might find what they were each missing, from each other.

Suddenly the three men felt much weaker; the bio-virus was beginning to take it's toll. They nodded to Jimmy and sat down against the wall.

An unbidden thought came to Frohike of a discussion he and Byers had earlier that day.

*"We really screwed the pooch... maybe it's time we called it quits." He had never been inclined to keep his mouth shut when he had an opinion. It was a habit his two friends had grown to respect and mimic.*

*And yet, as always... Byers had looked at Frohike and came up with just the right words to bring him out of the fog of defeat that he sometimes felt when an answer wouldn't come to him. "We never gave up, we never will. In the end, if that's the best they can say about us, it'll do."*

How apropos. And yet, he couldn't help wondering if they would have continued to make a difference if this terrible day hadn't happened.

Langly looked at the older man. As if reading his mind, he nodded and smiled grimly. "It was all worth it, man. This last stop's a bummer, but it's been a hell of a ride."

The two clasped hands in camaraderie.

With effort, Byers placed his hand on top. "Wherever we go, heaven or hell. Until the battle is over." He promised.

And leaning back against the wall, quietly into the dark they went.

\* \* \* \* \*

And then he woke.

Gasping, trying to draw oxygen into his tortured lungs, Byers struggled to make sense of his surroundings. Finally his labored breathing settled into a calmer progression.

Almost instantly he realized two things. The first was that he appeared to be in an empty white room containing a chair and a gurney, that latter of which he was lying on. The second was that the chair was occupied.

"Good morning, John." The female voice sounded friendly enough, but he could hear an underlining acidity and sharpness that made him feel instantly on guard.

"Where am I?" his voice croaked.

The bleach blonde woman ignored the question. "You were given an antidote to the bio-virus you came in contact with. Apparently you're very lucky to be drawing breath. You've been exposed to a fairly ingenious strain of, well... let's skip that part actually. To be unfortuitously cliché, you already know far too much for your own good. Adding to that would seem... dangerous." The tone she spoke the word left no doubt that the danger was to him.

Byers' still-foggy mind wrapped itself around the one word that stood out. "Antidote... Frohike? Langly?"

"Your friends are alive. However, staying that way depends entirely on you."

He strongly didn't like the sound of that, and was about to say so when she continued.

"Don't bother. Just sit there on the gurney and let me do the talking. So far the United States government departments that see fit to monitor to your little publication have tolerated it simply because of the lack of attention it receives, especially as of late. Action against it would bring more attention to the details of some of your more accurate stories. Fletcher's retrieval of Lois Runtz a year ago had the unanticipated effect of tightening your leash better than if we had planned it that way."

If Byers had disliked her immediately, he now did so even more at the mention of the actions of Fletcher. The self-proclaimed "Man In Black" had kidnapped Yves, and the Gunmen had exhausted their resources trying to locate her. Jimmy had taken off for almost a year, trying to find her. The poor guy had returned recently, on the verge of a breakdown.

She got up from the chair and slowly walked around the room, as if her attention were absorbed in the blank white walls that surrounded them. "However, there are several various reasons why your latest escapade cannot reach the public ear, none of which I'm at liberty to reveal to you. I'd just as soon have you vanish off the face of the planet. Since your apparent demise; this would be easy enough, except that there are those whom seem to feel that your continued survival could prove to be... useful."

John continued to listen to her, warily.

She turned towards him. "Here's the deal, non-negotiable and you only get one shot at it. You drop off the face of the map, with your two goons. New names, new identities. You do not let anyone you currently know that you're alive. In return for letting you live, we may call on your unique services once in a while. What you do outside of those few times, if ever, we don't care. Start another publication. Whatever, it doesn't matter... so long as you and your identities stay hidden." She leaned back against the wall, expectantly.

He waited, then asked, "And if we decide not to comply?"

She smiled. "Well, I suppose in that case, the nice funeral you had won't have been in vain."

Byers was no fool. He'd dealt with the government enough to know when his options were severely limited, and this time they'd been pulled back almost literally by the skin on their teeth. Buying more time wasn't necessarily giving up, although in a way it felt like it.

"All of us?"

She inclined her head, condescendingly but complacently. "All of you. Free to be dumped wherever you want, so long as it isn't on the East Coast. That way you won't run into anyone accidentally. And we'll be monitoring to make sure you don't contact anyone you've known."

John hesitated, but seeing no immediate way out, he nodded his agreement.

The young government official known as Renfro looked satisfied, and walked out of the room to make arrangements.

*It was a chance at life. He told himself. A gamble... but a chance none the less.*

*Better than the alternative...*

*Once upon a time, there was a secret government project named Manticore that developed the technique to re-sequence and alter the genetic structure of DNA. The product of this technique was the creation of a new species known as Transgenics. Some were reptilian, some were canine but most of them were human looking. Project Manticore raised them and trained them to be soldiers.*

*In the year 2009 (seven years after the reported death of the Lone Gunmen), reported terrorists set off a nuclear pulse off the United States coast, changing it from World Super-power to third-world country in a blink of an eye. That same year, a dozen or so of the transgenic children escaped from Manticore.*

*A little over ten years later, one of the transgenics who went by the name of Max Guevara met an ordinary human named Logan Cale and fell in love. Together, they launched an attack against Manticore and released all the transgenics held within, including Joshua... a transgenic with canine DNA who resembled both man and dog. Joshua had become one of Max's closest friends, along with Original Cindy, Sketchy, and a few other ordinaries. Ordinaries were what the transgenics called typical ordinary humans. Together, they burned Manticore to the ground.*

*Soon, Max discovered the existence of an organization known secretly as the Conclave; an ancient clan that developed many millennia prior and who's sole intention is to replace mankind as the reigning force on the planet. Enhancing themselves over the years through selective breeding, they feel no physical pain, were highly trained in the martial arts and nearly as strong as the transgenics.*

*When Max destroyed Manticore and set the transgenics free, a government agent named White took the opportunity to begin eradicating the now on-the-run transgenics. White was also a member of the Conclave and happened to be the son of Doctor Sandeman, another clan member who broke away from the Conclave and took a job at Manticore in order to preserve mankind rather than destroy them.*

*There was something special about Max Guevara, something unusual; she had no junk DNA. She discovered that Doctor Sandeman designed her explicitly that way.*

*But the reason for this was as yet unknown to her, and the clock was ticking...*

## CHAPTER ONE : "Disseminate This"

### CHAPTER 1

*Seattle, Washington State - 2022*

*"It's been more than a year since the incident at Jam Pony. Everything seems to be working out all right, the ordinaries seem to be quieting down since they discovered we weren't going to start prowling at night and stealing their children in their sleep; or whatever nonsense they were telling themselves. Since then I've experimented with these new abilities that seem to have manifested along with the runes. The first to appear was some kind of sixth sense premonition. Then later came some other, minor abilities. They remind me of some of the things I saw at Psi-Ops back at Manticore... telekinesis, etc. I've had \*some\* successful practices. For the most part I've concentrated on the easier of the abilities; I've been able to sense things that were about to make an impact on our lives and I've discovered that I can move objects a little if I concentrate on them. Controlling that movement however has led to some problems... lifting things without touching them doesn't seem to be difficult but controlling that movement is a lot harder. I've decided as of late to just let them develop naturally, and not worry about it too much."*

*"My search for Sandeman hasn't gone as well, though. I've devoted a lot of time in the past few months looking for him, with Joshua's memories and clues about him and my own brief flashes from my childhood. Of course I can only assume it's the same man, but Joshua's description fairly matches my own dim recollection."*

*"Christmas seems to be right around the corner again. I never really looked forward to it before, but this year seems different. We haven't had any serious problems from anyone in so long I'm starting to wonder if maybe things really will start getting better. Maybe Logan's 'have faith' attitude is starting to wear off on me. "*

*"Looks like we're getting a new president soon. I don't normally pay attention to government politics, but McKinley seems to show a strong policy towards rebuilding and restructuring the country. He's promising a lot, but I wonder if he can pull it off? Let's face it, I'm more paranoid of the government than most, but I've been proven wrong about some people before. Granted that doesn't happen often, but on occasion."*

She stopped, encrypted and saved the entry and closed up the tiny computer unit Logan had given her. He had said that writing down her thoughts would be good psychological therapy, and she had to admit that it made her feel better. *Isn't that a kick in the butt?* She thought to herself.

\* \* \* \* \*

"OK, they're in place!" Alec called down from the roof. Joshua leaned inside and let Logan know. The unshaven man tapped a few keys on his makeshift computer and a diagram of Terminal City came up, covered with green, red and blue dots and lines. He hit F5 and Building 5 alone appeared on the map, zoomed to fill the screen.

Logan nodded. The security system looked to be working perfectly. "OK, now have all the NT's, non-transgenics... put on the signal pins." One by one, the red dots all turned into blue dots.

Grinning, Logan high-fived Joshua. "It works great... now we'll be able to tell if any NT's make

their way into Terminal City."

Joshua smiled back, only partially understanding. Nobody had tried gaining entrance into Terminal City in almost a year. But he had come to know Logan well enough to trust him almost as much as he trusted Max. Not that Joshua disliked him, in fact, Joshua pretty much liked everyone. Well, almost everyone.

Joshua had come close to leaving Terminal City months ago on a personal hunt when he found out that White was seen in the area recently. He hated White with a passion for killing a good friend of his about a year and a half or so ago. Max had pulled him aside and explained that she didn't like White either, but it didn't justify hunting him down, anymore than it justified White to hunt them down. Logan explained that principles of right and wrong were what made White the bad guy, and them the good guys. And good people don't kill others if they don't have to.

That, more than anything else, had convinced Joshua to stay and help. Logan was his friend, but more importantly, Logan was important to Max. So he would refrain from killing White... as extremely difficult as that was. Every time he thought about that particular human he wanted to rip out the man's spine.

He thought that perhaps he was beginning to understand what Isaac felt when he was alive. Isaac had been Joshua's brother, who went on a murder rampage after Manticore guards cut out his tongue. Joshua later was forced to kill Isaac, and had never really forgiven himself. Sometimes he wondered if he had been wrong. He certainly hated White as much as Isaac had hated the Manticore soldiers. But Isaac had started killing innocent people when he escaped from Manticore, and Joshua knew that too was wrong.

Joshua leaned back out of the door and called up to Alec, "Works good!"

Alec gave him a thumb's up and disappeared back onto the roof.

A different beep from the computer drew Logan's attention back to the screen. It was notifying him that he had a message on the server he was logged into.

Accessing the email program, he scanned the email for viruses and then opened it.

His smile vanished, substituted by an increasing frown and furrowed forehead.

"Get Max on the horn and tell her to get back here pronto." He called out to Joshua.

Joshua hesitated. He knew how much Max needed this time alone. Joshua had been the recipient of more than one mood swing of the increasingly volatile female. It had gotten so bad that when Logan told her to go take some time for herself, she hadn't even put up a token argument. That just wasn't like Max.

It didn't take psychic ability for Logan to deduce what the transgenic was thinking. "I know." He consoled. "But this is important. We'll make it up to her."

Joshua paused another couple of seconds but then went off to make the call.

\* \* \* \* \*



"Senator McKinley is Conclave." Max read part of the email addressed to Logan aloud. She looked at the man with a 'you called me back for this?' look.

Logan nodded without smiling. "I know, it seems unlikely. But the odd part is that I can't trace the email address. It was ran through a series of anonymous email services and seems to originate from what looks to be a non-existent ISP." He looked thoughtful. "If I was the suspicious type, I'd say someone didn't want to be traced." He commented, tongue-in-cheek.

Max nodded, beginning to see the seriousness of the issue. First, only someone who knew one of the limited number of people that had one of Logan's contact email addresses could have sent it to him. And that person seemed to be equal or better than even Logan's expert hacking ability, which she would be the first to admit was considerable.

Logan made a decision. "I'm going to reply to it. If it comes through the same methods I might be able to compare altering details enough to do a little additional tracking. And since they already have the email address..."

Max considered it. "Good idea. The back-trace you did, where are the locations of the servers?"

He checked his notes, "So far, they're located in Texas, Idaho, Ohio, Florida and Wyoming. Nothing more determinant so far. The ISP doesn't seem to exist... I can't get a lock on it yet. Give me time and I'll see if I can come up with anything."

"Logan," she said, concerned. "What if it's true? McKinley seemed to turn his opinion around on transgenics only a few months after the Jam Pony escapade. Do you think he might be faking it?"

He shrugged. "Too early to tell." He looked at her and smiled at her. "Who knows...maybe the email came from some rich kid in a trick apartment, bored out of his skull."

Max couldn't help but laugh. She had used that exact phraseology in describing Logan when she'd first met him. "OK, I won't take it too seriously until you find something."

He turned back to the computer. "But until we find out, it wouldn't be a bad idea to hold a briefing to discuss the possibility, should something solid come to light."

She watched him for a minute, then left to tend with other issues.

## CHAPTER TWO "Apostate"

Ames White walked down Stewart Street in Sector 9 on his way to a contact. He'd been passed a note while at a grocery store near Terminal City that said to meet him near the old Greyhound Station in exactly an hour.

Though he was hesitant to do so, he was curious what it was about. Ames had briefly considered ignoring the summoning, but on the off chance this wasn't a planned Conclave execution; he was interested in hearing what they had to say. If it **was** a termination, there wasn't much he could do about it anyway; especially if they had assigned the Phalanx.

When he'd lost the battle at Jam Pony with the transgenics, the Conclave had decided that he was incapable of performing the duty he'd been assigned. Worse, they decided that he was an unacceptable risk. Normally that decision promoted termination; he'd been in hiding since but events had led him to come back out into the open temporarily.

He went into the back loading area and found the door missing a padlock. This was apparently where he was supposed to enter. He smiled wryly and found an alternative entrance.

A woman waited patiently inside. Blonde hair, dark eyes, she appeared to be about thirty or so in age. White recognized her as the woman at the store that passed him the note. He walked out into the open, she didn't seem surprised that he had come from a different direction than the front entrance.

"Agent White. You're seven minutes late." She admonished.

He simply looked at her. "Cut the crap. What message do you have for me?"

She looked him up and down, as if evaluating him for flaws, then spoke. Her entire body communicated a casual confidence. "The message is as follows; report to Washington D.C. A ticket will be waiting at the station for you under the name Joseph Taylor." She handed a small sealed box the size of a video tape to him. "That's all I have for you."

The woman turned and began walking towards the door.

"Wait." Ames called sharply.

The redhead paused and half turned in his direction, a curious expression on her face.

"Who hired you to deliver the message and this?"

She looked at him, now expressionless. "I suggest you ask whomever you're supposed to meet in D.C. I'm not at liberty to give you any further information. And you'd be wise to hurry. Your train departs soon."

She turned and walked out of the station.

He waited 5 seconds and walked out the door, ready to watch her departure and trail her. He looked around in surprise; she was nowhere to be seen. *Interesting...* he commented to himself, and quickly came to a decision.

\* \* \* \* \*

Max walked into Logan's "computer room". When he wasn't working on the computer consoles at the main building complex, he was normally in the room he'd claimed for his personal equipment.

"What's up?" she asked.

He swiveled his chair to look at her for a couple of seconds, then motioned silently for her to come look.

Being used to this; it meant he was in high mental gear but needed to include her on whatever it was. She went over and looked at the computer screen.

She quickly identified the information on the screen as some kind of network tracking code. Most of it didn't make a great deal of sense to her, but she had enough experience to comprehend pieces of it. Especially the final source information, which was more than familiar to her.

"Gillette, Wyoming? " Her voice was suddenly curt. Gillette had been the location for the original site for Manticore, where the transgenics had been created and trained.

Logan nodded. "It's no mistake. The email came from somewhere in Gillette. I'm running an email tracker on the reply. If they respond again, I should have a better idea. If it's a typical civilian, they won't know they've been bugged. If it's the military and know what they're doing, they might be able to figure out what I'm doing. Then again, the militia probably wouldn't have sent me an email at all, let alone something like that."

She pondered this silently.

"Project Manticore abandoned the base in 2009, shortly after your escape. It's been closed off and unused by the government or militia since then. A routine MP is sent out once a month to check on it's condition, run off any transients, and so on."

He continued. "Theoretically, there shouldn't be anyone in the town of Gillette either. It was absorbed unofficially by the organization that created Manticore for the families that worked there, but the town was more or less abandoned by early 2010 after Project Manticore was officially relocated."

"I managed to hack into the power grid computers in that region. There are some minor power usage's, but that just means it either may not have been completely abandoned or someone moved in sometime after Manticore abandoned it. That wasn't uncommon after the Pulse, and it's been a few years since it's been abandoned."

As if waiting for cue, his computer beeped. "We've got mail." He motioned, opening the message.

*"Nice tracking program. Come alone. Woodward."*

Logan hit a button, but the screen didn't change. "The email I sent was broken into." He looked at Max. "I didn't get an attachment log back, so I can't tell where it came from. I could trace it again but likely I'll come up with the same answer."

He looked thoughtful. "I'm guessing it's coming from inside the base. If it were somewhere in the abandoned town, I should be tracing ISP usage identifying our computer user. Since I'm not, you can draw your own conclusions."

She looked thoughtful, then curious. "What's Woodward?"

Logan rubbed his unshaven face. "I'm not sure. Probably the person's signature or handle."

Max hesitated, then nodded. "So we go out to Gillette and see what this is about."

Logan looked up at her, concerned. "No offense, Max... but the email said to come alone. I'm pretty sure they weren't talking about a party."

She smiled. "I'm not letting you go without a bodyguard and nobody can guard your body like I can. Look, I'm not happy about going back to that place either but it's not like it's a recruiting center for 'transgenic of the month' anymore. If he or she doesn't like it, then they shouldn't have sent the invitation."

Logan gave it a thought, and smiled in defeat. "OK. I could use the backup, and since you still happen to be my favorite cat burglar..."

"Damn straight..." she grinned back at him.

Together, they planned their strategy.

## CHAPTER THREE : "Recrudescence"

### **Stockholm, Sweden**

Nurse Larsson walked down the hall and into a lab in a secluded building near the edge of the large town. She carried a set of vials which contained valuable compounds. She walked quietly into the room, taking measures not to disturb the female scientist peering intently into the old fashioned microscope. The nurse put the vials down and waited with practiced patience to be noticed.

Eventually the woman raised her head from her work and looked over. The nurse motioned towards the vials. "These are the result of the analysis. You'll find them interesting I think, Doc."

The scientist smiled and thanked the nurse. She took one of the marked vials and prepared a slide, then focused the lens. It took her only seconds to reach the unavoidable conclusion.

"Finally, there's confirmable evidence. The electromagnetic pulses of 2009 weren't just nuclear pulses; they was a bio-weapon. And it also explains an eleven year-old mystery. Rose, this gives me ultimate proof that the extraterrestrials didn't follow through with their invasion for any other reason than that somehow, someone created an elemental agent which seemed to be harmless to human beings, but poison to 'them'."

The nurse nodded. She had a pretty fair idea of how important this was to the scientist, she'd been reviewing data with the doctor for years; piecing bits of information together like a jigsaw puzzle. While the discovery wouldn't put anyone behind bars, it would give scientists a better idea on how to counter degrees of bacterial problems that had cropped up due to the odd EMP emissions the Pulses had emitted.

"All I need now is corroboratively similar results, if they occur. FedEx a vial and a copy of the Pulse data to Professor Schroeder in the States. His address should be on my Rolodex." Old habits die hard, and the doctor was no exception. It was not common knowledge in the United States, but the Pulse that disrupted their entire way of life wasn't an isolated incident. Low level pulse detonations had occurred just months after the first detonation off the US West Coast in various and multiple locations around the world. For a few years the entire planet had been reduced technologically to the Dark Ages, until new but limited technologies were developed that worked around the EMP residual problem. But biological damage wasn't so easy to fix when you didn't know where to start. If she was right, this was the beginning of a world-wide solution to that problem.

Rose nodded at the doctor's request. "Right away."

As the nurse went to prepare the package, the doctor sat down and picked up the phone. *He's going to be impossible to live with for at least a week.* she thought.

She paused when the one voice she was most familiar with in the world answered the phone.

"It's me." The fifty-five year-old former FBI agent sighed, then stated with conviction, "Mulder... we were right."

\* \* \* \* \*

Ames White returned from the dining area on the moving Amtrak train to find an adult male sitting in the compartment he'd been assigned. His gun left its holster almost quicker than he had time to register that he himself had drawn it.

Without taking his eyes off the intruder, he closed the door and drew down the shade, his gun still aimed at the man.

"Fe'nos tol. Sit down, Agent... Taylor. I'm here to brief you." the man in the chair said.

"Identify yourself." White said coldly and without ceremony. He noted that the man had used the same name applied to the ticket.

The man reached in his jacket slowly, and just as slowly withdrew an ID badge. Opening it, Ames saw a picture which showed the man before him, and a badge identifying him as Agent Mark Baker of the NSA. White's practiced eye recognized it as a legit ID.

Ames put his gun away. "Very well, what am I heading to Washington DC for, Agent Baker?"

"Your 'retirement' from the Conclave has been reconsidered. There is a new project that requires your specific talents and training, and most importantly your experience with the transgenics."

White simply looked at the man. He decided to state the facts outright. "The Conclave had me excommunicated. This would have to be damn good for me to consider reclaiming a heritage from the people who threw me to the wolves."

The sitting man shook his head. "It's been reconsidered. You will be accepted back into the Conclave. So long as you continue to be truly loyal to the Conclave."

White straightened. "I have *always* been loyal. I don't make excuses, the transgenics were lucky. A superior human must always evaluate the situation. If the Conclave has reconsidered and it accepts the error in judgment it made and is willing to correct that error, then I don't see why I shouldn't be willing to re-enter the Conclave."

"Then I believe congratulations are in order, and welcome back." The man stood and offered his hand, which White took.

"What is the project?" Ames asked.

Baker handed over a folder. "Yet another government department experiment gone astray."

White briefly looked at the documentation. "Has this been attempted yet in the Conclave?"

"It's being tested as we speak. If successful, it will be further tested with a team from the Phalanx. The original testers were inadequate for the experiment, and the transgenic was even more incompatible. We, on the other hand, seem to be highly compatible so far."

White nodded. "Very good. What is my assignment?"

"Should the final stage be successful, you will be heading the tactical team against the transgenics. On the success of that mission, barring unforeseen circumstance, that mission will

expand. You have an opportunity to be part of the larger picture. Don't fail."

Ames looked at him. "I'm certain I won't."

He handed the folder back to the man, who took it and laid it on the sofa beside the sleeping boy. The folder had a logo indicating it's confidential nature, and a title tab labeled with two words.

'RED SERIES'

\* \* \* \* \*

They passed by the faded "Welcome to Gillette!" sign on the connection between I-90 and Highway 50. Slowing as they began entering the abandoned town, it struck her that she had never seen the town that Manticore had been only about 5 or 6 miles away.

When she had escaped back in '09, she had been picked up by Hannah and taken safely to her cabin near Clearmont. Instinct had taken over however, and she had set out on foot shortly after.

She'd stowed away in the back of a storage truck and arrived in Casper, Wyoming. From there, with the help of a girl named Lucy, she was transported out of Wyoming to California. She stayed with Lucy and her parents for only a few months, until the Pulse. Then she lived in another part of California until relocating to Seattle, and had been there ever since.

Passing through the town of Gillette held no meaning for her, since she had never been in it. However, it did hold a mild curiosity for her; this town that had been her unseen neighbor for the first nine years of her life.

She felt a prickle on the back of her neck, a sure sign someone was watching them. She glanced at Logan, who recognized the look on her face.

"OK, let's stop and look around." he said, simply.

They stopped in mid town, pulled into a gas station.

Max got out to stretch her legs and look around the curious area, sure that someone was observing them.

Logan walked around the corner of the station to look for a restroom, and instantly began walking backwards back around the corner, his hands in the air.

Max saw a woman walking towards him casually as he backed up, with a MAC-10 in one hand and a mini-crossbow in the other. She appeared to be in her early to mid 20's, long black hair and a curvaceous body.

The woman kept Max in her sight as she backed Logan to the car. "Who are you two and what are you two doing here?" she commanded.

Logan, hands still raised, immediately answered. "We're supposed to meet someone. However, the exact location is kind of a mystery. Can you help us? This is our first time in this area." He

glanced at Max and back at the woman.

Max had already calculated the distance to the woman from where she stood, and had decided that the brunette could potentially get a shot off at Logan before Max could get to her. Max could tell from the woman's stance and balance that she knew what she was doing.

"Do you mind if I show you something?" Max said calmly.

The woman looked at her cautiously. "Slow and easy. Very slow and easy."

Max smiled at her and walked halfway to the car.

The woman called out, "Stop."

As the woman was midway through the single-syllable word, Max launched herself into high speed mode. She crossed the remained of the distance towards the woman in a fraction of a second, kicking the AK47 out of the woman's hand and grabbing the mechanism of the mini-crossbow, preventing it from being able to launch the arrow set in it.

The woman instantly let go of the crossbow, swung around impossibly fast with a round-house kick that knocked the crossbow from Max's hand. The discharged arrow launched itself past Max into the rear car door and imbedded dead-center about three feet to the right of Logan, who only now with his human reflexes was reacting to Max's initial launch towards the woman by starting to move around behind the automobile.

Max backed up quickly to re-evaluate the woman, who was sizing her up as well. Both women were in fighting stance, prepared in case the other launched an attack.

"You're transgenic." The woman stated matter-of-factly.

"Yeah, so are you." Max wasn't in the mood for small talk. "I don't recognize you from Manticore. Who are you and why were you holding weapons on us?"

"No, I'm not a transgenic. Well, not really." She looked amused. "But since you're the visitors here, it seems to me you should be the one to answer questions. Who are you here to meet?"

The bracking cha-chink sound of a shotgun loading startled the woman into glancing towards the car. Max's former training allowed her to ignore the sound, assuming rightfully that it came from Logan's direction. From the sound, she assumed Logan had quietly taken the shotgun from under the seat that he normally carried. Just in case.

"Hands up, and put them on the roof of the car." Logan called out.

A slightly less distinct sound of a pistol being cocked from behind him changed the direction of his attention immediately. "Put the gun down, mister. I don't want to hurt you."

Slowly, Logan placed the gun on the roof of the car and backed away from it, hands raised again. He turned to appraise this new arrival while kicking himself mentally for not thinking to check the area for a backup to the woman.

The man was blonde haired with gray sideburns and had a fairly well built physique. Looking to



be in his early forty's, the man's stance was fairly impressive; however Logan could tell instantly that this was not a militia-trained man.

Her eyes looked away from Max and back over to Logan, her eyes narrowing in mild annoyance. "The question remains unanswered. Who are you in town to see?"

Logan remained silent for a moment, then decided he really didn't have anything to lose by answering, "We're here to see someone who sent an email. Someone who goes by the handle "Woodward".

The woman paused, then spoke. "Jimmy, you can put the gun away."

Instantly, the pistol disappeared into the man's jacket. His eyebrows were furrowed as if the woman often asked things of him that didn't make a lot of sense at the time, but knew enough not to argue.

Max began feeling a twinge of the sixth-sense insight she occasionally experienced since the runes came and vanished, before the Jam Pony stand-off. Her eyebrows raised as the realization struck her. "You were called here by a similar email."

She nodded. "I received a message stating that someone had information about a relative of mine. They were convincing enough that I decided to make the trip from Washington. It was also signed 'Woodward'. Jimmy informed me that Woodward was one of the investigative journalists in a movie he'd seen long ago."

Logan looked interested. "You're from Washington State too?"

Jimmy piped in, "Naw, we're from the D.C. area."

"Well, I'm Logan Cale, and this is Max. We're from Seattle."

Jimmy smiled warily, but shook his hand. "Bond. Jimmy Bond. And this is Yves." He pronounced the name 'Eve'.

Logan looked slightly amused. "Bond? As in Ian Flemmings' James Bond?"

Jimmy nodded. "Yeah, my dad was a spy-novel and movie buff back about forty or fifty years ago."

Logan glanced at Max, and she nodded. Max spoke up. "We think we know where the messages came from. A former secret military base near here that was closed down around the time of the Pulse."

Yves grimaced. "I should have known, with you being transgenic." she said. "Manticore."

## CHAPTER FOUR : "Deja Vu"

The train stopped in Washington D.C., and Ames White stepped off. A limousine was waiting for him, and he reviewed the file in his mind as he was taken... wherever he was being summoned to.

X5-452, the transgenic that called herself 'Max', had encountered the Red Series twice a couple of years ago. She had managed to defeat their mission both times, and the project had lost favor with the government department involved.

Deemed a failure, it had been allowed to lapse and the file was buried both figuratively and literally. Someone in the Conclave had seen the potential in the project and had dug it out of the ashes. The Red Series Project, code-tagged Project Borloff, *Where do they get these names? he wondered*, was being shipped to Seattle. Offices were being set up and would be ready by the time he returned.

The limo pulled up into the parking area of the Pentagon, and White got out of the car and walked into the main doors. After signing in, he was told that he would be escorted to his meeting.

White was taken up to the second floor and to a secure conference room, where he was instructed to have a seat and wait for his briefing.

After the escort had left, he got up from the chair and tried the door. It was securely locked, as he suspected. Sitting back down, he waited; once again reviewing the file in his mind.

Shortly, the door opened and Senator McKinley entered the room, closing the door behind him.

"Fe'nos tol, Agent White. Good to have you back in the fold." He shook White's hand, then sat down.

"Getting straight to the point, I have it on excellent authority that the transgenics are even more of a threat than they originally represented. Please give me your opinion on that estimate."

Ames considered the Senator. He'd worked with the Senator before. He was a member of the Conclave, yet in the past he infrequently came across to White as weak willed, however persistent he was. He paused before answering, giving the Senator's question reasonable thought.

"At minimum, one of the transgenics was modified extensively before birth by Sandeman. We don't know what he did, but we know some of the results. She has no junk DNA. Runes appeared on her epidermis that translate to prophetic notations, predictions and outright fantasy. It states that four-five-two is some kind of savior of the people, presumably from us. These runes vanished, to my understanding, months after."

"She has been observed performing abnormal activities, even for a transgenic. Telekinesis on an advanced level, for starters. What else she's capable of, we hadn't determined."

The Senator folded his fingers together in thought. "If you're placed in charge of this Project, do you believe you can succeed in eliminating the transgenics for good this time?"

White looked at the Senator in defiance. "If I may be blunt, Senator; given time I could have finished the transgenics when I was originally assigned to do so. If the Conclave had not been impatient and forced the Phalanx into action against the transgenics, we might not at this time be talking about the need to eradicate them; we'd be celebrating our victory against them."

White knew it was wildly dangerous to vocally question the wisdom of the Conclave, even when he'd had the Senator's confidence before. It was almost suicide now, unless the Senator felt he was necessary. Bringing White here was obviously an indication that White's talents were needed.

McKinley looked at White for several seconds without speaking. Then, coming to a decision, he stood. "Very well, Agent White. Report to Fort Lewis in Washington State as Project Tactical Lead. Make any changes necessary, then covertly have them moved to Seattle. I want a project report as soon as you can feasibly make one in defining your plan of attack and projected timeframe. You'll be given transport. Fe'nos tol."

He watched the Senator depart. *It won't be long now.* He thought. *I'll be here for good, and we can weed out these idiots that have weakened the Conclave.*

He allowed himself a small smirk of satisfaction, until his escort came to take him back to the car.

\* \* \* \* \*

They took their two separate cars, Logan and Max in the car they came in, and Jimmy & Yves in his vehicle.

"How do you think she learned about Manticore?" she finally blurted out. "I checked the back of her neck when she picked up the MAC-10 from where I kicked it. No barcode."

He nodded. "And her moves were pretty darn fast for your typically average non-genetically engineered human. Definitely want to keep an eye on that one, and our surroundings."

Manticore wasn't far from Gillette, off to the North from the town through several back roads in a wooded area. If you didn't know what you were looking for, you'd drive right past the road paths, especially since most of them were pretty much grown over by now. Strangely, a couple of paths were noticeably used, or at least cleared recently.

They eventually pulled up to a gate. Max got out and pushed the gate open after looking it over. "Like the road, it's been used recently."

Logan nodded. "Don't read too much into it, yet. Remember, the government sends someone out here monthly to check on the place. On the other hand, I can't argue that both we and these two received virtually identical emails. The messages had to come from somewhere. Can you tell what they're discussing?"

Glancing at the car Jimmy was driving, she could make out their talking to each other with her enhanced hearing and lip-reading skills. *One of the benefits of having been at this monstrosity... some of the training is actually useful from time to time.* she thought.

Through the tinted car windows however, she could only barely make it out.

*YVES : This is it. This is the place they took me. Manticore.*

*JIMMY : Do you really trust them?*

*YVES : It does seem too coincidental that they showed up at the same time we did. But I think it's safe to assume they know as little about the emails as we do.*

*JIMMY : (pausing) Do you think you'll find it?*

*YVES : It has to be here somewhere, we looked through the town, I might have figured Lydecker would be smarter than to leave them here. Guess we'll find out.*

Max watched for a few seconds, but they didn't continue the conversation. Probably like a hundred conversations she and Logan never finished, simply because it was old territory.

She got back in the car and Logan pulled forward after Max pointed the way.

"She's been here before, and they're looking for something specific. If it's a trap, I don't think they're part of it. Although... she knows Lydecker somehow." she relayed.

Logan pondered this quietly.

In Jimmy's car, Yves broke the initial silence after watching the dark haired girl get back into the vehicle in front of them. "She's obviously one of the transgenics." She said thoughtfully. "It's possible she knew or knows something about what we're looking for. I'm wondering if we might have been wrong about who sent the message though, I can't think of any reason these two would have been contacted."

He glanced over at her. "But we have to find out..."

She took his hand and smiled. "Yes, Jimmy. We do. We owe them that much. I haven't forgotten."

The black car followed the leading vehicle to another gate, which was open. They drove through and into a clearing where they saw a compound with several buildings. They pulled up to the front of a building and stopped.

Max had avoided looking at the buildings as they approached; getting out she was now forced to view the spectacle.

Manticore. For the first 9 years of her life, she had known nothing but this place, the barracks, the teachers, the training. The realization shocked her that it had only been 13 years since she'd last been on this property or in these buildings. It seemed so long ago. Involuntarily, she glanced up at the building whose windows she and the other child-transgenics had busted through, somersaulting onto the snowy ground back in 2009. They were boarded up now, but she remembered it as if it had just happened.

Logan got out of the car and was about to comment until he saw the look in her eyes. Wisely, he let her come to terms with this in her own way. He knew it wouldn't take long, she was probably the strongest woman he'd ever known in his life, physically as well as emotionally. She'd survived her trial by fire... this would be a piece of cake in comparison. But still not easy.

He walked back to where Jimmy and Yves were getting out of their vehicle.

"It's been hard for her." He explained to them. "She hasn't been back here since the twelve of them escaped."

Yves looked startled. "Escaped? I thought they'd all been transferred because of the Pulse?"

Logan looked at her. "Back in 2009, just before the Pulse, a number of transgenics escaped from Manticore. Some were caught, but about a dozen or so managed to disappear, uncaught."

He motioned towards Max. "She was one of the lucky ones, if you can call any of them lucky."

Max walked up. "Okay. There were a number of places in Manticore that the emails could have come from, but they'd have probably had an easier time of it if they were able to access the mainframe directly, as well as the old T-lines. And incidentally, we're being watched."

Jimmy looked around. "I don't see anything, are you sure?"

Max nodded, "I'm sure."

Then she motioned to Yves. "You and I should check out the T-lines, Logan and Jimmy can find the mainframe. Logan's got skills with computers, if they find them he'll be able to crack into it."

What she didn't mention was that what she really wanted was to keep an eye on the woman without Logan being in. She wasn't sure what it was she felt, but there was something definitely odd about the woman, something she couldn't quite place.

Logan went to his car and got his backpack out. Yves went to the trunk of the black car and armed herself appropriately, also putting on a thin backpack.

They locked the car doors, and as the sun began to set they headed out on their respective missions.

## CHAPTER FIVE : "Reunion"

Logan and Jimmy made their way through one of the buildings. From the directions Max had given them from what she remembered, they were making good headway.

"So, Jimmy... how did you come to be involved in this?" Logan asked.

Jimmy looked at him and shrugged. "It's a long story. It started when Yves disappeared about 20 years ago. A government agent named Fletcher took her, and some friends and I tried finding her. We never did. I mean, at least until later. although I came close a couple of times."

"You know how like when you're looking for something, and it's right under your nose, but you can't see it? Like my wallet when I lost it in the car last week and I looked all over for it. Turned out it was in my other coat pocket. I never keep it there..." He shook his head, remembering.

Logan looked slightly befuddled, but decided to ignore the detour from the topic. "You were talking about an agent named Fletcher?"

Jimmy looked sheepish. "Oh, yeah! Total butthead. But not as bad as some other government people."

Logan prompted him. "Like Lydecker."

The older man nodded. "Exactly. Like Lydecker. Yves talked about him once."

"Jimmy, how was Yves involved with Lydecker?" he asked.

He looked thoughtful. "It took place just before we had even met Yves. This Lydecker had some kind of project goin' on where he was paying women to have special kids that were changed inside before they were born, so that they'd be better than regular people."

Logan nodded. "Surrogate mothers... host mothers. They remove an egg, fertilize it with a genetically created formula from target species, replace it and 9 months later, instant transgenic."

"Yeah, that's what Yves calls them, transgenics. Anyway, in 1999 she had left her father's control, and was trying to obtain a large amount of money over the span of a couple years. She was told about an opportunity to make a good amount of money in a year's time, so she signed up. She said she was desperate at the time to stay off the map or she'd never have considered it."

Logan stopped and looked at him in dubiously. "Jimmy, Yves is around 23 or 24, judging from her looks. She couldn't possibly have been eligible for that project back in 1999. She'd have been 2 or 3."

Jimmy smiled. "Yves is 42 years old. She was 21 when we met her, and she was 19 when she ran away from her father's influence. She hasn't changed much since I met her about 20 or so years ago."

"How is that possible?" Logan asked, as they began walking towards the computer room again.

Jimmy continued, "Yves thinks that somehow during the pregnancy, some of the formula washed into her system. She also has considerable strength and dexterity, which matches some of the transgenic traits. Since then she's managed to track down two other mothers. Both of them had enhanced abilities of one form or another, but Yves is the only one so far who looks as young as she did then. She did say the traits, like her strength, didn't start showing up until about a half year before we met her."

Logan considered this. He'd seen some fairly strange transgenics... including the abilities of Mia, a transgenic with the ability to psionically hypnotize you just by talking to you...

"I suppose that's not too far fetched a theory." *Assuming it's true.* he thought to himself.

Jimmy pointed down the hall, "There it is."

Logan looked, and sure enough, a faded sign with "Information Services - IS" was visible on the door.

They walked down, and Logan almost groaned. The lock was fairly heavy duty, definitely military stock.

Jimmy pulled out a blob of something resembling Silly Putty and stuck it on the lock, then jammed something into it. He pulled Logan out of the way and behind the side corridor.

A loud snapping sound occurred, and they peeked around the corner. The lock was nearly separated from the door.

Logan looked at Jimmy with new respect. The big guy grinned, "Micro-explosive compound. Yves makes it. Pretty darned quiet."

"And handy." Logan said, as they made their way back to the door. Cautiously, they entered the room.

And found themselves staring at the wrong end of a pistol.

\* \* \* \* \*

Max and Yves went to the main complex and found the door unlocked. They glanced at each other and Max turned the knob and opened it, each of them behind each side of the door frame.

Max glanced in, and not seeing anything motioned to Yves, and they entered.

They made their way past the front area and into the hallways. Max had never been in the front main floor area, when they had training or exercises they were either inside the buildings or out the back onto the grounds.

They found the telecommunications room, and Max picked the lock easily enough. They entered and Yves walked over to the comm relay center. She clipped into a couple of wires and plugged into a laptop she pulled from her backpack.

"The communications relay is here. The mainframe is here too, and appears to be still up and running. Strange, I'd have thought it would be in another section. I'm accessing in through the

internal network. Shortly we should get a diagram of what rooms are being heated and what aren't, what phone lines are active and which ones aren't. If the internal cameras were networked, I should be able to access them too."

Max nodded and watched patiently.

"And... bingo. Welcome to Manticore." A display of the buildings appeared on the screen. "And about ten phones on each floor appear to be active. One appears to be running an old devoted DSL line through the network. That should be our emailer. I'm running a tracking program to see if the line is currently being used. In the meantime, let's see if we can tie into the cameras "

Abruptly, multiple images appeared on the laptop screen.

Max pointed out some of the images. "Those are Barracks 14. And that one is the cafeteria for Building Three." She noticed movement on one screen. "Pull that one up."

The multiple camera layout vanished as one image filled the screen. They could see Logan and Jimmy walking down the hall, followed by someone holding a gun on them. They were being motioned into a room.

She tapped a few more buttons. "3rd floor, office 6." Yves pulled out a modified 45 pistol and slapped a clip into it. "Let's go."

The transgenic didn't argue. In fact, she was already out the door.

Yves cursed to herself, and followed.

They went up the stairs quietly and smoothly, and onto the third floor. Max glanced up and down the hallways. "No guards, but they could be watching the cameras." She whispered to Yves. "Wait ten seconds, then follow me."

Without pausing, she launched herself down the hallway and through the door marked with a 06 on it. Taking in the layout of the room, she noticed all at once that an older man appearing to be in his mid-70's was holding a gun on Logan and Jimmy, and that otherwise the room was empty.

Still in attack mode, she swooped across the room in an instant and took the gun out of the surprised man's hand and backed off from him without attacking. Taking Logan's blindfold off, she handed the gun to him.

"Hey!" the man called out indignantly. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

Yves walked casually into the room. "We might ask the same of you, Melvin."

The man looked at her, then in recognition he sat down hard in the chair behind him. "You."

Jimmy, still with his blindfold on and oblivious to what had just occurred, started at the voice. "Frohike? Is that you?"

The man looked closer at Jimmy, recognizing the voice. "Yves? And Jimmy? What in the Sam-hell are you doing here? Yves... you haven't changed at all!"



"See what a healthy life can do for you?" she smiled. "Your predilection for stating the obvious hasn't changed, although I have to say that I'm glad to see you're still kicking. And the rest of your little club?"

"Alive, and still kicking."

The confident sounding voice came from behind them, and Max saw two men in their 50's walk in. One in jeans and a tee-shirt, and a man in a pre-Pulse suit with streaked gray and brown hair and beard.

Yves nodded at the men. "Welcome back from the grave, boys."

Jimmy peaked from underneath the blindfold. "Byers!" he exclaimed. The next thing the man with the beard knew, he'd been tackled in a hug.

"Ooffff... good to see you too, Jimmy." he smiled as he tried to catch his breath from being practically crushed.

The man in the tee-shirt stepped forward and shook Jimmy's hand. Jimmy exclaimed, "Langly! It's great to see you guys!"

The sound of someone clearing her throat brought their attention back to Logan and Max.

"I hate to break up a family reunion or whatever, but before I knock the octogenarian on his ass for being lucky number three today to hold Logan at gunpoint," she jerked a thumb at Frohike, "maybe you'd like to fill us in on what you're doing here. This base is government property, you know."

"Listen, you flippant little piss-ant..." The short man apparently had a temper. He took a step towards her but was stopped by Byers interruption.

"Frohike..." Byers warned. "I invited them here."

Logan's expression changed from curiousness to caution. "You sent the emails?"

"As we suspected." Yves interjected. "I decided shortly after your pronounced death that things weren't as they seemed. The ambulance that took you never arrived at the intended hospital, and they had closed caskets at your funeral; a quite unnecessary precaution due to the nature of your infection. Once infected and deceased, you would no longer have been a contagion or carrier. "

Jimmy's voice sounded burdened. "But we couldn't find you. A year of searching for Yves, only to turn around and look for you guys. Yves decided that you either needed to hide for some reason, or you were being coerced."

"A little of both... we were being threatened by that government bitch that if we contacted anyone we knew that they and we would be toast." Langly nearly spat.

Yves looked at them curiously. "Someone must have wanted you alive, badly, for them to have gone to the trouble of saving you. I never did find any evidence, other than your graves being

empty."

Frohike looked at her. "You dug them up? That cemetery has guards, you know..."

She smiled. "It's amazing what a warm smile and a hefty bribe will get you in some security circles. But we had to know if our suspicions were correct..."

Logan interrupted, "The email?"

Byers, who had been silently listening and letting them get their initial greeting out of their system, nodded. "My apologies Mr. Cale. It's been twenty years since we last saw our friends. But we've taxed your patience enough. Let me be frank and make my initial statement. You can ask me questions after I'm finished."

Looking curious, Logan nodded.

"Twenty years ago the three of us," he motioned to Langly and Frohike, "were subjected to a bio-toxin. To make a long story a little shorter, we were given an antidote by a secret government organization. As Langly stated, we were given certain guidelines for our continued survival. The two that you arrived with were good friends of ours. We've been keeping track of them as much as resources permitted." He looked at Yves. "If you only knew how close you've come from time to time in finding us, and how close that was to ending our continuance." After a grim look, he smiled. "And yet, we wouldn't have it any other way."

Yves couldn't help but notice that Byers had become slightly more reserved in his manner of expression. She continued to listen without interrupting.

Still looking at Yves, he continued. "We know everything that happened here with you and why you still look exactly as you did twenty years ago. We know about Max and the ultra-secret transgenic program, and what's going on with the Conclave. We know about Mr. Cale and his equally secret cyber-journalism."

Max and Logan warily glanced at each other. Byers could only be referring to Logan's occasional alter-alter-ego, 'Eyes Only', whose airwave hacked broadcasts shed light to the citizens of Seattle when their own city government kept them in the dark.

Byers didn't dwell on that particular point, and proceeded to drop the bombshell. "Senator McKinley, who is running for President of this country and according to current poll status is probably going to win, is a member of the Conclave. His organization plans to destroy the transgenics with a former government project and in less than two years time he will have eliminated all *normal* humans off the face of the planet with an engineered form of the same bio-toxin that almost killed the three of us twenty years ago."

"How do they plan to get rid of the transgenics? What former government project?" Logan asked.

"Someone dug up an old implant project called the Red Series..." Byers began.

Max's interruption was instant and heated. "Red Series? Do you have any idea how hard they are to stop? I had to put one of those probes in my own neck to beat them. In fact, the damn thing's still in there, though it's not functional."

"We know." Byers finished. "It gets worse. They're using Conclave to put the implants into. If what I hear is true, they're reacting to it just fine, and it doesn't effect them sufficiently enough that imposes a time limit to it's use. The Conclave are genetically enhanced through selective breeding. They're about to redefine the term 'enhanced'."

He looked at all of them. "We're all in danger of ultimate extinction."

## CHAPTER SIX : "Recapitulation"

The private jet had been waiting for Ames, and the trip enroute was brief. Ames White arrived at the secluded and, until a few months ago, abandoned military base called Fort Lewis in Washington State. The guard at the gate confirmed their identification and they were waved through.

Once reaching his assigned office, he was quickly brought up to date on the current status of the Project.

Originally, the Red Series had been a group of convicts that had been taken by a government project leader and subjected to the implants; a single half-inch spiral-metallic probe that when inserted became interconnected with the convict's nervous system. The implants lodged into the back of their necks and supercharged their system via dexterity, strength, etc. They were virtually unstoppable except by death. The downfall was that they only lasted several months to a year before their nervous system fried.

Initially, two of the Phalanx, a warrior breed of the Conclave, that had volunteered were chosen to test the redesigned implants. So far, this had met with complete success and no appreciable level of degradation as had been the case with the prior project. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that this was due to the superior selective breeding they participated in and were the result of.

This new group were nicknamed "Red Cobras", in deference to the prior, flawed program and it's rebirth into the Conclave. The name stuck, and the Red Cobras were subjected to insurmountable tests of strength and agility that were easily passed by the super-charged Phalanx members.

White was not opposed to the Phalanx, but he had been insulted by the Conclaves decision to bring them in on the transgenics problem before. They had superseded his authority in the matter, and as a result had destroyed everything he had accomplished in his attempt to destroy the transgenics cleanly and efficiently. That he was here with the involved Phalanx members under **his** command was apropos.

He read the updates on the project, and discovered that things had progressed significantly. There were now over 200 Cobra soldiers that had been tested and certified for active duty. Ready for deployment.

According to documentation, and after reading between the lines, he discovered that there had already been some interaction between the Red Series originally and at least one transgenic. *452 does get around, doesn't she?* he thought to himself. She had severe problems combating them when they were only souped-up humans. It was only because she'd implanted one of the probes in her own system that she'd beaten them. However, it appeared that the probe had been disabled with a direct high voltage shock in an attempt to save her life from it. It was no longer a problem. White pondered that, wondering if there was any way to reactivate the implant. He'd have to ask R&D about that.

He chuckled to himself. The transgenics wouldn't know what hit them.

\* \* \* \* \*

"The first few years we just did what we were told." Byers told them as he led them to one of the other Manticore buildings nearby. "We laid low with new identities across country in California and when they contacted us, we did research into the subjects they asked; so long as nothing they asked us to do would violate our code of confidence and honor."

"Basically, we were doing the same thing we were doing before, except we were doing it for someone else. Mostly computer hacking and some investigations work, but stuff we were pretty much uniquely qualified for."

"Yeah." Langly stated, scowling. "Things that the FBI and CIA lackeys were too embarrassed to bother checking out. They turned us into information gophers." It obviously didn't set well with the long-haired man.

Max and Logan walked along, absorbing this information that was so far apparently meant for the two others, Jimmy and Yves.

Byers continued. "However, when the Pulse hit in 2009, everything was wiped out. Computers, communications, everything. We then decided that the government had lost it's leash and we booked. We'd managed to hoard a large quantity of supplies in the hopes that the chance would come to go into hiding from going into hiding."

"We arrived in Gillette on the day the military families were being routed out of town. We didn't know it then but It turned out almost everyone in Gillette were all in one form or another assigned to Manticore. Once they'd left, it was all but a ghost town, and less than a month after that there wasn't a soul that remained."

"Shortly after Manticore cleared out, we learned approximately where the trucks had come from in the wooded area a few miles north of Gillette. It took us days to find it, however, and of course there was a couple men shy of a platoon guarding the place."

"It took quite a while to piece together a picture of what happened, and it was months before the security dwindled down. Finally even the one remaining soldier guarding the entire outpost was reassigned and an agent from Clearmont was assigned to drive over here to make sure the buildings stayed abandoned. Didn't take but a couple more months to get his schedule down pat, and we had a base of operations."

"We built a hidden storage shed outside of Manticore territory, and when the security monitor was due to show up, we took all evidence of our being here, pack it up and take it to storage, then go up to a cabin near Weston for a day or two. The guard shows up, trips our alarm, and it sends a relay to the systems inside Manticore to our receiver at the cabin. Five hours later, he departs, the signal changes and we're back in business."

They entered the building, which Max recalled as the location they were taken for various tests; such as underwater duration and other endurance level monitoring.

"When they left, they stripped the place of almost everything light and easily transportable. They must have thought at some time they'd be back, because some of the more heavier equipment was left. Otherwise, as I'm sure you know, they'd have salvaged it or moved it to Washington State. Fortunately, the Manticore computers that were left here were unaffected by the Pulse; probably because the mainframe was heavily protected from just such an attack."

Byers looked directly at Max. "When they left, they made a mistake. Whomever was supposed to purge the computers missed a backup storage device. Everything they had when they left was still in the backup."

She glanced at Logan, who had an idea of what that meant. She might be able to find her mother. She'd have access to fingerprints and genetic blueprints of every transgenic ever created here. For Max, it was like finding the Holy Grail. She would now be able to determine how many transgenics were left out in the cold.

After letting that soak in, he continued. "It also has quite a bit about the Conclave. History, perceived intentions and so on. The two groups, both Manticore *and* the Conclave, have apparently been around for a long, long time."

Logan nodded. "We know. We just learned about the Conclave about two years ago, and they've been a pain in our backside ever since."

"I don't know what you think you know, but whatever it is; there's more." Langly stated, bluntly.

"Langly's right." Byers nodded. "There's apparently more going on than you think, if you believe all they've done is been an annoyance to you."

Max was reaching the end of her patience with all of this. "Why don't we get back to what you were talking about before then, about ultimate extinction."

Byers stopped walking, turned and looked at her. Yves noticed that the years of passing had turned the idealistic yearning in his eyes to a look of sharp dangerousness. He'd always been a man of maturity and intelligence, but he'd grown since then into... something more.

"Miss Guevara, the Conclave don't simply plan to dominate the planet. They intend to take measures that will eradicate mankind so that their cult becomes the only remaining intelligent sentience of the world. Evidence shows that they intend to do this in the most violent and horrendous bloodbath the world has ever seen. They intend to wipe out humanity with an army of Conclave Red Series soldiers. Simply, effectively... and violently."

## CHAPTER SEVEN : "Espial"

Max and Logan glanced at each other. Logan spoke up, "We were under the impression they wanted to enslave mankind. Studies into ancient history indicate..."

"History is one thing, Mr. Cale." He replied, walking through a double door at the end of the hallway. "But never forget that agenda's have a habit of changing, evolving. And so have theirs."

He switched on the lights and Max saw a room that she had not laid eyes on even during her early years at Manticore.

It looked like the control center for an airport, except with a old but huge plasma screen that took up almost the entirety of the facing wall. Currently, the screen showed 4 split screens, one of them with a planetary sat view, one showing the United States and neighboring south and north countries, one showing a representation of Manticore with a matching number of dots to people in their current location, and a familiar map outlining a series of dots.

Logan motioned to this fourth map. "You're tied in to the new alarm system we installed at Terminal City in Seattle." he exclaimed.

Langly stepped over to one of the consoles and tapped a couple of buttons. The Terminal City map now occupied the first screen, and various live feeds flipped around on the remaining three views. "We're tied into your security cameras as well."

Frohike was first to notice the look on Logan's face. "Don't worry about it, chief. We've had you under surveillance since long before your alarm system. Remember, we've been here off and on since shortly after toots over there..." he ignored the glare that this garnished from Max, "...escaped from this Nazi camp and the establishment moved out. But as far as the government is concerned, this base is nothing but a useless piece of land with burned out equipment."

"Why are you watching us?" Max demanded.

Langly turned from the console towards her. "Why do you think? Because you were created with the singular purpose of being able to combat the Conclave, and defend the world from them. Before 2009, there were apparently only two things that the Committee was concerned about, aliens and the Conclave. Now, it's just the Conclave. We've been looking around for a few years now, and the Manticore transgenic project seems like the best chance to save mankind."

Jimmy looked at the maps on the screen. "If that's the best chance, what are the other chances?"

Byers looked over at Jimmy and reflectively nodded in acknowledgement, then he turned directly into Max's eyes. "I should revise my friend's prior statement. We believe that the transgenics are the **only** chance to save mankind."

\* \* \* \* \*

A knock on the door brought Ames White out of his meditation. He opened his eyes and called out sharply for them to enter. Two men and a woman entered. One of the men walked ahead of

the others and stood in front of the desk.

"Agent White. I'm Doctor Graff. I head the Integration Department."

White stood. "Doctor. How are the Red Cobras doing?"

The doctor stood aside and White's vision now focused directly on the two younger individuals that came in with the doctor. "Our first two high-level warriors. Their handles, should they be engaged by the transgenics, are Chris and Shanell. Former Phalanx, now there's nobody in the Conclave who could touch them in terms of academic and physical stamina and prowess."

White walked up to the boy, who looked around 18 years of age. "So you're been 'fitted' with one of the probes. Do you feel up to the assignment we have ready for you? No ill effects so far?"

Chris looked at White. "Yes, sir. And no sir. No ill effects."

Ames glanced at the female called Shanell, who repeated the reply.

White nodded in approval, something he didn't normally nor easily give. "Not long from now we will dominate everything on the planet. The transgenics pose a potentially substantial threat to that control. Most of them currently reside in a small community called Terminal City in Seattle, Washington."

"Your first assignment is recon. I want a current status report on the transgenics in Seattle. By the time you're finished, there will be more of you ready to participate. You're to evaluate layout and placement, and when finished you will form a plan for submission in which you will outline tactics for two scenarios. The first in which we capture the transgenics."

The girl motioned to White. "The second?"

Ames smiled a rare smile. "The second would be to terminate them."

He turned around and walked towards the desk. "You will have two weeks in which to arrive there, decide to integrate or observe from a distance, form your estimations and return. If your origin is discovered, you will use lethal force in which you will escape so that your report can be given. However, you should have no problems. I do not need to remind you that our domination starts in four weeks. By that time, the Conclave will have made it's decision and acted regarding the transgenics."

He turned and looked at them. "Your mission is vital, and you will succeed. Any questions?"

The two glanced at each other quickly, then shook their heads.

"Dismissed."

They departed the room, leaving White and the doctor alone.

"It's really very incredible, the technology this encompasses." The doctor stated enthusiastically.

White looked at him with disdain. "It's crap. A tinker-toy that just happens to be useful currently."



Never forget, doctor, that the mind is the most powerful weapon. And that our selective genetics ensures that this will always be so."

The doctor nodded, chastised. "Of course. I only meant..."

"How long exactly before the rest are ready?" White interrupted.

Doctor Graff quickly reviewed his notes. "Pretty much as you indicated. About a week to a week and a half."

White's steel gaze fell on the doctor. "One week. The Conclave needs to be ready... the time is coming. That's all."

Graff hurriedly left the room.

Ames leaned back in the chair. Four weeks, and the Conclave would have control over the imperfect.

Then selective breeding would begin selective extermination.

\* \* \* \* \*

"So what's your plan?"

Max leaned back against one of the control panels, careful not to hit any of the buttons, and waited for an answer to her question. Being back inside the Manticore complex wasn't exactly her idea of a fun summer vacation, and she was a little nervous being here.

"As we mentioned, Senator McKinley is part of the Conclave, which means that he probably has staff and assistants that are members as well." Byers began. "If he becomes President, there will be absolutely nothing that will stand in their way."

Logan nodded. "McKinley has to be stopped. But that won't stop the Conclave; they'll have a backup plan."

"Then we have to have a backup plan." the bearded man continued. "Possibly several."

Yves spoke up, the first time since Byers started explaining what had happened to them. "How do you know what the Conclave are up to?"

Langly answered her. "We've got almost any and every non-government networked tied in and monitored from here. Our Manticore pals here had some sweethearts for computer systems. I've been able to covertly tie into satellite data and communication relays world-wide. We even had your number, Mister Eyes-Only."

Eyes Only was Logan's secret identity. He hacked into the television transmission centers via sat-com relay, and denounced criminals, government conspiracies and even cops on the take if they were significantly dragging the arms of justice. Very few knew Logan was even associated with Eyes Only, let alone that he was the man himself. He was responsible for putting away many of Seattle's more notorious criminals.

Logan kept a cool face. He was about to reply, but Langly interrupted him. "Don't bother, we've had your hack since shortly after you started. Good job on the Puget Sound Manticore base by the way, nice to see a fellow hack take down the big guys once in a while."

"Don't worry," Byers interjected. "We're on the same side here. Langly, bring up Fort Lewis in the State of Washington."

Langly punched in another set of numbers, and a different establishment came up. "This is Fort Lewis, Washington. Formerly a military base, now it's the West Coast headquarters of the Conclave."

"I know where Fort Lewis is." Max said curiously, as she studied the images. "It was abandoned when I first came up to Washington. I almost decided to stay there, beyond the police patrols, but then I got a job at Jam Pony." She smiled at Logan. "Before I met Logan."

Byers looked at Max. "The Conclave have been there since shortly after the Manticore in Washington was flamed. White was assigned to clean up the Manticore mess, ordered by Senator McKinley, and the Conclave soon followed. If you'd have gone back, it only would have been a matter of time before they would have captured you. Besides, Lydecker scoured Fort Lewis not long after you showed up in Seattle."

Max scowled. "Yeah, he was all over trying to find us. So what are we seeing?" She pointed to the camera view showing what looked like a gym with Conclave working out.

"That's the Phalanx." Frohike growled. "If you think regular Conclave are tough, you should take on a couple of those bastards. Come to think of it, didn't you guys tangle about a year ago?"

Max smirked. "Did we clean their clocks, you mean? Yeah. Squeaky clean."

Byers look did not reflect Max's cocky comment. If anything, it became grimmer. "Those are the Conclave that the spikes are being given to."

Max's smirk melted into a frown as she realized the implications of Byers' statement. "Damn."

Byers nodded, and looked around the room. His eyes lighted on Yves, who had remained silent and listening throughout the entire discussion. Surprisingly, she had a smile on her face. "Something on your mind, Yves?"

"I believe..." She cocked her head to one side in that eerily familiar, yet annoyingly superior manner that they were used to from twenty years in the past, "...that I have a plan."

## CHAPTER EIGHT : "Precursor"

Professor Eric Schroeder had first met Agent Fox Mulder at a lecture on parapsychology and xenobiology in 1992. Mulder had stayed afterwards and they had discussed several topics at length. From time to time, he had been contacted by Agent Mulder with questions of various bizarre and unique topics. Amongst other things, the bizarre and unique were Schroeder's specialty, not unlike the odd FBI agent himself.

At least until the year 2001. Eric had been fairly busy, and hadn't really noticed until late in the year that he hadn't heard from Fox Mulder in some time. Eric was going to Romania, and figured Mulder would be interested in some first hand Transylvanian pictures of the old ruins in the country. When he called Mulder's FBI number, he'd been forwarded to another agent who had identified herself as Agent Scully, confided that Mulder was missing. At her request, he agreed to contact her if he heard from Agent Mulder.

He'd received a letter a couple of years later, unsigned... but it's contents had asked if he could be at a specified location. Cautious but intrigued, he had done so... and found himself meeting with Mulder again, as well as the agent with whom he'd spoken to on the phone. They seemed to be in some kind of trouble, on-the-run trouble, but were reluctant in discussing it. He understood this and refrained from asking too many questions. They only wanted to arrange details in maintaining a communication, in case they needed assistance or an answer, but neither wanted to endanger the professor nor reveal their own location.

He had agreed to this, hesitantly. He liked these two, but not enough to get himself killed over. And yet, the form of communication would be simple but non-provocative. They would contact him with a simple code system; he'd receive a letter or package during the first year, it would be signed either Mike or Carol. Each year afterwards the packages would be sent under different names. He always chuckled to himself at that, assuming they must really have been into the old TV shows.

When the Pulse had hit, he had been living in Yucca Valley, California. It seemed far enough away from the main cities that he was left alone to his personal quirks and research, but close enough that he was only an hour or two away from any University if he couldn't get what he needed from Internet Research or Library sites. He had been in the middle of a scientific paper when the computer and lights had gone out.

Now, 13 years later, he resided near Portland, Oregon. He never could bring himself to live in a large city, no matter what city it was. At 64 years old, he was near retirement age, but had no plans on doing so anytime soon.

A knocking startled him out of his reminiscing. He got up from the table and walked over to the solid door. Peeking through the peep-hole, he saw the normal FedEx guy. He tried to remember the man's name... Karl... no, Kevin was his name. Opening the door, he called out, "Mornin, Kevin!"

"Hi, Mr. Schroeder, got a package for you all the way from Sweden this time. There aren't any Loch Ness monsters or Bigfoot in Sweden are there?" the young man teased.

Eric chuckled. "No, but there are a lot of Viking mysteries that remain unsolved to this day. Who knows what mystery is lurking in this box... eh, Kevin?"

"Right you are, Doc...if you'll sign here..." The FedEx deliverer held out a clipboard with a number of signatures already on it from previous packages. Eric found the appropriate line and scribbled his name on it. The uniformed man took the clipboard, smiled and mock-saluted the scientist.

Eric returned the smile and turned back inside with the package with mild curiosity. Taking it to the table, he noted that it was from a Doctor Livingston. Livingston had been Dana's code-name for the last year. Opening it, he read the attached letter and results of the tests she had apparently completed with her latest project.

He looked through them, and his brow wrinkled in conjunction with his deepening frown, and took the vial to his private lab to begin evaluating her proposal and theory.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yves finished outlining the plan that she had conceived and evaluated moments before.

After hearing what Yves had to say, Byers leaned back and considered the proposal. It was risky, but the bulk of it was purely the decision of the two Washingtonians in the room. "It could work." He said finally, looking over at Max and Logan.

The two visitors were also looking thoughtful. They glanced at each other after a couple of moments and she nodded. "I agree." Max stated. "It's dangerous, but not to do something would be suicide anyway."

She looked at Yves. "It's a good plan, with a decent chance of succeeding. However, it's going to take a bit of time to set it up and put it in motion."

Yves motioned outside, "Then we should get supplies for the trip." Max turned and started to follow her out.

Byers called out. "Miss Guevara, there's something else. I need to talk with you alone, however."

Max stopped, glanced at Logan and saw the curious look on his face. "It's ok, help them load up the car and we'll be out as soon as I find out what this is about."

Unconvinced, but with no reason to distrust Byers yet, he touched her cheek and smiled. Then he turned and headed after Jimmy and Yves.

"Guys, give us some air, ok?" Byers looked at his two friends. "Yves and Logan will need appropriate supplies, and since we've relocated everything around here she won't know where to look."

Langly shrugged and lifted his hand to turn off the system monitor. "Go ahead and leave the monitor running." Byers said quietly.

Langly followed Frohike out and closed the door. Byers and Max were left alone in the computer room.

"OK, hot-shot, what's up?" Max exclaimed.

Byers looked at her solemnly. He cocked his head and observed her. "Yves was a good friend. We had our differences of opinions long ago, but she was more of a friend than we had any reason to believe. Really, only Jimmy saw past the wall she presented, the virtual shroud she wore. I'll give him credit, Jimmy didn't always seem on top of everything all the time, but he could see more about her than we did."

Max listened, but so far was failing to make any connection to anything relevant. "Yeah, she's all right. She's got some decent moves on her." She looked slightly cynical. "In fact, I hope to have half her agility at her age. She gave us some cock and bull about being one of the surrogate mothers here. Was she pulling our legs or was she really one of these kid's donors?"

"No joke. No one could have been more surprised than I was when I came across records with her name on it. Her real name, Lois. Seems she changed it just after leaving Manticore."

Suddenly Max didn't want to hear the rest of whatever Byers had to say. "Well, it looks like she did well for herself. I'm sure she'll be an asset to the mission. Now, I have to help them load the cars." She started heading towards the doors.

"The records also stated which kids were from which surrogate mothers. In fact, it's why I contacted her along with my email to you. I mentioned to her in the email that I had news regarding the child she gave up at Manticore." Byers stated, matter-of-factly.

Max stopped, knowing already what he was implying, yet incapable of escaping the room before hearing it. She remained faced towards the door.

Byers quietly spoke, though to Max it seemed to vibrate throughout the room.

"She is the mother of transgenic offspring X5-452." He paused, letting it sink in.

"You, Miss Guevara."

She slowly turned to face him, silently.

She stood there, like a beautiful statuette, looking at him. Finally he heard her quietly speak, "You haven't told her yet. You haven't been alone with her to tell her."

"That's true."

"This could compromise the mission, distracting me with something like this." Her voice was slightly shaken, but he suspected it was due to the emotional impact, which she no doubt would control momentarily if the records he had reviewed on her were accurate.

"Also true." He stated, not yet offering any further explanation.

He deduced she would gain control but express herself in anger. He wasn't disappointed. She suddenly glared at him, and as he suspected, the shaking in her voice was now gone. "You don't know me well enough to even assume you have the right to drop this on me."

Byers looked at her sadly. "Twenty years or so ago I might have agreed with you to a small

degree. Now I've come to the realization that some things are best not left unsaid or unspoken... at least the things that count. But to be completely honest, I didn't tell you for your sake or because I knew you well or not. I told you because Yves is a friend and I think you and she should come to terms with that on the way to Washington, for the reason I mentioned to you a minute ago. In case one of you fails. What you decide to do with this information is now up to you, Miss Guevara."

"Why did you tell me, and not her? You just said she was a friend of yours, and as I just said, you don't know me."

He inclined his head in agreement. "Yes, she was. But over time, people change. I decided I currently could anticipate you better than I could her. But I felt at least one of you should know."

She continued to look at him for several moments. Then she turned and called out as she headed to the door, "I have to go get ready."

He watched her depart without commenting further, musing the reaction of the young transgenic.

Max walked out into the shade of the building. She shut the door and leaned back against it. She was experiencing so many different emotions that it was difficult to sort them. And now, on top of everything else, she had to decide whether to approach this "Yves" person and come clean.

She took a couple of deep breaths and began to walk in the direction of the vehicles.

By the time she rounded the corner, she had made her decision.

## CHAPTER NINE : "Homestead"

Checking email wasn't Alec's most favorite thing in the world. Normally consisting of deleting hundreds of junk mails, hate mails, sorting through the rest to weed out the idiots who wanted to know how they could become transgenic to death threats demanding they leave the United States altogether, usually turned out to be a large chunk of wasted time. Ending up being one of the five most widely broadcast transgenics had made him somewhat of a celebrity.

Unfortunately it also made most of his local con jobs impossible now that his face was nearly but not quite as well known as Max and Joshua's. However, he'd come to appreciate the real kinship that he and Max shared from time to time, along with his friendship with Joshua. Even he had to admit that he'd changed since re-joining the group as a family member rather than just being a player on the team.

Carl, the transgenic that normally handled the generic emails was down in Las Vegas scrounging up some additional funds. Carl was another tactical transgenic like Brain who had made himself extremely useful in organizing and making quick profit from the funds that Max and various other transgenics managed to obtain... Alec corrected himself, like Brain *had* been. Brain had died of a gunshot wound back when Alec and Max were still working at Jam Pony and hadn't been revealed as transgenics yet.

He'd finally sorted the last email when another popped up. Alec recognized it immediately as one of Logan's monikers. Alec ran it through the decoder and leaned back. This would take a little while, as Logan's encryptions tended to be highly complicated.

Twenty minutes later, the computer beeped, drawing Alec's attention back to the monitor, casually roving an eye over the message.

He sat straight up as he re-read the email. Just to make sure, he ran the decoding program a second time. When it came up with the same message, he hit the print command and then wiped the email. Scrambling out of his chair, he grabbed the printout and booked towards Ops.

Ops consisted of a number of monitors and Logan's newly installed motion-sensor grid. Punching his authorization code into the door alarm mechanism, he entered and made his way to the control-room.

Mole was chewing on a cigar he hadn't lit yet, and another transgenic Alec was only vaguely familiar with was monitoring the motion sensor equipment.

"Heard from the boss-lady yet?" Mole asked without taking his eyes off the multiple monitors.

Alec handed him the printout. "This came in over email from Logan. It was enabled with a high level encryption."

Mole rolled his eyes, but took on a different demeanor after reading it. "Did you verify this?"

"Twice." Alec replied, his tone indicating that he didn't appreciate being questioned.

Mole nodded slowly. "OK, get everyone in the auditorium in about an hour, and let them know we're preparing for war. This says that Max and Logan will be arriving approximately this time tomorrow, with company. Let's be ready when they get here."

Alec nodded and left. The radio monitor glanced over at Mole, a curious expression on her face.

Mole puffed away silently on his cigar for a few moments, then grunted at her.

"We're taking on the Conclave."

\* \* \* \* \*

Alex looked out among the hundreds of transgenics that occupied Terminal City, who were now gathered in the central auditorium. Not really an auditorium, it was actually the parking lot where Max and the transgenics, and Clement with his officers had faced off a year ago. They had accomplished a great deal in the last year, made the run down buildings not only habitable but comfortable, fixed things up fairly well.

He spoke into the microphone that was ready for him. "Listen up, people." The roar of the transgenic audience dulled until he could be heard.

"It seems that Max and Logan discovered some information that leads them to one conclusion and one conclusion only. The Conclave have to be taken down. Not later, not a few months from now, but now."

Alec looked around at the crowd to judge their response to this. Most of them were paying rapt attention to him. The rest were mumbling to each other, commenting on the announcement. Everyone knew the consequences they faced with the Conclave, and those that didn't had a fair idea.

"Max and Logan's ETA to Terminal City is a little under twenty-three hours. We have to make sure we're ready to go into battle before they return, and that doesn't just mean preparing yourself mentally, it also means securing this establishment. Our territory. Our home. Mole is going to brief you on what needs to be accomplished."

Alec stepped aside as Mole walked up and stood behind the microphone. Mole looked at them as he puffed on his cigar in silence for a few moments.

"After you secure what you need to and prepare yourselves, we'll be taking on a foe that believes it can match us in strength and tactics. This sorry-ass group calls themselves the Conclave. We've been led to believe that they can kick ass pretty damn good. We've also been told the tooth fairy'll leave a quarter on your pillow if you lose a tooth."

He looked at them with an expression that left no doubt as to his belief in either. "You want to know what kick-ass is? Kick-ass is what WE are. It's not what we get, it's what the receiving party experiences when they mess with this group. The Conclave messed with us once before with their 'elite of the elite' and we went through them as if they were target practice."

Alec listened as Mole's gruff confidence raised the morale of the transgenic audience. He had to admit the lizard knew how to fire up their lust for battle. Though to be honest, it didn't take much to provoke a bunch of guys and gals whose primary mission in life had been geared around special operations missions.



"But we have to take the threat seriously this time." He continued. "A couple of years ago, Max got herself seriously butt-kicked by some kinda reprogrammed ordinaries. A neural spike embedded in the back of their neck made them stronger and faster than any three of you put together. That includes the furball..." he motioned to Joshua, who growled lightly but not seriously at Mole for the insult.

He let this information sink into the transgenics for a moment and continued. "We don't know how many Conclave have been converted with these spikes. We won't have the chance to find out. We're launching an attack on Fort Lewis, where the Conclave have been hiding. Where they've been skulking and slithering with those snakes they worship. We're going to take the fight to them, and show them just how it feels when the bite comes from **our** fangs. I'm not going to blow sunshine up your skirts, sweethearts. This time it's not going to be so easy to take them out. This time we might lose more than just one or two of our own. But that's the price you pay for freedom, boys and girls. I say we give the Conclave a taste of it's own medicine."

Mole was referring to the situation that rose at Jam Pony a year ago, a hostage situation in which one of the transgenics had been shot and killed by the manipulated police force. That had been the same situation that they had also faced the Phalanx, the Conclave's elite combat force that Mole referred to. Regardless of what Mole implied, taking out the Phalanx warriors wasn't as simple as all that. In fact, it had been almost evenly matched.

Many in the crowd whistled and applauded. Mole nodded and stepped aside, and motioned to Alec to finish up the briefing.

"All right people. Now this is going to be a big operation and practically no time for planning or prep. We're going to need each and every one of you at your best. But I know for a fact that that's exactly what we are. That's exactly what we were made to be. The best. So get ready to head out and kick some snake-butt. Report your status in twelve hours. Dismissed!"

The transgenic group departed in good time. Mole and Alec watched as they left the auditorium in orderly fashion.

Mole's gaze followed after them, and made another decision. "It's about time they got a battle under their belts. When Max is in cell range, get a hold of her and tell her we're going through with this attack early. By the time she gets here we may already have this turkey baked."

Alec shook his head. "That's not a good idea. We need..."

"We need to get these people active, and if you didn't notice, I wasn't taking a survey. You don't like it, tell her to put you in charge next time. For now, I was left in lead position and there's no reason to postpone this just so she can wave the flag going in. You gave them twelve hours to report their status. An hour after that I want us out in the field and heading to Fort Lewis."

Mole walked out of the auditorium, leaving Alec to mumble to himself. "She's really not going to like this."

## CHAPTER TEN : "Inexorate"

"Are you sure that was the smart thing to do?"

Frohike looked concerned. It wasn't that he had grown into one of those crotchety old men, the truth was that he'd always had a bit of a grump in him. Yet he was still more than a little protective of his old-time friends. Including Yves. Perhaps especially Yves.

The three long-time friends were preparing for the monitoring of events that would soon take place. Langly was hooking a few more network recorders and hard drives up to the system. There could be no mistakes if they were going to keep an eye on the battle soon to come.

Byers had been considering the very question the elder Gunmen posed. "I don't know. But she had to know, and we're not as close to Yves as we used to be. Hell, I don't know if Yves still considers us as friends, it's not like any of us had time to get reacquainted with her or Jimmy. It's been twenty years, you know. I think it should come from her daughter and not us."

Langly entered the room. "All systems are up and working. And the GPS bug I planted on the two vehicles should give us instant locations at all times."

"Good." Byers answered. "Keep their position up."

\* \* \* \* \*

Conclusive. Dr. Schroeder pondered the ramifications of the results he had produced, or more to the point, reproduced, from the information and vial that was sent to him from Dana. It seemed that someone in the United States had initiated the EMP bombs that had set the planet back about a hundred years.

Eric began to type up a reply on his computer in the pre-arranged code. This wasn't good news, not good news at all. Someone had created a bio-toxin that, according to Scully, was harmless to humans but lethal to the supposed aliens she said were going to land nearly 11 years ago. Of course, he had seen the proof but still found it hard to conceive.

However, he'd taken the testing one step further, a step that no doubt Dana or Mulder were taking right now, and would come to the same conclusions he had. The problem was that the harmless bio-toxin wasn't so harmless. Certainly in its current form it held no danger to human beings, but the simple introduction of a catalyst in sufficient quantity could turn the planet into a biological time bomb for mankind.

Thankfully, the projected catalyst was relatively rare. In fact, the only time he'd heard of the bio-agent was from Scully, a man made agent that caused the death of a couple of reporter friends of hers more than twenty years ago. Eric's eyes widened. Over time, the bodies of the three men buried in Washington could conceivably decompose sufficiently to disperse the toxin.

If the sealed coffins containing the bodies were ever opened... No, certainly the government would have decontaminated and cremated the bodies. Eric began breathing easier at his self-examination of conjecture. Standing, he began pacing, running through the information out loud. Often, he found that he could reason out possibilities by literally bouncing ideas off the wall. Hearing things out loud gave him an alternate perspective on how things could be perceived.

He sat back down and finished his thoughts in his reply to Dana and Mulder. After finishing, he further encrypted the file, then got ready to go into town. He received packages at home, but never sent them out from the same location. Sometimes he drove halfway across the state to send a letter out, but he enjoyed the drive so it never bothered him. He addressed the envelope, then put it inside a larger envelope, which he addressed to a go-between contact in named Skinner, in Washington D.C.

He'd never met Mr. Skinner, who was a decade older than he was, but he'd spoken on the phone once with him. He had seemed intelligent, though Eric got the impression that unlike Mulder, the former FBI assistant Director was all business. That suited Eric just fine, who never really took the cloak and dagger stuff seriously, so he supposed someone had to. However, his two friends trusted the man implicitly, and that was good enough for him as well.

Taking the letters and envelopes, he left the house, locking the door behind him, and started the vehicle. The 2008 Ford Scimitar didn't run like it used to, but it was reliable and got him where he needed to go.

\* \* \* \* \*

Shanell, the Phalanx Conclave fitted with one of the probes, walked into White's office.

Ames looked up from the files he was reading and frowned. "Fe'nos tol. You're supposed to be at Terminal City on reconnaissance."

She responded automatically with the Conclave greeting. "The transgenics are going to attack this establishment."

White stood. "How did they know we were here?"

Shanell shrugged. "The lizard mutant and the one they call Alec headed the announcement. They want the rest of the occupants to be ready by 3am tomorrow morning, 10 hours from now. X5452 and Logan will be returning at approximately 2pm tomorrow afternoon to deliver final instructions."

Ames pondered the information. "The lizard calls himself Mole. So they're going to attack, assumedly after 452 and her infatuated boy-toy show up."

The female warrior looked uneasy. "That's what Alec indicated. The liz... Mole on the other hand seemed anxious to get busy with it. And I overheard them after the meeting. He's not going to wait for X5452 to arrive, he wants to get started as soon as the transgenics there are ready. But that's not all. They know about the neural spikes we have in our necks."

White looked livid. "How the hell did they find out?"

"They received a communiqué from 452." Shanell looked unperturbed by his display of anger.

He walked across the room and attempted to control his temper. This was bad. 425 shouldn't be aware of anything that was going on here unless they had a snitch, or...

White looked over at her. "How long do you think you can be gone before your contacts at Terminal City miss you?"

Shanell contemplated the question. "I'm supposed to be out obtaining, aka stealing, weapons supplies. I've already requisitioned realistic looking blanks and dummy grenades from storage on base. But they'll know who supplied it when they fail to kill our people during the attack. I'm assuming, however, that most of them won't survive to initiate repercussions."

Slowly nodding, he looked at her again, appraisingly. "I'm impressed. The last group of Phalanx warriors failed me miserably. You seem to have a finer grasp of overall tactics, rather than being shortsightedly convinced of yourself."

She smiled. "Thank you. Do you have additional orders for Chris or myself?"

He sat down and looked thoughtful. "Get a micro-transceiver from supplies as well for you and your partner. Make sure they give you the high-range units. Leave it on all the time. You'll receive further orders."

"Why weren't we assigned transceivers to begin with?"

"We weren't on a hurried schedule then, and now we have mere hours to work up strategies. That may require information obtained second by second. Get what you need from supplies and head back up to Terminal City immediately." He commented distractedly.

Shanell nodded. "Very well. Fe'nos tol."

"Fe'nos tol." He dismissed her.

As she departed the room, he punched a number into his cell phone.

"The transgenics are preparing an attack on Fort Lewis. Have the doctor give me an idea on how many altered Phalanx warriors we can have ready in eight hours..."

A buzzing of chatter came across the cell phone.

"Yes, I know I gave him a week. That's what discovering that you're about to be attacked does, it shortens schedules. And prepare a contingency plan to capture and or destroy the attacking force, and submit it to me in two hours. We're on countdown status starting now." He disconnected the call.

Ames smiled. This could work out better than he'd hoped. The destruction of the transgenics, and then his revenge against X5-452. Finally.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN : "Avowal"

Logan couldn't help but notice on the trip back that Max was unusually quiet. She'd insisted on driving for most of the first part of the journey and had been silent nearly the entire way so far. She could be fairly moody from time to time, so he let her be. He had weathered enough of these to know that she'd start to talk when she was ready.

He already knew that whatever it was, it wasn't about him or she'd have switched places with either of the two individuals in the other vehicle following behind them and then bounced a few "Who does he think he is?" rhetorics off the unfortunate soul.

In the meantime, he was using the time to draw up potential scenarios for the transgenic attack against the Conclave base. Using maps of the area, he was coming to the conclusion that the only thing he was absolutely sure of was that it wasn't going to be easy.

There was an airfield near Fort Lewis that was still used for what small aircraft still flew in the area. A fly-by at night maybe... drop a few dozen transgenics in to clear the heavy spots, then let in the small army waiting on the sidelines. He was so deeply entranced in his own thoughts that he was startled when Max finally said something.

"Did you know your mother well, before she died?" She said abruptly.

Max had learned soon after meeting Logan about three years ago that his mother had died when he was a child.

Logan pondered the question, knowing that she seldom asked a question like this without a reason. "I think I knew her, but how well does a child ever really know his or her parent when they're growing up? If you mean did we have a close mother-son relationship before she died, yeah. She was more important to me than anything." He looked wistful. "She definitely died before her time."

Smiling, he added, "You and she would have gotten along great. You both have, or in her case 'had', the same type of 'don't mess with me' attitude."

He looked over at her, and his smile vanished.

Tears were streaming down her face.

He could only remember seeing her cry twice since he'd known her. Both times were about things that touched her deeply, she wasn't the sort of person to let things bother her that extensively on an emotional level... at least not to the point of tears. She was more likely to take something and beat the crap out of it. This was something very bad. Or very personal.

Logan wasn't stupid. The question, along with their recent visit to the original Manticore, pretty much lead him straight-lined to the source of her despair. Yet he knew she'd approach it at her designated speed.

He reached over and brushed the tears from her face, found a box of Kleenex in the back seat and placed it beside her.

She glanced at it, and after a moment reached down and took one. Wiping the salty streams

from her face, she sighed.

“Byers discovered who my mother was.”

He looked at her, and his concerned look turned to confusion. “But, Max... that’s good news! Isn’t it? You’ve wanted to find out who your mother was since I’ve known you. Did he tell you who she is?”

Max nodded. “He said Yves was my mother.”

Caught off guard, he rolled that around in his mind for a bit. The Gunmen’s friend, Yves, who had given a child up to Manticore. Yves, who because of the strange properties of the transgenic pregnancy still looked in her early 20’s.

Logan had assumed, naturally, that the Gunmen’s sole reason for contacting him was to get the transgenics active against the Conclave. This did suggest a bit more intentional manipulation than that. On the other hand, it could be nothing more than a piece of information that crossed the trio’s path that Byers decided to pass on as a favor to their friend.

He focused his attention on the woman beside him. “How do you feel about it?”, he asked, trying to draw her into talking about it.

Max looked thoughtful, but Logan knew she was scared. She picked her friends carefully, but this wasn’t a member of her transgenic family they were talking about, this was her host-mother.

“I don’t know.” she replied. “I always thought if I found out who my mother was that I’d have time to sort it out and then go to make the announcement to her, or that suddenly someone would walk out of the blue and say ‘Hi... you don’t know me, but I’m your mother...’. This was never the way I envisioned it... especially since we started trying to beat the crap out of each other on our first meeting...”

He interrupted her, “Don’t sweat it. They were right to be wary. So were we, for that matter. If she really is your mother, she’ll understand. Or at least let’s hope that’s where your compassion comes from, regardless of the ‘steel-maiden’ act.”

Max glanced at him, and couldn’t help laugh as he wiggled his eyebrows at her. “OK, I get it. I just can’t help feeling a little dislocated from this. It’s weird, I wanted to know who or where my mother was, and now that I know I’m feeling like maybe I wish I hadn’t found out. Assuming Byers was telling the truth or is even right about this.”

“I think what you’re feeling is normal. Like you said, you felt that finding your mother would follow a simple line of events, and it didn’t work out to your expectations. Naturally you’re going to feel a little detached. That’s how life works... keeps us on our toes. Give her a chance. If she’s really your mother, then let her give you a chance.”

She brought his hand up and kissed it. “Now I remember why I fell in love with you, it’s all this flowery pillow-talk you give.”

He chuckled along with her. And the sound of their laughter sounded good together.

\* \* \* \* \*

They stopped at a greasy spoon along the way, and ordered dinner. Logan, Jimmy and Yves kept involved by quietly discussing possible plans regarding the Conclave, and even though two of the three didn't know Max well, all three noticed she was very quiet.

After dinner, Logan commented to Jimmy that before they left he wanted to check the engine, that it seemed to be emitting an unsteady rattle. Jimmy of course offered to help, and so Logan and Jimmy went to pay the bill and check out the car... leaving Yves and Max alone.

Not sure how to approach the subject, she began, "Byers passed on some information to me. I'm not certain how to approach it, or even if I should talk about it right now."

Yves was unreadable. She looked squarely into Max's eyes, and stated matter-of-factly, "He told you about you and I. About Manticore."

Max looked confused. "You knew?"

Finally, Yves nodded. "When I was going through the computers back at Manticore when we first went in, I came across some of the records that Langly managed to retrieve from the database. Of course I checked for records of transgenic births. It wasn't easy, but it didn't take long."

"Why didn't you say anything?" she exclaimed.

"We were a little occupied," Yves smiled, "...as you might recall. It didn't seem to be the time. Also, dealing with the shock of finding out who my daughter was, let alone that she wasn't that far away, and then the boys showing up again..."

"...then with the mission, deciding if it should even be brought up beforehand... yeah, I was going through that reasoning myself." Max finished for her. "OK, I can understand that. What do we do now? I mean, we don't know anything about each other."

Yves glanced out at the two men working on the car, and smiled. "How about you and I take my car and let the boys here take yours. You and I can do a little catch-up, and maybe work out the fine-points on the little party we're throwing for the Conclave."

Max smiled at Yves. "Sounds first rate." She followed Yves' glance out to the guys. "Jimmy knew we wanted to talk, didn't he?"

Yves turned back to Max with a warm expression and nodded. "He's a very caring man. It seems they both are. We're two lucky girls. Not as lucky as they are though..." she chuckled.

Grinning, Max stood. "Let's go remind them just how lucky they are to have us."

Walking outside, they sauntered up to the two, and in unison kissed them soundly. Jimmy turned red, and even Logan managed to look slightly unsettled.

"What was that for? Not that I'm complaining." Logan cocked his head at Max curiously.

She smiled at him. "Just for being here. Yves and I are riding together. Can you and Jimmy

buddy-up for a while?"

He glanced at Yves and smiled back at the young transgenic. "Take your time."



## CHAPTER TWELVE : "Advent"

Doctor Eric Schroeder arrived back at his home late that evening, after a drive across the highway for a few hours in order to drop the encoded letter at a random mailbox in San Bernardino. He drove up to his house and stopped the vehicle. Surveying the house, something seemed strange, but he couldn't quite make out what it was. Nothing seemed different, but Eric still felt uneasy. He shrugged it off and walked up to the house. The door was locked and there didn't seem to be any vandalism; in fact there didn't seem to be anything out of the ordinary. *Living alone must be finally getting on my nerves...* he chastised himself, unlocked the door and walked in. As he reached for the light switch, a voice from the darkness called out quietly. "Leave the light off, Doctor Schroeder."

Startled, he paused in indecision, then lowered his hand. "Who are you and what do you want? I don't have anything of value that you would be interested in."

The figure, whom he could now vaguely make out in the darkness, lit a cigarette and put the match out. Eric briefly pondered insisting that he put it out, but decided that he might not be in the best position at the moment to make demands.

"I'm here to ask you a couple of questions, Doctor. If you answer them truthfully, I'll walk out of your life and you won't see me again. However, if your answers don't tell me what I want to know..."

The man left the statement unfinished but pointedly concluded.

"I don't have anything to hide," Eric stated defiantly, now beginning to become slightly more annoyed than fearful, "but I want to know who you are, coming into my house like this."

The man took a drag from his cigarette, his eyes still on the doctor. "I understand that you may be in touch with a couple of ex-federal agents who may now reside overseas. I want to know where they are."

A chill shot up Eric's spine, without his knowing why. "I don't know what you're talking about." He stated immediately, then groaned inside at how cliché it sounded.

"Of course you do." The man in the chair replied. "Let me be blunt, doctor, then we can dispense with the cloak and dagger and get on with our lives. You have been in contact with Walter Skinner in Washington, and you have been sending coded messages through the postal service to London, where they are routed and pass through at least 5 additional addresses that we know of, then the path ends. I want you to verify that the person or persons you've been contacting are the afore-mentioned ex-federal agents, and I want you to verify where they are now located."

The doctor looked perplexed. "I send letters to Walter because we met through a federal agent nearly twenty years ago... wait, is that who you think I'm in contact with? I haven't seen him or his attractive partner in all that time. Contact Walter, he'll tell you so." Eric informed the man. He appeared and spoke calmly, though he felt panicked inside. Technically speaking, he was telling the truth... he hadn't seen Mulder in person since the day they showed up in California, on the run.

The shadow crushed out his cigarette and stood. "I'm sorry that you're feeling so uncooperative.

It makes things so unpleasant for the rest of us." Walking towards the doctor into the light, his face finally became illuminated. Eric suddenly recognized the man with a start. "You! But you're dead!" he cried out reflexively, then immediately realized his mistake.

Without changing expression, the man lit another cigarette and gazed at him. "That's very interesting, Doctor Schroeder. How would you happen to know this?" the man calmly stated. "In fact, I'm interested in knowing just how you come to recognize me at all. Did Ex-Assistant Director Skinner tell you I was dead, show you a photograph? No, I know for a fact that you haven't met with Mr. Skinner since August of 2003. Perhaps you were briefed by Agent Mulder." he prompted, watching the doctor for a reaction or expression.

Not trusting himself now to speak, Doctor Schroeder remained silent.

"Gentlemen." Two men came from the kitchen area, Eric hadn't even known they were there. "Please take the doctor to Agent White."

As he was escorted out of the house, Eric Schroeder wondered erratically if someone would take over his research after he was dead.

Pausing at the door, former Consortium member C.G.B. Spender crushed his cigarette out and walked out after them.

The man Mulder once referred to as "that cigarette-smoking bastard" got into the back seat of one of the vehicles that pulled up. The doctor was unceremoniously deposited into the back of a van that followed.

Spender knew that the doctor had been in contact with Scully and Mulder. It also amused him that the doctor would recognize Spender's face. Now all that faced the doctor was pain and possibly death by more thorough interrogation.

The former government man put the doctor out of his mind for the moment, and allowed himself the rare perusal of prior events as they drove.

It had been just about twenty years since the death of his twin brother, whom had been with Mulder literally moments before dying. While the former X-Files investigator knew that Spender was behind the scenes of some major world conspiracies, it had completely escaped his knowledge and the knowledge of most of his associates, that Spender's position was held by siblings; identical twins.

Not so identical, as it later turned out. His brother, who not only had developed a 'thing' for Mulder's partner, Scully, but also lived up to his X-Files-given moniker; 'Cancerman' in more ways than one. His brother was diagnosed with throat cancer and later with pancreas and lung cancer.

It had only been a matter of time before his sibling would have succumbed to the inevitable, so Spender didn't waste precious time on blame or hate. In such situations, death was to be embraced, not shunned. His brother had known that and Spender accepted it without question.

Prior to that, he had been involved in the decision to keep associates of Mulder and Scully's alive after a mishap with a deadly viral agent that threatened to kill a large number of people.

His people had blundered in that situation, but the three conspiracy aficionados had come through with the ultimate sacrifice. Unfortunately, he couldn't allow them to be buried, and although it would have been convenient to cremate them as the Runtz woman had done with the other infectant; he had decided that they could actually prove to be of use alive rather than dead. So, they had been brought to a government project lab and given the antidote.

Reflecting on this, he briefly contemplated whether it had really been a wise decision, considering the Gunmen's affinity to uncovering the truth and misguided moralities. Yet certainly those moralities had forced them to live up to their end of the bargain. Oh, not by his direct request; they would have died all over again rather than help him in any way. No, his direction was passed down through an assistant of his by the name of Renfro, daughter of another Consortium member who was long since dead along with most of the Consortium. Elizabeth Renfro had been one of the Consortium's few surviving legacies. Her death in 2021 had indeed been a great loss.

However, the computer skills of the Lone Gunmen had proven invaluable many times, especially with that business back in '09. It had taken a bit of convincing by Renfro to have the boys hack into the national defense systems worldwide and keep the same defense systems from reacting to the pulse missiles launched around the world, but they had worked their magic and "The Pulse" saved the planets from the malevolent aliens. After that, they'd been allowed to disappear off his radar. He kept an eye out in case they resurfaced in a less than desired measure, but without their precious computers they had faded away into obscurity.

Spender's coup de' grace was his association with the Conclave during his participation with the Consortium. He had discovered, through one of Mulder's X-Files, the existence of the Conclave. He had contacted one of their scientists, a doctor Sandeman, and consulted for many years with the man regarding the "black oil" and the aliens. He convinced Sandeman, covertly, to defy the Conclave and invoke his genetics to creating the perfect genetic soldier, immune from the black oil and designed to combat the aliens. The project was named Manticore, after a legendary monster with the head of a man, the body of a lion and the tail of a dragon. Sandeman had been convinced by the one thing that the Conclave had fought for their entire existence; survival.

In return for bringing the doctor into his confidence, he had only asked for one thing. Spender had discovered that he too had cancer, not surprising due to his predilection for tobacco and his twin's fate. Spender's request was simple; he wanted a cure. What Sandeman found was far superior to any cure; in his development of the transgenics he found an isotope that only effected non-transgenics; which rendered Spender not only cancerless, but as a result he had not aged a day in the last 20 years. Virtual immortality.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN : "Triage"

Max was enjoying herself. She and Yves had talked about a great many things during the road trip. Once she and Yves finally warmed up to each other, anyway. That had taken nearly half the trip in itself as neither woman was prone to easily trusting others. Apparently Yves father, now Max's host-grandfather, was a man of great influence through international arms dealer and terrorism. Yves had spent years fighting her father's activities. After she developed her enhancements, she tripled her efforts. Eventually, she had been rewarded with success. Afterwards, she and Jimmy began searching for two things. Clues to the whereabouts of the Gunmen, whom they suspected to have survived after all; and the location of the transgenic daughter that had been taken from her.

Max was uneasy about learning that a relative of hers had been into such mankind abusing activities, but she had to admit that few people had perfect family histories. Even Logan. Having been created with genes of Einstein, Alexander, and so on, she could afford learning about a black sheep or two. Especially if it meant having found her mother in the meantime.

They pulled into Seattle and went through the city's sector check-points with only a little difficulty on the part of the non-Seattleites, but an under-the-table bribe got them on their way quickly enough. The infamous Space Needle, once home to tourist visits and locals alike, now stood in the backdrop like a huge metal statue from the past.

As they approached the section of town nicknamed by the Transgenics as "Terminal City" due to a toxic waste spill a decade ago, Max began to feel increasingly uneasy, sensing that something was terribly wrong. Noticing Max's sudden tension, Yves slowed the car down to approach and observe. Logan followed suit behind them.

As they came around the corner to the entry gate that normally blocked the rest of the public from entering due to sentry's that typically manned the gate, they saw the gate wide open and pandemonium reigning.

Max didn't wait for Yves to slow the car further; she opened the door immediately and jumped out, running through the open gate and into the compound. All around her she saw her people either being treated for injuries or in the midst of treating others.

She grabbed a 14-year old carrying supplies by the arm. "What the hell is going on here?" Max demanded.

The young transgenic recognized Max immediately. "Ma'am! Yes ma'am!" The boy was obviously one of the more recent arrivals into Terminal city, courtesy of the destruction of Manticore. "We launched an attack on the Conclave. High casualties and injured, ma'am."

Max was stunned, then furious. "Who led this... attack?" she growled.

Now the boy was hesitant. "Uh, you'd have to talk to Alex, ma'am. I think he's in the main compound." He hurriedly got out of Max's way as she barreled towards Alex's direction.

Yves pulled into what she assumed was a general parking area, and Logan pulled ahead of her nearer the building. He got out of the car, looking concerned at the chaos that filled the grounds in front of the building. Jimmy looked startled as he got out on his side. "Oh my god..."

The entire front area of the building, leading into what looked to be an inside parking area, was littered with injured and bleeding people. It appeared to Jimmy as if they had set up some kind of first stage battle triage where they could determine the severity of the injury and prioritize those who need more immediate attention and those who could wait. It didn't look as if there were many who fell under the latter category.

Yves looked over at Jimmy, who glanced back. They nodded at each other and moved almost as one, going to the nearest injured and starting in on preliminary first-aid. It would have been apparent to anyone watching them that in the apocalypse that followed The Pulse, they had not been idle.

Logan headed into the building where he had seen Max enter. He found Alec, a transgenic of their acquaintance, sprawled on the ground at her feet, shaking his head to clear it. He presumed he had just missed Alec being decked. While Alec often was getting involved in cons that resulted in his deserving to get pounded on by someone and usually Max was right to assume the worst, Logan decided to run interference until they found out what was going on. Max sometimes acted first before hearing the whole story, especially in Alec's case. This seemed to be one of them, judging from the barrage of expletives directed at the man on the ground.

"What the hell did you do?" she blasted at Alec, who was now scrambling to his feet, a little irate himself now. Logan walked within eyesight of the both of them. It probably wouldn't stop them from getting into a fight with each other, but it might make them think twice... if for no other reason than to not injure Logan. It worked, or appeared to. They squared off, but didn't start beating on each other.

"Back off, Max." Alex growled through clenched teeth. "It wasn't my idea. In fact, I tried talking him out of it."

Max's anger abated, though only slightly, after coming to the obvious conclusion. "Mole." She stated. "Where is he and *what happened?*"

Alex motioned them into an office complex. Max hesitated but decided that if she had to kick someone's ass that it probably would be best served not to hurt the already injured while doing it.

Closing the door after Logan, he began. "Mole found out the Conclave was confirmed nearby and went nuts. He decided they were just waiting to attack Terminal City, so decided to go on the defensive. You couldn't be reached, so he took command."

Max waited, expectantly.

"They were expecting us. It's the only explanation. They knew exactly when we were coming and how." Alex grimaced. "It really wasn't that bad of a plan. But it went bad once we entered their compound. We got cut off and... I guess there's no getting around it. We were played."

She considered and immediately rejected the Gunmen's involvement. They could have given the Conclave information on them, destroyed them and not called Logan in to talk to him; it was unlikely they'd have been responsible since they were warning Logan about all this. "All right, from now on, whatever we do is command personnel ears only. The missions are passed out individually and without cross reference with other groups."

Alex nodded, understanding immediately. The only way the Conclave could have known in advance is if the transgenics had an information leak.

“Before we do anything, however, I want Mole in here. He’s got a lot of explaining to do.”

Alex was momentarily silent, then he briefed her. “As far as we can tell, Mole was captured by the Conclave. Joshua was taken too.” He gave her that latter news with a softer tone. Joshua was known and liked by everyone at Terminal City, but he was also a close personal friend of Max’s.

She glanced at him to see if he was making another of his dry, off-the-wall jokes. His expression gave her all the answer she needed. There were several seconds of silence.

“We’re getting them back.” she stated, shattering the quiet as the door slammed open on her way out of the room.

Alec’s gaze fell on Logan, who had stayed out of the conversation. “I take that to mean we’re dismissed.”

Logan appeared concerned. “You know she’s going to act on this. We’d better follow her.”

Alex gave it less than a moment’s thought, frowning. “Yeah, I s’pose we should.”

They walked out the door after Max, catching up to her back in the infirmary. Logan found her talking to one of the injured, questioning him gently for information regarding the new Conclave base.

She stood. “They’re at Fort Lewis. Logan, can you get me detailed plans for that base?”

He considered her request. “I might be able to hack some old DOD databases, if we can find any that are locally accessible other than the Seattle Police Network.”

“You’re barking up the wrong hack.”

Turning, Max saw the Gunmen standing beside Jimmy. Obviously the three had been let inside Terminal City while they’d been in conference. Logan raised his eyebrows in question at the accusation.

Langly continued, smugly. “The old State capitol holds all that old information, and their databases are net-linked to the United States intelligence system. It’s a lot less stable than it used to be, but they’re keeping it running. It’s a lot easier to get into than the Department of Defense computers.”

Logan nodded. “Actually, that’s a good idea...”

The bearded man stepped forward. “We discovered the Conclave’s plans just after you left. We tried catching up to your vehicle but the van just isn’t in the shape it used to be...”

“Like it ever used to be any better.” Frohike growled.

Ignoring him, Byers continued. "They're going to wait until dawn, after you're all exhausted from treating the injured, then they plan to finish you."

Max looked pissed enough to rip someone's head off. "You don't say. Well, they still have some of our people as prisoners. This isn't going to wait until dawn. We're going to have to come up with a plan before then."

"Actually," Byers smiled, "I think you'll like a few suggestions we have, additions to Yves initial plan. We've been discussing it on the way here."

Still angry, the transgenic challenged, "Try me."

"An all out frontal attack won't work against the Conclave. Your attack force is proof of that, and your numbers are somewhat more limited than that first attack. We believe we have a better way to improve your odds. It doesn't mean an attack won't be necessary..."

"Damn straight." Max interrupted.

"...but I can pretty much guarantee you'll have a better chance than your injured party did." Byers continued.

Max looked over at Yves, who nodded. She looked back at Byers. "All right, put together a scenario and let's run over it in 30 minutes."

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN : "Quandary"

After hearing Byers plan, Max had to concede that it was a good one, although far-fetched and not just a little risky. But she was hard pressed to come up with a better plan under the circumstances and gave them the thumbs up to pull off their part. She and Alec went off to see how many people they could come up with for a second attack against the conclave. Byers, Logan, Langly and Frohike went off to arrange for the implementation of Byers plan and to download the latest satellite pics of Fort Lewis as well as obtaining the plans for the base.

Yves and Jimmy were assigned a temporary barracks off of Building A. Jimmy went off to get supplies, and when he came back, he found Yves in the bedroom lying on the bed on her side. Sensing something wrong, he put down the necessities he had been given and sat down on the bed.

"What's bothering you?" he asked bluntly. He'd learned in the last 20 years that beating around the bush never got anywhere with Yves, she responded better to directness.

She was quiet for so long that he began to think she'd fallen asleep, but she startled him by speaking. "My god, Jimmy. I've known for two decades that I had a child, but somehow I never envisioned that this was how she turned out. She's strong, beautiful, and a born-leader. She's nothing less than incredible. How can I give her a mother out of the blue; and what can I possibly offer her?"

Jimmy was astounded. He almost never heard her express her own limitations, and had never heard her speak in self-depreciation. The only time he could recall her talking to him in any measure of being unsure was regarding her father and that also was nearly twenty years ago.

After his momentary shock, he came to his senses. This woman, whom he loved more than life itself, needed \*his\* guidance for once. He was determined not to let her down.

"Yves, all you can do is offer her your presence, your friendship and your love." The words spilled out, seemingly from nowhere, but coming from his heart. "She was taken from you from birth, but fate brought you back together. It's going to take time for you guys to get used to each other."

She didn't move, but he could tell she was listening just because she didn't automatically point out flaws in his argument. One of her most annoying but valuable assets was her ability to honesty and accurately critique scenario flaws. What he was saying apparently was making sense.

"Everything you say about her seems to be true. But you know what else I notice? Everything you said about her is true about you as well. I see nothing but you in her, and I know that given time you two will be the best of friends. Isn't that what's most important, anyway? You'll always be her mother no matter what, but maybe what you need is to be friends. And it seems like you two have gotten off to a pretty good start from the looks of it." Jimmy finished, waiting for her to respond.

She turned to him, tears on her face, and looked into his eyes. He gently wiped the tears away and she smiled at him. "When did you come to be so wise, Jimmy Bond?"

Relieved, he smiled back and shrugged. "I guess some of it had to rub off from you eventually."



She laughed a rare laugh, and pulled him down to her. Soon they were aware of nothing but each other.

\* \* \* \* \*

An hour later, they joined the Gunmen and Max down in a conference room. Byers was apparently still going over details with the young transgenic.

“Frohike and Langly can handle that detail by themselves. Langly and I will be in control from the van.” Byers pointed to a map of Fort Lewis. Glancing at the arriving couple, he nodded. “I’ll go over Jimmy and Yves’ details after this briefing.”

Max looked at the map and, glancing at Logan, she stood. “It looks as good as anything I’ve come up with for this mission, maybe better. We use it. Set up and be ready to implement all parts of the plan in two hours. If you need to make changes for any reason, let me know before we leave.”

Frohike and Langly looked at each other, then pointedly back at Max. She noticed the glare and turned a slight shade of red. “Sorry, force of habit. *Please.*”

At this, the two Gunmen departed. Byers smiled. “Thanks. We’ve been under the thumb for a long time, they’ve been ready to snap for a while.”

Max nodded. “I know exactly what you mean.” she commented as she departed, with no small amount of irony in her voice.

Byers looked concerned at the departing transgenic. “Is she going to be ready for this?”

“She’ll be ok. She spends a good deal of her time trying to convince herself otherwise, but admittedly when it comes to what she was designed for, she really is the best at what she does.” Logan said as he put his paperwork away.

“Frohike will be waiting for you. We have a plan in mind for the van, so you’ll need to use alternative transportation.”

Logan looked thoughtful. “We have a couple of vehicles around here, I’m sure we can scrounge one up. Good luck.”

After the man departed, Byers turned to Jimmy and Yves. “Your part would be equally dangerous. If you’d rather not... you didn’t volunteer for this. I’m assuming that since you’re here that you’d want to be part of it, but I’ve already talked to Max and if either of you want to bow out, we can find someone to take either or both of your places.”

Jimmy nodded. “We’re in. It’ll be just like old times.”

Byers leaned forward. “I don’t trust anyone like I trust Langly and Frohike, or you two. I just wanted you to know that.”

Jimmy smiled at him. “It’s great to see you guys again.” He looked over at Yves and his smile quickly faded.

Yves was looking at Byers coolly, without emotion. Jimmy said nothing, unsure of what was wrong.

Byers noticed as well, and was not so quiet. "Problem?" he asked, simply.

Instead of responding, her gaze shifted to Jimmy. "Could you bring the dark blue bag from our room? I think we'll need it."

"Sure..." Jimmy responded, uneasily but taking a hint. "I'll be right back."

After Jimmy walked out of the conference room and closed the door, Yves looked back at Byers and her expression erupted.

"Do you honestly expect us to buy into this 'I trust you' facade? Do you know how much pain you caused that man when he thought you'd died? Do you have any idea at all? It almost destroyed him." she spat out venomously.

Byers appeared stunned at the sudden barrage, then began to look angry and indignant. "Do you think we wanted to leave everything we knew? Jimmy, Mulder, Scully, you were all our friends. Even you, in your typically condescending way. We had to protect you." He took a deep breath, but it didn't help to dissipate his anger. "It was the only thing we could do."

"So what happened?" she said coldly.

"A secret government branch revived us, gave us a choice. Cooperate and live...or decline and die, forgotten. We were told that if we agreed, we would have to stay underground, that we couldn't communicate with the outside world or else we and anyone we contacted would suffer the consequences. So we cooperated, hoping the time would come when we could get in touch again, when we could come back out into the daylight."

"But do you know what cooperating with the government meant? It meant manipulating the defense system in a way that almost destroyed the world ourselves. We were the terrorists responsible for the Pulse. We helped save our planet from the aliens that Mulder found out about, but we sent the world into the dark ages in the process. Well, it's been twenty years, and we decided it was time. Time to blow the lid off this conspiracy, print our final edition of the Lone Gunmen and know that in the end we held on to what we believed in."

He sat down, suddenly looking very tired and spent rather than angry. "It was all that we could do." he repeated, almost to himself.

Her gaze finally softened as she sifted through his explanation, finally understanding. "I'm sorry." she said, simply. This was a man who in his time had stood up against everything that was wrong in the world, only to have it chain him down in the cellar. Such a man was his own worst enemy, destroying himself over his own self-created responsibilities. She had seen that in him twenty years ago and this man, haunted by the past, was the result. Deciding to accept his explanation, she changed the subject.

"Jimmy still has everything you boys had that was left after you... died. What you three did, everything you ever did, was the epitome of decency. I suppose I'd forgotten that. Jimmy never did. The sacrifices you made, and that last day together."

Byers nodded, looking down at the table. "I never stop thinking about that day. None of us did. Always wondering if we could have done something different, always feeling as if it should have turned out differently. We almost gave up, a hundred times or more. But we never did."

He looked over at her, breaking off a moment of self-indulgent reflection. "But now it looks like it all may have paid off."

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN : "Imbuement"

Casually walking into White's office, Spender closed the door. Ames White stood up. "Did the good doctor come clean?"

Spender lit a cigarette, and sat down on the sofa opposite White's desk. White frowned at the cigarette, but refrained from comment. The man was not Conclave, but he was highly positioned in the Conclave hierarchy... one of the only members not to actually be of the Conclave. He didn't like this man, nor did he respect him, but he was forced to respect the position.

"Unfortunately, the doctor died during interrogation." Spender calmly stated. "He revealed no knowledge of the Conclave." He looked at White chillingly.

White glared at Spender, unaffected. "He had to have known something... one of our agents overheard him on a payphone. He was reported..."

Spender interrupted him. "Your agent was wrong. You made a mistake." His voice was quiet but commanding.

Ames leaned back and looked at the man. Something was very wrong, but he had bigger fish to fry. "Very well, Vice-Minister. I will submit a report to my superiors indicating that Dr. Schroeder was a dead-end. I look forward to receiving a copy of your submission as well."

Shaking his head, the Spender looked amused. "I receive reports, Brother White. I do not submit them. You can consider my updating you on the situation a courtesy to you, as lead of this project." He snuffed out his cigarette, and lit another. "Brief me as to the current situation with the transgenics."

Infuriated but knowing better than to ire the man before him, he calmed himself before replying. "We're attacking just before dawn. We knew they were coming and staged a coupe. There are 7 transgenics held prisoner in our cells, behind re-enforced titanium steel bars, and a modified base so they can't weaken the links of the bars."

Spender's eyes did not leave the face of the young Conclave clansman. "You would be a fool to believe that the transgenics will not respond to prisoners being taken."

White stood. "With all due respect to your position, I don't have time to be insulted. I have a job to do."

The Cigarette-Smoking Man didn't move from his chair. "Sit down, Mister White."

Something about the tone in the man's voice made White reconsider and he sat back down, though impatiently. He clasped his hands on the desk and raised his eyebrows, silently inviting Spender to continue.

"Let me be blunt with you. I was against your being reinstated into the Conclave. The only reason you're here is that Minister convinced me that you might have some small potential and contribution left to make to the Conclave. I've been in the business a long time and I know when I'm facing something a little too full of himself. You're trying to make a name for yourself, get a

position back in the Conclave. There's nothing wrong with that at all. But be clear on this; if you fail again, your termination from the Conclave will be absolute."

Crushing out his second cigarette, he stood and smiled at White. "I'll be watching you."

White watched him exit the room. Grimacing at the putrid stench of the cigarettes, he turned the ventilation system up a notch. He knew that Spender's comment of termination was not rhetorical; if he failed this mission he'd likely not survive to try again. On the other hand, his instincts were usually dead on, and something smelled fishy with the Schroeder interrogation. On the same token, something about Spender himself struck White in a very wrong way. Before Spender's arrival, White had heard of him; the non-Conclave who had risen to the top of the Conclave inner-circle. It was not the way of the Clan. But the higher-ups obviously approved, so until now so had White.

Now he wasn't so sure.

But he hadn't been merely sarcastic when he'd told Spender that he had more to do. He had an attack to review and carry out, led by the Reds. He turned his computer back on and began doing just that. He'd have to remember to have Spender checked out.

\* \* \* \* \*

A couple of hours later, at the Seattle Police Station Headquarters, Lieutenant Higdon straightened her collar while kicking back. She had the undesirable duty of watching the large computer mainframe all evening and through the morning, which no matter how important, wasn't quite what she had signed up for with the police department.

On the other hand, she mused, things hadn't been too wild since that fiasco a year or so ago at that messenger company with the transgenics. Now THAT had been something. Not caring if the transgenics were right or wrong, she'd done her part in keeping the peace. And things had been quiet since.

She supposed she should be thankful that she hadn't pulled dock duty. There wasn't a week gone by that they didn't have to pull a floater from the Sound.

Deciding she was hungry, she looked over the monitors to make sure none were having fits, and left to see if anyone had bothered to stock the cafeteria.

The room was quiet, save for the fans of the computers and the whirring of hard drives. This silence was soon broken by the sound of scraping, and the removal of a ventilation screen.

Lowering into the room, a series of balancing wires attached to a harness held the aging Frohike from dashing to the floor. Logan tapped a sequence to slow the man's descent to monitor level.

"All right. Log into the system and backdoor a command to access terminal... 42 dash E." Frohike quietly spoke, the microphone delivering his voice to the man above him.

"Done. Should be able to log in... now. You have complete access to the program now. Be careful, the program is complicated; there are about a hundred thousand separate command processors, all in video multi-sinc." Logan glanced from the laptop and down at the man

hanging from wires. "Are you sure you can cable hack the program and change it without corrupting the..."

Frohike shook his head in annoyance, not deigning to look up. Interrupting Logan, he growled, "Listen, kid; I was hacking television satellite cable before you were old enough to drool over Jessica Rabbit, so get over yourself."

Logan frowned, an oddly confused look flickered across his face at the unfamiliar name. Shaking his head, he watched the laptop screen with fascination as the elderly man did his magic. "Not bad at all." he quietly commented, the mic on mute. The old man was a pain in the ass, but he definitely knew his hacks.

Frohike logged out of the system. "Ok, that should be it. It'll feed to the rest of the links like a virus, but the computer will think it's part of the diagnostics run. Pull me up."

A tap on the keyboard was all it took to bring the man back up into the passageway. Frohike unhitched himself as Logan placed the screen back. As the screen snapped into place, they both heard the sound of the computer room door open.

Lieutenant Higdon stopped just inside the doorway as the door closed. Looking around the room, her eyebrows furrowed in curiosity; she would have sworn she heard the oddest sound as she entered the room. She put the plate of food down on the table and re-opened the door, but heard nothing but it's normal hinge squeak. Finally, shrugging to herself as the door closed, she picked the plate up and took her seat. Glancing at the monitor and finding nothing out of the norm, she began munching through her salad, satisfied.

Departing the rear of the building in janitorial overalls, Frohike surprised Logan by grinning. "I haven't done that since the Octium convention. Damn, it's good to be back in business."

Clapping the young rebel on the back, together they left the property undetected.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN : "Foray"

2:17 a.m.

The guardsman at the gate of Fort Lewis yawned and glanced at the clock on the shack wall. Groaning, he checked the time on his watch, which confirmed it. Time seemed to be passing much slower tonight, after the excitement the day before with the attack by the transgenic freaks.

He smiled at the thought. They'd really kicked some transgenic butt, and obtained a few prisoners in the process.

His gaze moved to the door of the shack and was startled to see a man standing casually on the outside of the door. Recognizing the Vice-Minister, the officer snapped to attention so fast that Spender was almost amused.

"Sir! I wasn't told you were in the area! Is there anything we can help you with?" the man remained at attention.

Spender nodded. "Yes. You can tell me whom that person is."

The guard looked in the direction the Vice-Minister was pointing, and noticed someone just entering the perimeter of the light and walking up the road towards the guard-shack. Spender stepped aside to let the guard exit the shack. As the approaching man came closer, the guard called out to him. "Excuse me sir, you need to go back the way you came."

Waving, the man continued closer. "Hi! My car broke down a few miles back, I was wondering if you could help me?"

The officer unhitched the clasp to his holster and put his hand on the gun.

The man stopped where he was. "Whoa! I just want to make a phone call, buddy! I'm supposed to check on the status of these bases every 6 months or so, and the darned stupid company government car broke down!"

The guy looked at the shack and then back to the guard. "Are you supposed to be here? I was told this base didn't have an on station watch."

The Conclave guard looked back towards Spender, but the Vice Minister was no longer there. Without a superior at hand, the officer decided to just follow protocol. "We were assigned here a couple of months ago, to prepare for reopening the base. The phone here is down, but I can take you inside to a working communications line."

The man grinned. "Thanks pal, that'd be great."

The officer nodded and smiled. "Don't mention it."

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Minutes later, the man was on the other end of a brig cell. "What the hell do you think you're doing? Who are you people?"

The guard smirked at him and walked away. A voice from the lower bunk of a two bunk bed growled. "Shut up, moron. If you REALLY get their attention, you're not going to be having a really happy day if you get my drift."

Jimmy leaned over to better see the individual. A transgenic whose face looked like a cross between an archeological dig and a lizard from that old sci-fi series 'V' scowled back.

Jimmy smiled. "You must be Mole. I'm here to pass some important information to you."

"Yeah?" The lizard-man looked fairly unimpressed. "So start passing."

"Max, Logan and everyone who can is going to be taking on the base, and getting you guys free." Jimmy looked around, as if expecting someone to be listening in, then leaned closer. "They start their attack at 4 a.m."

The cigar stopped moving. "You're serious."

"Sure. That's the plan."

Mole studied the enthusiastic face to see if he was being put on, decided that it sounded better than just napping and chewing on his unlit cigar, so he got up out of the bunk.

"Well, all right then. Let's get everyone in the rest of the cells in on this."

\* \* \* \* \*

A Conclave guard walked the perimeter with no haste in his step. No energy wasted, no spot unchecked. Five thousand years of genetic selection created no slouch, he was as efficient in his duties as humanly possible; not due to attempt, but because he simply could be no other way. Cause and effect.

A sound came from nowhere. He stopped, slowly taking in everything in his vision. Turning his head from side to side, he missed nothing. The officer frowned, and took in everything around him again.

Without warning, the ground suddenly departed from underneath the guard's feet. Micro-fractions of a second before losing consciousness, he came to the realization that this was due to someone yanking them backwards out from under him, as the rediscovered ground came up to greet him. Out cold, the transgenic responsible crawled out from the underground hole beside the manhole cover she'd moved aside quietly.

Using hand-signals, she motioned to the transgenics through the hole, and moved off. Silently but quickly, they came out from that and other similar underground passages in various locations. The Gunmen's downloaded plans had been right on the money, indicating that the old sewer systems hadn't been used in years in lieu of more efficient ways of piping the sewage and garbage out. In fact, the old system wasn't even shown on later maps, just those printed prior to the Pulse.



Inside the van, Byers and Langly monitored the transgenics progress. The team leaders had been fitted with transceivers, but early activity was accomplished without sound. Langly turned to Byers, "Backup is ten minutes away." Byers nodded, his concentration passing from monitor to monitor.

Maintaining radio silence, the invaders continued to make their way around the inside of the perimeter, removing the Conclave security officers at the entrances and key positions throughout the base. Once they had all main ground communications and security taken out, Byers had been fairly sure that confrontation would soon follow. He wasn't yet to be proven wrong.

Full floodlights suddenly lit up the base. Max and her team of a few dozen select transgenics and Yves, commanding a team herself, were caught in the open. The first thing they noticed were hundreds of Conclave in formation. Several dozen were in front, wearing a different format of uniform than Max had known them to use.

Max looked over at Yves, who nodded in silent agreement. These odd uniformed Conclave must be the new Red Project.

Ames White walked out from a building to their right, and down the formation. Looking at Max, he nodded seemingly to himself, but passing her as if she were part of the base structure.

"452." He calmly stated to no one in particular. "My intelligence informed me that you were out of state. I had hoped to approach you after this was over, to savor the moment when I would announce to you that the transgenics were all but extinct."

Stopping suddenly, he paused; then turned to the front row of Conclave. "But my manners. Ladies and gentlemen of the Red Phalanx, allow me to introduce to you the remainder of Manticore creations."

He looked around, then corrected himself. "But no, they aren't \*all\* here, are they?"

He faced Max again, smiling. "The rest of your friends, who so rudely arrived unannounced and made themselves unwelcome. They literally crawled back to Seattle, didn't they? Told you about their defeat?"

He raised his arms, as if addressing millions. "They were CRUCIFIED!" he yelled. "And these magnificent examples of Conclave superiority have not so much as a scratch!"

Dramatically, he moved a step towards Max, and offered in a lower tone, "If you'll pardon the cliché, of course."

Ames smirked at Max, but was not rewarded with the glare he expected. Instead, she looked at him with... what? Pity? Typical of these inferiors, he should have expected as much. Deciding to bring this speech to a close and let the fun begin, he started walking down the row of the elite Phalanx.

"Ames White."

Something in her voice brought him to a stop, and he turned his head in her direction.

"You are under arrest, for murder, for treason against the United States of America in serving a federal capacity under alternative agendas, and for crimes against humanity." She called out to him.

Ames' amusement was evident. "Under arrest. Well, that's very interesting, 452. Perhaps you'd like to take me in?"

He cleared his throat loudly. In one fluid motion, all the warriors at the front of the Conclave line took one step forward.

Max's look was absolutely stone. "No. I'm not going to take you in... we're going to take you out. The jury is in. You are found guilty, and your punishment is death."

White looked at her incredulously, then tipped his head back and laughed out loud. "I almost like you, 452. But you've outlived your purpose..."

"My purpose," Max interrupted, "...and the purpose of every transgenic, White, was to rid the world of one threat; the Conclave. You must have known this; you've spent an inordinate amount of resources to try to eliminate us. And tonight, our purpose will be finished, our mission completed. You will be eradicated from the face of the planet. And we will wipe our feet on you and walk away. Tomorrow, we'll forget you even existed."

Slowly, White's amused expression vanished, and decided he was finished talking. "Have it your way, transgenic. No more small talk."

He walked back towards the building he had come from. Yves saw him lift a radio transceiver and heard him talk into it. "Eliminate them, then execute the prisoners. I want this finished."

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN : "Rope-A-Dope"

Mole watched the bantering take place between Max and Ames outside the cell wall. She'd seen him at the window on the second story of the building, but had given him only the slightest glance. Enough for him to know she was ready. His eyes met Jimmy with a deadly look.

The guard at the end of the hall heard a slamming sound from the cell. "Damn human, it's YOUR fault we're here. You're dead, you hear me?"

Hearing a snap that sounded like bones breaking, the Conclave officer ran down the hall in time to see Mole drop the human to the ground. He pointed at the guard, "You! Get this trash from my cell."

The guard looked at the body, then at Mole. "You really did kill him. You transgenics are despicably stupid."

He unlocked the cell and Mole thought to himself, "*Not as stupid as some.*"

Seconds later, Mole dragged the guard to the corner of the room and under the bed. "You can get up now, ordinary."

Jimmy opened his eyes, glanced at the two and got up. "How did you make that cracking sound? That was pretty good."

"Maybe I'm a ventriloquist. Are you gonna stand there asking questions all day, or help me? Here, grab his keys and get Joshua and the rest of them out of the cells. They know the drill."

Jimmy grinned and followed Mole's instructions.

\* \* \* \* \*

White walked to the building he'd originally come from, and opened the door. It took him just a fraction of a second to recognize Joshua, one of the transgenics that he'd ordered taken prisoner whom had tried to kill him at the Jam Pony escapade and should have been in one of their prison cells. Unfortunately, the fraction of a second it took him to recognize the man with the canine features was a fraction of a second longer than he'd have needed to block the blow that came at him from the huge transgenic.

Slammed off his feet, White took the blow well. He hit the ground rolling, and came back up on his feet. "I've been waiting for a chance to tangle with you again, dog-boy." He said to Joshua. "But since I'm a little busy at the moment, this time you can count me out from being your chew toy."

He whistled, and two of the Red Phalanx flanked him.

White motioned at Joshua. "Turn this... thing... into dog chow."

Joshua pointed at White. "You're first."

Misunderstanding the big transgenics words for bravado, White simply laughed.

He didn't laugh long. Behind Joshua, Jimmy held the taser he'd taken along with the keys from the guard. When Joshua stepped aside, Jimmy fired it at Ames. Shocked in more ways than one, White could only stand there convulsing as Jimmy pulled the trigger releasing the electricity to its natural course.

Having been instructed that Conclave's were tougher than typical human beings, Jimmy let the Conclave jerk about longer than he normally would have. He counted the number of seconds that Max had instructed him, then let go.

White succumbed to gravity and fell to the cement.

Joshua put his hand on Jimmy's shoulder when he started towards Ames. "Let me."

Jimmy grinned. "You got it, big guy."

On the field, the attack began.

Conclave met with transgenic in unarmed combat of a like that had not been seen by mankind in its entire history. Lightning fast reflexes and trained skills thousands of years old found forms of martial arts and basic combat techniques combined with horrific accuracy and effectiveness.

Max and Yves, fighting side by side, fought as if they'd been training with each other for years. Seemingly almost able to read each other's moves and thoughts, they complimented each other in a style that seemed almost eerie.

Until they encountered the Red Phalanx soldiers.

Even when battling the basic Red series a year or so prior, Max had found her own skills outmatched. The Conclave were naturally as strong as the transgenics, but the Red Phalanx, she quickly discovered, not only were immune to pain, but had a strength superior to even Joshua's ungodly might.

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In the van, Byers watched calmly but nervously, via the links to the base cameras. "They're getting pummeled out there. Tell me you have good news."

"Backup is still a minute and a half away." Langly replied. "Let's hope it'll be soon enough."

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Yves picked herself off the ground again, her entire body aching as if she'd been slammed repeatedly with one of the buildings instead of the soldier that was fighting her. She'd never encountered anyone like these Reds, and they simply didn't seem to tire. This White character was as good as his word; the Reds were mopping the virtual deck with the transgenics. As she got to her feet, the grinning soldier extended his arm and made a "come hither" motion with his hand.

For the first time since Byers told her the plan, she wondered if it would work after all.

For the first time in twenty years, she wondered if she might die.

Suddenly, the air began filling with a low buzzing sound. Gradually, both transgenic and Conclave alike became aware of it, and slowly stopped fighting.

Over the trees from the north, a huge swarm of electronic gizmos appeared. Many of the Conclave that had been in the Seattle area for a time recognized them as Police hover-drones from the Seattle Police and Security force.

Inside the van, Langly motioned Byers attention to the control screen. The hover-drones were working exactly as Frohike and Logan had programmed them from within the police network.

The Conclave gapped in surprise at the unanticipated invasion, just long enough for the transgenics to re-launch an attack on them. Momentarily distracted by the air assault, most of them went down without a continued fight by the transgenic barrage.

Immediately, the Red Phalanx resumed fighting, keeping the incoming devices in their peripheral view; should they become a source of attack themselves from the guns they knew that most of the probes bore.

Unfortunately, the expected attack came in a manner that they didn't quite anticipate.

As the drones settled into what could only be described as 'squadrons', they took formation in firing runs. But at the point the Conclave calculated that bullets would be fired at them, nothing happened. Instead, when the drones got closer, bolts of electricity powered out of the drones and into the Reds. Screaming, the altered soldiers were helpless in the jolts of lightning-like channels of energy coming from the police drones. The transgenics fell back hurriedly so as not to get caught in the deadly force.

The hover-drones positioned themselves, finally filling the region with the glow of arcing and electrical discharge, the Red Phalanx soldiers caught in the powerful grip of electrocution.

Max switched her microphone to transmit. "Remember, don't kill them!"

Byers voice came over the line, static filled from the electrical discharge. "Don't worry, we're monitoring them carefully. As soon as the Red Spike's neural implants are burned out... wait, that's it. Langly, send the command to end sequence."

Moments later, the hover-drones stopped arcing the powerful bolts.

"Stand ready!" Yves called out to the transgenics.

Her caution, though well founded, was unnecessary. All of the Conclave present were out cold.

"The spike neural connections should be toast." Langly's voice filtered over the connection. "But we've got the drones standing by, just in case."

Max motioned for the transgenics to check the unconscious soldiers for pretenders. After all were examined, she called out, "Byers, call 9-1-1. Have them get whatever military forces necessary down here right now, tell them they've got a slew of terrorists just waiting to be picked up."

Yves glanced sharply at her. "You're not going to kill them?" She obviously had not ignored the little speech Max had given White.

"Unlike these cowards, we're not murderers. We only kill now when we're forced to, if it's life or death." Max looked back at Yves, who slowly smiled and nodded approvingly.

She motioned to Yves, who came and stood beside her. They faced the rest of the transgenics and raised their arms, linked, at the small army. The transgenics did not so much cheer as they did roar, drowning out the noise from the drones.

In the van, Byers and Langly listened to the cheering and looked at each other. "Looks like we've still got it." Langly grinned.

Byers smiled. "You know, I don't think we ever lost it. Until we accepted that someone else had control over our lives. We should have known better than that. But now we're back."

"Damn straight." A third voice popped up as the van's side door slid open, allowing Frohike to climb in. "It's about time we got back into action."

Langly high-fived the old man, while Byers got in the drivers seat, started the van and drove around to enter the complex and help the transgenics clean up.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN : "Destiny"

After arriving and listening to a quick briefing, the military rounded up all of the Conclave at Fort Lewis and sent them to be picked up by the CIA. Senator McKinley was arrested, and the rest of the Conclave rounded up around the world. Though superior physically, they were still susceptible to the laws of physics which of course dictate that what goes up, must eventually come back down.

Medical supplies and doctors were forwarded to Terminal City, where the transgenics dealt with treating their injured.

Letting another truck with hospital equipment come through the gate, Logan was suddenly hugged from behind. "Frohike, I told you not to do that when Max is around."

Max slapped him lightly on the back of his head, then came around front and kissed him.

"You're so bad." she smiled. "Where is your new pal, anyway?"

He motioned with the clipboard. "Over there with the guys and Yves." He glanced at her. "I think they're getting ready to leave."

He knew her well enough to notice 'the great wall of Max' come up. Understandably, this was an emotional issue for her. He pulled her close to him, and held her.

She didn't resist, needing the comfort.

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Langly growled. "What do you mean you're not coming?"

Looking somewhat sheepish, Jimmy shrugged. "Yves wants to get to know Max. She's her mother, Frohike. Look guys, I'm glad you're alive. More than anything. But Yves needs this, and I stand by her. Like we used to stand by each other, before you... uh... died. You know what I mean. Can't you stay?"

Byers gazed thoughtfully at Yves. "Is this really what you want? With so many years of wandering, do you really want to settle here?"

She met Byer's look. "Honestly, I don't know. But Jimmy's right. I want to get to know her. We missed out on something, and now that her reason for being created is done, maybe we can explore her reason for being."

She looked at the rest. "You could stay too. Or you could still do good out there. If you can't do it yourselves, you could find others and teach them. Pass on your knowledge, show them how to set things straight. Unless, as Jimmy stated, you decide to stay, help us and the transgenics."

Waiting for them to respond, she smiled at the three of them. The Lone Gunmen. She already knew the answer they would give, now that they were free. They had crossed the line, and whether the government would still chase them down or if they had been all but forgotten... they

would do what came naturally to them. They would fight injustice anywhere they'd find it.

Unspoken, the three men knew the answer as well. They looked at each other, and back to Yves. She nodded to them, and went to each and hugged them. Stopping last at Frohike, she looked into his eyes, and kissed him.

Byers and Langly glanced at each other, then to Jimmy. Surprisingly, this did not seem to phase him in the slightest. Langly looked back at Byers and shrugged. Sometimes you just never know why women do crazy things.

Parting, Yves smiled at Fro. "Take care of yourself, old man. Don't let these boys get you killed."

Startled, but recovering quickly, Frohike retorted, "That'll be the day."

The three compatriots climbed into the van.

Rolling down the window, Byers leaned out. "Take care of yourselves. Jimmy, Yves. We'll be back this way again sometime. And if you need us...."

Jimmy laughed. "We'll email you."

Byers smiled at them. And Yves could see this smile was at least somewhat free of the burden it held before.

Putting his arm around Yves, Jimmy waved, and the three men waved, and drove off.

Yves and Jimmy watched them until they disappeared in the distance, then walked over to tell Max and Logan that they'd be staying.



## EPILOGUE

The helicopter landed in Wyoming. After a team of agents scoured the abandoned base, formerly known as Manticore, they reported back to the individual in the 'copter.

"There's no sign of them, although it's apparent they were here." the team leader reported.

The old man inside looked thoughtful. "I thought the invasion at Fort Lewis had their touch. I'd bet that they were there. In fact, I'll bet your career that you're going to find them. But when you do, don't detain them... just report. Understand?"

The man didn't flinch. He answered, "Yes sir!" and left the helicopter.

Closing the door, he turned to the other passenger. "Do you think he'll find them?"

Lighting a cigarette, Spender shook his head. "It doesn't matter. What does matter is that from what Doctor Schroeder informed me before he died, eventually they'll find Mulder. And when they lead us to him, we'll have everyone in a nice, neat package."

The minister smiled, as the helicopter lifted and flew off into the clouds.