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Doc and the chimera conspiracy

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DOC AND THE CHIMERA CONSPIRACY

A Thesis

by

JESUS BELTRAN II

Submitted to the Graduate School of
The University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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Major Subject: Creative Writing

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May 2015

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ABSTRACT

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Doc and the Chimera Conspiracy, is a story that takes place in a world which diverged from our own in 1861 and led to a cooperation between the stoic science of Europe and the holistic science of indigenous people around the world. It is because of the cooperation that there is an explosion in advancements of science and technology. One of these advancements is the creation of Clones and human/animal genetic creations known as Chimera. I tell the story of Jack (a.k.a. Doc) a Chimera who lives in this present day, alternative Earth. The story teeters on the edges of civil rights (Chimera are oftentimes treated like second-class citizens in this state), but focuses mostly on a kidnapping, assassination, terrorism and a global conspiracy perpetrated by the latest incarnation of the Knights Templar. These events take place in the fictional city of Auia, located in the state of South Texas.

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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

In ancient Greek mythology, the Chimera was a fearsome beast with particularly strange parentage. The head of a lion, body of a goat and the tail of a serpent/dragon. To hunt such a creature would be suicide, but would be a tale for the ages. But the Chimera in the thesis I am presenting, titled *Doc and the Chimera Conspiracy (DCC)*, are less fearsome. The Chimera are a sub-species of humans in *DCC*'s alternate Earth. They are the creation of human genetic engineering created to serve the corporations whose industry, though heavily regulated by international government, can be extremely hostile to ordinary human life.

Nowadays, natural chimerism, both in humans and animals, is a known condition in which “an individual, organ, or part consisting of tissues of diverse genetic constitution” (Merriam-Webster, 2015). For example, a mother’s blood may not have any genetics in common with her child, but her cheek cells will.

Lam (2007) writes that in “2003, Chinese scientists at the Shanghai Second Medical University were successful in their attempts to produce stem cells through the merging of rabbit eggs and human skin cells”. The technological ability to, and the ethical implications of, purposely creating a human-animal hybrid, Chimera, has led to the creation of a new plot device for entertainment and laws, such as the Assisted Human Reproduction Act (AHRA) of 2004. The current version of the AHRA has been in force since September 30, 2012 (Canadian Legal Information Institute, 2012). But why prevent chimera from being created in the first place?

One of the reasons could be the oft-cited position that man should not play god. Possibly the most compelling reason not to create clones or chimera, at least in judicial arenas, comes from scientists. One of the earliest scientific writings concerning the possibility of human chimera comes from molecular biologist Joshua Lederberg. In 1966, Lederberg published a paper in the *American Naturalist* where he explained some of the drawbacks to human cloning and hybridization. Lederberg (1966) writes “the issue of ‘subhuman’ hybrids may arise...there would be widespread inhibitions about risky experiments leading to an object that could be labelled as a human or para- human infant”. Lederberg’s concern over the reasons for chimera being created and what could become of these “subhumans” led me to build the history of a world that would lead to the creation of the Chimera in *DCC*.

Though *DCC* started out as a simple answer to the question, “what could have led to the advanced scientific ability to create these hybrids,” it has grown into more. For my own understanding, I followed this new world from its inception, the point of divergence from our own world’s history, to the present. The new history, along with its new problems and solutions, has pointed *DCC* in a new direction. In this alternative world of *DCC*, the technology that would have emerged from a different history would have also brought about similar drastic, cultural changes. Dubos (1961) explained, “[n]ow the power of science is so great that almost any desired method, gadget, or product can be developed if we are willing to devote enough resources to the task. And it is precisely the confidence that utopias can now be converted into realities which creates urgent ethical problems for the scientist.” This is the same warning Lederberg and authors like Mary Shelley have been proclaiming. It is an old warning used in Spiderman comics ~ “With great power comes great responsibility.”

Those warnings are echoed anytime science progresses far enough to contribute to what Csicsery-Ronay (2008) calls the technological evolution or “Second Evolution”. He explains that the first evolution was mankind (in all his intelligence) emerging from nature. The Second Evolution is what emerges from mankind as a type of Second Nature, i.e. technology. Rather, what technology becomes once it takes on a life of its own. In our world, this would become artificial intelligence, robots and cyborgs. In DCC, the Second Nature still includes electronics and advanced programming, but the major technological advancement has been an upgraded human in the form of Chimera.

Just as the first evolution spawned humans who outlived our closest cousins, no one can know what problems (medical or otherwise) or attributes (positive or negative) a Second Evolution, man-made human-animal chimera would face in our world—but we can speculate. One of the strengths of DCC, as well as other science fiction stories, is that writers can philosophize as to the worth and danger of something so extraordinary as a Chimera without having to actually create one. Though our world may have only just begun to test the limits of what is possible, the alternative universe of DCC has already done so.

As is clear, making a chimera is not outside the realm of the possible. Also, I could have chosen to use any number of typical nightmare scenarios concerning Chimera turning against humanity, i.e. Frankenstein’s Monster. Lederberg’s use of the word subhuman is most poignant when put into the context of the history of human atrocities. But for *DCC*, I seized upon the idea of Chimera being commercially created and sanctioned as workers by international law. But once abuses were discovered, the creation of Chimera was outlawed.

The kind of machine that would allow consciousness to be copied or transferred from one brain to another is definitely in the realm of fiction; at least for now. In our world, the closest

scientists have come to actually reading/interpreting what is going on in a human brain, uses a BCI or Brain-Computer Interface. The BCI in our world comes in the form of an electroencephalogram. The closest scientists can come to “writing” to a brain, is devices such as the cochlear implant or a deep brain stimulation which can be used to help lessen body tremors (Allison, 2011, 133).

In the fictional world of *DCC*, Doc and the other Chimera were created with what is akin to a base program, like Linux. The process involves a type of deep brain stimulator which uses a silver mixture, coating part of the brain, to facilitate the transfer of information/data. This process is different from Clone memory download because a clone is basically the same body getting a copy of memory patterns. The essential brain functions of a Chimera are built from the ground up, which is a longer process, which needs specialized equipment.

Once the process is over, the silver mixture is automatically redistributed throughout the surface of the body in random patterns, which resemble tattoos, resulting in what I call marker veins. Every Chimera has one or more designs that can be found on different parts of the body. The marker veins became a device that would allow Doc to use his ability to interact with the brain of other Chimera... essentially controlling portions of their actions, much like the deep brain stimulator.

As for the creators and creations, I decided to utilize the ubiquitous bad guys—the corporations and the Knights Templar—as the puppeteers behind all the bad things in the world. “In science fiction the secret society usually operates very closely with the corporate conglomerate... Sometimes a clandestine element can be found within a large company acting as the secret, nefarious force behind corporate interests” (Stuart, 2011). Unfortunately, the symbiotic relationship between ubiquitous corporations and the influence and power of the secret

society of The Knights Templar is not explored in DCC and so, the Templars will have to be eliminated from the story.

The first group of Chimera, in *DCC* were more human than not. The following batches were created to be stronger than the average human to be used as a workforce for dangerous work— as slaves. But because the Chimera were not even given minimal protection and abuse became rampant, the world government named INTERPOL stepped in and gave these Chimera human status and protection by law. INTERPOL also outlawed the creation of Chimera, though preventing the creation of these beings proved to be more difficult than enforcement of their legal status.

At this point, I would like to focus a bit on this government body, its purpose and role in DCC. The world governing body called the **INTERN**ational **P**olice/investigative force and **L**awgivers, INTERPOL, I created for *DCC* was a way to balance the scales. The main role of INTERPOL, in DCC, is to fight the bigotry and enforce the protection laws. Greed, corruption and bigotry were, in my opinion, some of the major diseases of for the ills of societies throughout time. Without a strong, unified force to fight these diseases, they fester and have brought destruction to civilizations. In DCC, a sort of new age of enlightenment has occurred that brought about the creation of INTERPOL to fight back societies' diseases. In the case of DCC, the corporations are uniquely qualified (I will explain shortly) as being the source of those diseases. Though not mentioned in the story, this government was formed towards the end of the 1800's. In our world, the United Nations was formed in 1945 after the Second World War.

Unlike the oppressive government of Orwell's *1984*, I wanted to portray a benevolent organization that was formed through cooperation between empires and citizens and given powers to enforce laws—a beneficial global government that takes care of people no matter who

they are or their birth origins. As it turns out, the idea of this type of international organization is not as new as I thought. In many articles, speeches and essays, Bertrand Russell, born in 1872, advocates for the creation of an international government well into the middle of the last century.

In his essay, “Proposed Roads to Freedom”, Russell (1918) explains:

One of the most obvious necessities, if peace is to be secure, is a measure of disarmament. So long as the present vast armies and navies exist, no system can prevent the risk of war. But disarmament, if it is to serve its purpose, must be simultaneous and by mutual agreement among all the Great Powers. And it is not likely to be successful so long as hatred and suspicion rule between nations, for each nation will suspect its neighbor of not carrying out the bargain fairly. A different mental and moral atmosphere from that to which we are accustomed in international affairs will be necessary if agreements between nations are to succeed in averting catastrophes. If once such an atmosphere existed it might be perpetuated and strengthened by wise institutions; but it cannot be CREATED by institutions alone. International co-operation requires mutual good will, and good will, however it has arisen, is only to be PRESERVED by co-operation.

This government would have an army that would make it unnecessary for other nations to have their own—just like the INTERPOL of DCC. I believe INTERPOL can be kept in a rewrite, but its agents, both the clone Chief Morse and the stalwart Inspector Kerr, may not be necessary. I will be including INTERPOL’s history and its influence, but the agents do not need to be represented by individuals.

INTERPOL was also instrumental in curbing the creation of Clones, but did not outlaw the creations completely. For *DCC*, I propose Cloned body parts were created first. When body blanks became available, the technology was created to download memories of terminally ill patients. In the re-write for *DCC*, I will include more of the process to bring to life the birthing process of Clones and Chimera.

DCC begins with the main character, Doc going about his day, as usual. Doc's meeting with his friends and Elsbeth, the newcomer, will be the midway point of the story. In the newer version of *DCC*, Elsbeth's role will be that of companion to Doc as he explains the city's dynamics and the history of Chimera and their struggles within this city to gain citizenship. I feel there should be addition of a more grounded personal, interpersonal and social struggle often attributed to minority groups. Doc grows into the role of a leader within the community of Chimera in the newer version of *DCC*. We see through the eyes of Elsbeth and the others as they also grow in strength and unity. We will also have more of an affect and effect with the officials and opponents to the Chimera.

I tailored Doc after the greatest influence on a majority of my works, *Doctor Who*. I began watching reruns of *Doctor Who* in the mid to late 1980's. Though I had watched other science fiction television shows and movies before *Doctor Who*, Tom Baker's version of the Doctor was the main reason for my delving deeper into science fiction. I proceeded to create something new, but still wanted to keep my Doc character as a non-aggressive hero. Re-imagining The Doctor without too much overlap with the beloved British creation has freed me to take the character in a different direction. Though I do not write with a dialect in mind, there is a noticeable non-American language usage going on.

Because *DCC* is set in a fictional alternate universe, I felt the freedom to explore the change in language by using what Csicsery-Ronay (2008) calls Fictive Neology (new words). As the First of his *Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, Csicsery-Ronay (2008) explain,

Neologogenesis, the production of new words, is a vital process in all living languages...languages usually accommodate social and cultural changes through new vocabulary and usage. This accommodation is especially true when communities establish connections with foreign cultures or undergo technoscientific transformations. Neology is consequently of central importance for modernizing societies, whose languages must be dynamic and flexible enough to permit new customs, concepts, and objects to become part of collective experience.

A note on language is directed at some of the spelling found in *DCC*. I used some of the accepted English/European spelling of words for both dialogue, narration and in most of my other works, including this introduction. For *DCC*, the use of English/European spelling goes back to the idea that language would have developed, in *DCC*'s South Texas and other countries around the world, based on the strongest influence. Personally, the spelling of certain words have a more pleasing physical sensation as opposed to others. I only recently found out that this is a form of synesthesia.

Another example of what Csicsery-Ronay is meaning, are the American GI's of WWII. Much of their lingo, like SNAFU, found its way into the civilian world both domestically and abroad. And just like the military jargon had an influence on our world, the strong scientific field's technical lingo of the alternate world of *DCC* would have a strong influence on societies

around the world. Because language grows and evolves when there is a blending of cultures and languages, I decided to use the fictional history of DCC to figure out what concepts would have eventually become a part of this world. And like the chopped-up language of the street has its origins in other realms of society, DCC's language also follows this same pattern. For instance the derogatory name for a Chimera is Splice. This word comes from the process of genetic modification performed by splicing one or more genes onto the base helix. The Flexi is both the generic and brand name of portable computer/communication system. Flexi is a descriptive name for what the computer does and is, though, the full name of the system is originally The Flexible Computer and Communicator. Its creator wanted to use the acronym FCC, but the public preferred the simple, Flexi. In some matters, no matter the world, the public is in charge.

In fact, Dubos (1961) pointed to the fact that "haphazard scientific technology pursued without regard for its relevance to the meaning of human life could spell the end of civilization." Though not too close to ending civilization, the companies' leaders engaged in illegally creating Chimera are attempting to change global rule of law. Had they been expecting an uproar about the influx of Chimera, they must have been disappointed. In *DCC*, because human cloning and genetic engineering have become commonplace, the average person understands that there is only a minor difference between natural born humans and the created humans (Clones and Chimera).

Whether the natural born humans of *DCC* agree with the existence of these creations cuts to the heart of the issue of bigotry. It is because of this difference, because most heroes in fiction are outsiders, that I decided to make the central character, Doc, a Chimera rather than a natural born human. Even in *DCC*'s world, with lots of Chimera, Doc is an outsider because of the

secrets he has to keep. Annette Curtis Klause (1997) presents a similar issue with her werewolf story, *Blood and Chocolate*.

In *Blood and Chocolate*, a werewolf named Vivian attempts to live a normal life with a human boy, Aiden by attempting to stay away from her pack as much as possible, all the while suppressing her werewolf nature—up to a point. Vivian is accepted into Aiden’s clique, but when Aiden sees what Vivian truly is, he rejects her. Similarly, Doc attempts to suppress his abilities so he can fit in as an average Chimera, or even as a regular human, when he hides his marker veins. Because of his ability to get into another Chimera’s mind and possibly cause extreme harm, that he fears touching another Chimera’s marker veins. Had Doc attempted to get help for his condition, he would have received it from agents of INTERPOL.

In *DCC*, INTERPOL is in charge of making certain anything relevant to human life is protected, especially Chimera. INTERPOL’s influence is seen throughout the story. In person, Inspector Kerr and her supervisor Chief Morse represent INTERPOL in public and among law enforcement officers for the city. These two characters show up at the second half of the story. And this is where a major problem lies. The beginning of the current version *DCC* allows us to look into the life and times of the main character, while showing bits and pieces of this alternative world. The main action that shows the conspiracy takes place almost midway through the story.

Initially, I felt as if the beginning was too slow to carry the story forward. But Le Guin (1993) says the rules writers are told, want “all the main characters [introduced] early in the book” (199-200). She goes on to explain how Charles Dickens “didn’t get Sam Weller into the *Pickwick Papers* for ten chapters—that’s five months since the book was coming out as a serial in installments” (Le Guin, 1993, 200).

With Le Guin's encouraging remarks, I let *DCC* lie with its languid beginning, the sharp pivot into action towards the end and the multiple characters added only during the end-half. I can see now this mix did not fit together as I had hoped. Because I ignored the advice I often gave to students I tutored at the University Writing Center, which is, "don't be married to what you write", the second half of the story does not serve the beginning as well as it should. Because the ending was the anchor point the rest of the story was built upon, and because of the additions subsequently made, the end portion of *DCC* is now odd.

A major improvement would be to have the Chimera be created to work as either sex slaves or slaves for mining or working with dangerous materials. Those that die while working or being abused are incinerated. Instead of killing those who are too weak to continue to be useful, the Chimera are released after their memories are erased. Though it would be easier to just kill the weak, sending them to the cities serves as a taunt to the government that cannot stop the underground corporations.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is with Mischa and Layla. Because not much is known about Mischa as a character, he seemed to be dead weight. If I were to keep the end portion of the story, the Mischa character could be referenced in passing, if at all. Layla, though central to the reason for Doc going on his hero's journey, will not be necessary in the rewrite.

As far as storytelling style, I feel a majority of my work as an author is done in what Bell (1997) calls the Modular Design—meaning writing can change POV, tone, voice, etc. all within one work (214). One of my favourite literary tools to use is the analepsis, the flashback, as a way to provide background information to readers. At the beginning of *DCC*, Doc is leaving a video message for other Chimera to watch. It is a short introduction, for this unknown newcomer and the reader, in need orientation for the world they have just wandered into. I chose a first-person

narration, sometimes through the video diary, because I wanted to let Doc explain why he so he tries to fit in as an average Chimera and, by not showing off his marker veins, fit in with regular humans. Through flashbacks, readers learn why Doc suppresses his abilities.

In DCC, the video diaries is used as an aside...a way for the character to speak directly to readers or an audience. In literature, Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*, the *Emily* series by Maxwell and my own *Lost in a Wish* series are examples of using diaries to provide background information.

A problem with DCC's first-person narration, rather, there is a conflict between first person narration and the ending. Whether or not I could kill off Doc in the end would determine who was telling the story. One idea was to add a bit to the beginning to explain what was to follow was extrapolated from personal journals and official reports.

However, the constant stop/start of action and dialogue to explain this would cause a slowdown of reader flow and a disjointed view of the story. Another option was to allow Doc to die and have his "spirit" finish the story — à la *American Beauty*. This is not one of my favourite methods of telling a story, unless the story is about the afterlife. No, for DCC, I allowed Doc to live by faking his death and keep the, mostly, first-person narrative intact. With the changes to take place in DCC, a third person omniscient narrator doing all the explanations and guiding readers to what else is happening will work best. As such, the ending is in flux ~ life or death for Doc hangs in the balance should I only change the point of view. By changing the emphasis of the story to the life and times of Doc, then death is completely off the table.

Technological diversions never gained the same importance in this alternate world, as it has in ours. Because there is no lack of interest in real life, the people in DCC never developed

the voyeur-type of entertainment that has plagued most every facet of the American media as well as those of other countries.

I learned a great deal about our world in creating this alternative world. There are so many options that are still available. As with most stories, our world's future depends of the choices made in whatever present is at hand. With time, if there are too many unanimous choices, the future becomes much clearer — think a magnifying lens between the sun and a sheet of paper. The movements of the lens are the decisions. Once there is one true future, we are all stuck. That future could be the bright light of wisdom or the oncoming lamp of a train coming towards us.

The content of *DCC* is entertaining as well as informative. Presenting a world where greater emphasis is placed on creation rather than destruction, I feel, is a way I can bring hope to the future. The “conspiracy” part of the story can wait for another day. I do not believe that every aspect of *DCC* is cheerful, nor should it be. Nor is it a cautionary tale. *DCC* is just another world. Ultimately, the best option to adjust *DCC* is to simply focus on the “life and times” of Doc.

DOC AND THE CHIMERA CONSPIRACY

Scientists have been searching the solar system, and even parts of the galaxy, for intelligent life for the past 50 years. Deep space probes search for tell-tale signs of intelligence ~ but so far, nothing has been found.

In the 50 years since those hundreds of probes have been sent out, humanity has made some great, and not so great, advances. There is a global law system that has rid nations of the need for standing armies. Global healthcare is available to all humans. Fantastical literature about magickal schools and music created from mood-sensing instruments are acceptable entertainment for people of all ages. There are Flexible Computers that can be rolled or folded and put into a pocket.

Finally, the greatest invention of the last 50 years are the Chimera. Chimera were originally meant to be workers and soldiers, created with full mental capacity to understand who and what they are and learn as quickly as a young adult. They are sent into places that were too dangerous for an ordinary person. But after Chimera creating was outlawed, they kept showing up outside cities and towns all over the world. Most, if not all were in terrible physical shape from having worked in extreme conditions or brutally abused sexually.

These Chimera had no recollection of where they had been before being found. They were younger, mentally, than previous Chimera. They are trusting, naïve, socially awkward and often honest to a fault. But they are extremely capable of learning quickly and sexually adventurous. This last bit has sometimes been an issue in different cities if the communities

within are more prudish in their approach to sex. No one in law enforcement has figured out how and where the Chimera are made and used before they are let go. To this day, Chimera are still showing up, but in fewer numbers.

Radio and the News Data streams report there are growing numbers of people, birthed humans, who don't want Chimera to be included in the United American States. But knowing that Chimera are a large minority group in the state of South Texas, the Non-Birthed Human-haters should not have voted in favour of re-joining the now tiny North American country.

Their stunted logic can be seen in interviews like what comes through the News Data streams across the top of Flexis as an announcer reads off the story:

Though bigoted propaganda is illegal, under section 17 of the Fair Reporting Act, we are allowed to interview such people as necessary to present all sides to an issue of public importance. For this report, we contacted one outspoken critic, Edward Cruz, about INTERPOL's intervention with independent nations' handling of the Chimera issue.

We came back to this part of the world knowing that it was near time for the Union to ask to take us back into its bosom. More than 100 years have passed since the Union had sold Texas to Mexico because she could not afford to repair every state damaged during the War Between the States. They would not even allow citizens into the few remaining Union states for fear of causing a drain on resources.

My ancestors left Texas for Canada, vowing to return when the time came, so we could return to the Union. And we have done just that. We legally immigrated into the Mexican

state of South Texas. Our numbers swelled once word got around that we could vote at least one part of the original Texas back into the Union.

Now, because INTERPOL says that Non Birthed Humans should be given an opportunity to become citizens, we First Humans are forced to wait longer for basic services, food and job opportunities. We were here, first. We should be serviced first. We are the First Humans.

Doc shuts off the Flexi. He has seen this rhetoric before. It is no different than what he had seen when he was new. He even recorded something about it in his video diary after his first run-in with those people. Doc left a personal recording for other newcomers to view when they come to this café. Doc's was a simple message.

Personal recordings are a good idea for newcomers, such as yourself. It is a way of getting to know yourself and get used to expressing yourself. So, if you are watching this, understand that there are good and bad things to experience in this world. But, you've made a good choice coming here to Jocelyn's café. If you see me, just come by and say hello. Thank you for your time. Again, I am Doc.

—Welcome

Doc often wondered how many other Chimera have personal recordings or even recorded messages for newcomers. Xu, his friend, mentor and sometimes lover had recorded him since she first took him in. The personal messages are to himself in the future. She bought a small data node so the personal recordings would stay personal. Normally, anything saved through a Flexi is uploaded to the flying data nodes located onboard the dirigibles that dot the city's sky. One

such recording was made by Doc after he had just had his first interaction with a NBH-hater the week before. He cried on his way home.

Today is November thirteenth. My name is Jack. It has been almost a year since I was found, wandering outside Auia city. A couple of days ago, I received the official report of my being found. It only took a few days after another psycho analysis. Wait. I have a copy of the report here. The Chimera was found, etc., etc. Ah!

Found to be examining the foliage nearest him, viewing and then smelling the leaves.

We stopped him as he was attempting to put the leaves in his mouth. Since this was the first Chimera we have found, we covered him with a spare blanket in our vehicle and transported him to our physician. This is where we left him. We the undersigned attest that the events happened as printed above.

The guys who found me worked as farm hands for some city farmer. Anyway, not important. I hate that I can't read Spanish like the most of the other Chimera. I can decipher a few things, but, for the most part, I'm illiterate. English is used, too, but I want to know what things say in the original Spanish. Anyway, I'm glad these men found me when they did. Since the vote to become a state in the United American States, these leaflets have been scattered about the city. It's about what to do when you find a Chimera.

STEPS TAKEN AFTER FINDING A CHIMERA

As a matter of public policy, the following guidelines fall within the mandates as required through the INTERPOL Global Human Initiative. The Global Human Initiative establishes that every living, intelligent human being, whether created (i.e. Chimera and

Clones) by natural born humans (original Homo sapiens) or procreated (by Homo sapiens), is a human and is entitled to housing, healthcare, education and training (as needed).

- Newly-created Chimera found without supervision are to be humanely taken to the nearest medical/healing facility.
- Medical/healing facilities are to retrieve specimens from the Chimera to be handed over to authorities in an attempt to establish lineage, creation grouping and possibly, creation site.
- Once the Chimera specimens are collected, a medical and psychological baseline is to be established.
- After processing and determining the Chimera is safe for others to be around, the Chimera is to be turned over to an educational facility. Here, the Chimera will be instructed in the ways of civilized society before being released into the city they were found. By this time, the Chimera will have a trade or a means to support themselves and be a productive member of society.
- A citizen can choose to establish guardianship over a Chimera, thus relieving the city of the burden of housing, education and training, with minimal or no assistance from the city.

For more information on Chimera, please select Chimera Guides from the top menu of your Flexi.

I received a copy of this leaflet just after I had to begin the process to become a citizen. Though I was already a citizen with full rights as a Mexican, the U.A.S. was exercising their right to challenge the VIABILITY of all Chimera, like me, to become PRODUCTIVE citizens of their small nation. The U.A.S. has always made their position of Chimera and Clones very clear. We are not wanted. But, for the inclusion of South Texas into their Union, they had to abide by INTERPOL's laws regarding human Chimera and Clone civil and human rights.

Doc has never been allowed to be outgoing. Xu always warned him about getting too much attention. One of his first memories is of Xu and another doctor washing him.

“Did you see his back? This is very unique, even among his kind.”

“And we need to keep it quiet. I've had success with a treatment that hides the markings. It needs to be applied weekly, but it will hide that.”

“But why hide it? It must mean something.”

“It does. A man dressed in black, who did not identify himself, was looking for this Chimera. The man was asking specifically for anyone with letters on their back. He did not look like he was from INTERPOL. I'm betting he was from one of those black market corporations who are still making Chimera. This one is special. Why else would they look to recover him but none of the others?”

Whoever was looking for Doc when he first came to this city might still be on the lookout. As far as anyone knew, that night was the last time anyone ever heard from those people.

Doc looks back at these journal recordings Xu had him start making whenever he felt he needed reminding of why he had to stay. Despite the physical clues, no Chimera knows exactly why they were created. Like orphans making up stories of why their parents are gone, some

Chimera play with ideas of their origins. In a short time, they have created a mythos of their existence.

Doc looks at these recordings for clues that he might have missed ~ something he said that might give answers as to who created him and why he was left at the doorstep of society. A little known about the people who were looking for Doc. They had enough connections to deactivate the Remote Visual Surveillance and Recording (RVSR) system along the route to the clinic Doc was first taken to. Also, the next block over, RVSR cameras captured a few frames of an out of focus uniform on one of two people who left the clinic.

Xu and Doc have yet to find a uniform like the one in the recording, but it doesn't matter. Doc holds on to the belief that one day he will have answers. This is his city. He may not have been born here, but it's Doc's home. Often humid, mostly just hot, Auia City is nearly 20 miles from the Rio Grande to the south and 20 miles from the Gulf of Mexico to the east. It is an oasis for people passing through, but also a destination to those looking for a place to heal. Those who live here find each other and pass the time with music, conversation, meals and drink. Occasionally, there is coupling. Coupling is great fun, if you can find a partner.

Today is a typical humid morning. Being a Friday, Doc waits for the JaCo Auto-Trolley to roll up the street to take him to the downtown market. His radio-pass card signals the trolley when to stop. Of course, because Doc was in a hurry, he forgot to apply the cooling gel to his chest. Now he has to keep pulling the shirt away from his skin to keep it from sticking.

The trolley lolls to a stop and calls out "all aboard" in English and other languages prevalent in most of the civilized worlds, but Doc hasn't learned, yet.

Xu keeps telling Doc he has to apply himself to learn at least Spanish, German, any of the Mayan or Nahuatl languages. Even though he doesn't really have to time, unless he stops

sleeping for a few years, he feels he'll never be able to learn a whole new second language like everyone else.

He climbs on board and is greeted with red posters with bold with black lettering, just like every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The posters usually have catchy slogans. Today he finds the inspired:

“Any % Splice = 0 % Human”

“Splice wires not people”

And the ever-present,

“Auia city is for Humans!”

“Send Splices back to Mexico!”

The last poster ignores the fact that South Texas only left Mexico and joined the Union a bit more than three years ago. Before then, Doc was here for two years. This has been his home for the past five years. Xu put it best. “You don't abandon your home just because a few pests moved in.”

Doc, of course, pulls down the posters, as he does every time. This time, before he can insert them into the disposal unit, a young man stops him.

“What in THE hell do you think you're doin'?”

“Tossing out the trash. Why? Did you put this up?”

“Of course I did. My father said we need to make folks aware of the threat to human kind. Are you one of them Splice-lovers?”

“I suppose I am, seein' as how I am one. You KNOW this type of stuff is illegal, right? You will serve time in the country facility. All I have to do is report you to the police.”

“And what do you think’ll happen? Nuthin’. That’s what. They don’t give a care about your kind.”

“They may not care. They just have to make certain the INTERPOL inspectors don’t have reason to question their response to a human’s complaint.”

“You’re not human. You said so yourself. You’re a Splice!” His reddening face scrunched as he said the last word with added force.

“INTERPOL classifies all of us as humans. We just came into this world differently ~ hence the term Non-Birthed Human.”

“I don’t care what INTERPOL says. You’re not a REAL human. Besides, what INTERPOL says won’t matter much longer. From what I hear, things are going to change pretty damn soon.”

Doc has been hearing similar rumblings from different sources. It’s only a few governments who are openly working to get its citizens behind a plan to pull away from INTERPOL control. But even this minority of voices cannot hope to usurp INTERPOL’s global system of basic laws.

Doc unrolls his Flexi and takes a picture of the young man.

“There. Now I have a face to go along with my complaint. Once you are identified, your father will be targeted for printing this rhetoric, but he’ll only be fined. Of course, if you stop putting up these things anywhere in the city, this information will stay with me.”

The young man stands in front of Doc, eyes squinting, fingers curled into a fist and nostrils flared. He reaches into his satchel, removes the rest of the posters, pushes them into the disposal unit and hops off the trolley as it is about to move.

“First Humans First!”

The battle cry of the last bigots. Doc knows the young man didn't strike him because of the one or two witnesses sitting near the entrance to the trolley. Of course, Doc didn't strike him for the same reason.

Doc sits on the upper deck of the trolley because of the tinted windowed roof. He can sit back and watch the data dirigibles that hover overhead. Their copper-coloured exo-skeleton, which protects them from stray electrical discharges, give the floating behemoths an elegant appearance glinting against the early fiery-streaked, blue-grey sky.

Doc is glad Auia city is small. The tallest building is only three stories high. But the 60-foot clock tower, which is coloured differently on its four sides, functions like a compass. As a quick reference, anyone can look up and see which of the four quadrants they are in. And because all the lights are directed downward, anyone on the roof of any building can see the morning and evening twilights and the stars at night. The people in the larger cities don't have it this easy.

Most days when he is able to come to the Market Square, Doc likes to chat with Mr. Marquez at his papaya stand. He has been trying to teach Doc Spanish ever since they have known each other. And Mr. Marquez knows Doc well enough to know he is not learning much because Doc still sometimes call the local corn, *maze* instead of *my ease*, as Mr. Marquez taught him.

Mr. Marquez does not believe Doc is a Chimera. Other vendors have told him they have seen Doc with other Chimera, but Mr. Marquez tries to defend Doc's honor. He tells Doc jokes about Chimera Marker Veins being a good indicator of our sexual prowess. But Doc only laughs. Even when he tells Doc the only reason Chimera don't smoke tobacco or marijuana is because coffee and tea isn't rolled into a cigarillo, Doc chuckles.

Doc is not ashamed of who he is. He just does not want to start, or attract, any trouble. That's why some Chimera kind cover up what they can. Mr. Marquez does not agree with how INTERPOL has created laws that apply to every country.

"Those religious groups were right to try and force the countries to limit the rights of those," Mr. Marquez' face pinches as if he had just bitten into a lemon, then he waves his hands in a circle, "...people."

"But that's why INTERPOL stepped in. Because it knew that all that bigotry would lead to violence and unrest." I soften my voice and put a hand on his shoulder, a technique to calm anxious patients I learned from Xu. "Requiring nations to provide avenues to full citizenship for Non-Birthed Humans was the right thing to do to keep the peace."

"That may be, kiddo, but the Union is being smart in how it complies with that law. INTERPOL never specified what criteria to use to let those people become full citizens."

"Not that long ago, before the death of Ireland's president, John F. Kennedy, he spoke about all of this." Doc closes his eyes to remember everything as he saw in the News Data stream recording. *"The tragic nature of humanity was avoided when INTERPOL stepped in to save the Chimera and Clones. They are extensions of ourselves. To cause them harm or to treat them as less than human degrades us all as a species."*

"I remember that speech. He was a wise leader. But that doesn't mean I'm agreeing."

"Of course not. But we can agree that your papayas are looking *delicioso*."

Doc buys the papayas, says good-bye and moves on. Doc can feel Mr. Marquez is softening his stance. Maybe one day Doc can walk to the market with an open shirt, as the fashion of this humid state dictates, and show him who he really is. Doc is luckier than most of his kind in that the Marker Veins are lighter and hidden under his shirt. The downside of this is

that his Marker Veins are larger than most. They cover the whole of his chest and look like the wings of a bird. Chimera have to be careful not to be exposed to too much sunlight or else the Marker Veins darken or lighten for a few days, depending on the tint of the Chimera's skin.

Xu tells Doc that Mr. Marquez is from an older generation who adapt more slowly. It's possible he thinks Doc is just one of those eccentric people from Europe who refuse to learn a new language. But even they, for the most part, accept Chimera, as long as they contribute to society, "what's the harm?"

But so few Europeans come here, now that South Texas is part of the Union, mainly because of the bigotry. The American Union wanted this little state in their union because they would, by law, force companies to keep its technology and production facilities in the state.

The trolley finally stops at Market Square – the town square transformed twice a week into a cornucopia of local produce. Like an artist's palate, the foods are arranged to fade in and out from one colour to another. The green avocados that make up one block eventually give way to a new cantaloupe which leads to yellow squash and golden apples.

But what draws people like Doc are the smells and flavours of the produce. Chimera perceptions of the world around them are different than the average person. Doctors call it synesthesia ~ a crossing of the senses. This sensory anomaly helps Chimera choose the best foods based on their perceptions of texture and colour. If Chimera enjoy the taste of its colour, or the sound of its odor, then they use it in their meals. When two or more of these colours are put together, Doc is serenated by the food and knows the combination will work.

People from surrounding counties come to sell and/or buy some of the best natural foods. A portion of food grown here, both in soil and through hydroponic farms, is shipped to the other

states in the Union. Their usual food, which come from factories, isn't recognizable as food to the rest of the world.

Like most Fridays, Doc meet up with Jocelyn Lakeshore at the market. Her latest venture is a mobile food service that caters to Chimera. The food is held in an edible container. The new government overseers tried to shut her down citing the containers were inedible to humans. But the International Legal Services stopped the government by reminding them "no one is being forced to eat what they do not want to, nor cannot, eat".

"That's a lovely frock. It accentuates your body, very well."

Jocelyn is almost as tall as Doc, but she carries herself as straight as possible. Because of her large, pert breasts, no one can see the Marker Veins on the underside of her breasts. When she and Doc have coupled in the past, they both had fun. She has been alive longer than Doc and have taught him the pleasures of coupling with a Chimera. Her warm personality and tender coupling methods remind Doc of his experience with Xu.

"Thank you. You always say the nicest things. Your shirt seems to be sticking to your body. Did you forget your gel?"

"I did. Can you see the Marker Veins through my shirt?"

Jocelyn pushes Doc's shirt against his chest.

"Just a bit. But I'm sure no one else can see them. Some other Chimera I've seen, who have Marker Veins on their backs and chest, paint their shirts to match their personal design. Maybe you should do the same. If you did, you wouldn't have to worry about" she winks and smiles as she touches my chest one last time with an open hand and lets it linger a moment, "see-through incidents, again. Well, enough of that. Shall we shop?"

"Let's. My list is minimal, so I can help you carry your supplies."

They walk and converse about her new recipe. Jocelyn becomes excited when it comes to food. Her eyes widen and her hands dance as she explains what she made and its taste. Jocelyn wants everyone to taste it, tonight, at the coffeehouse and give her feedback on the addition of goat's milk. No one drinks milk beyond infancy, anymore, because of its negative effects on the digestive system for most humans.

“You won't be drinking the milk, silly. It will be one of the ingredients for my new treat. You are coming tonight?”

“Of course.”

The clouds have thickened since Doc arrived at the Market Square and a light rain begins to fall. Luckily, food is waterproof. He wasn't expecting this weather, so Doc gets soaked helping Jocelyn to her vehicle. Since she is going the opposite direction, and Doc is already wet, he declines her offer for a ride and make his way back to the trolley stop.

Doc takes a hot shower to get ready for the next part of the day. Xu grows several plants she collected from the rain forest in the bath room and the steam gathers nicely, simulating their home environment. The large bathing room has a tin shower stall, usually seen in communal, outdoor settings, and benches in the shower area as well as the outer wall. The stall is large enough for several people. The concept of bonding in a relaxing bath borrowed, from the Romans, Greek and Nipponese, among others, no doubt. Xu and Doc have had guests stay for a few days and the shower was simply another place to sit and talk without barriers.

Doc makes himself a small snack to take to the appointment. Twice a month, Doc waits in a line for almost two hours to get into the building full of psychiatrists. There are two armed guards at every exit on every floor. At the end of the second line, which could run anywhere from two to four hours, Chimera get wrist buzzers that whistle, light up, vibrate and buzz when

it's their turn. This means they can take a nap, listen to music or watch vids and not miss their turn — unless they take the thing off – then, they have to get a new one after being bumped to the end of the list. Once the buzzer goes off, Doc is escorted to my mandatory session.

Doc is fortunate that his appointments have been cut down from every week (these are for new applicants) to twice a month, and almost always on Wednesday. Since today is Friday, Doc hopes he does not fall asleep when the group are all gathered at Jocelyn's.

The organization in charge of these psychoanalysis exploratory sessions believes that Chimera respond better to structure. That is why they attempt to keep the sessions on the same day every month.

Some of Doc's friends are new applicants for citizenship. These unfortunates are too exhausted from their weekly week's-end sessions that they haven't been able to meet up for months. Doc is trying to make time to meet his friends at different times. Isolation from fun and social engagements are devastating to the younger of the newcomers. Again, Doc is fortunate that the early days of this process was chaotic, so the weekly sessions only lasted two months. In those days Doc's friends were mostly birthed humans, so they had time to spend with him.

He sits on the window bench of the psychiatrists' second floor office for his last session of the month. This one is named Kathleen Nelson. The short, but stout, Doctor Nelson wears her nearly silver hair in a bun which stretches her face just enough to make her small, pointy nose stand out.

“There are times when I look in the mirror and see more than my face.”

She stops writing for a moment.

“What do you mean?”

“If I stare in the mirror, just above my eyes, my face changes ~ I see very different people.” Doc turns his head, slightly so his skin touches the cool glass as he looks out onto a single, proud mesquite ~ its wide, leafy head providing shade for a few of the market folks in the old town square. Doc watches the slow-moving dirigibles make small circles in the sky above the city. He sometimes feels like that tree. Things — memories — get stuck up top and it’s hard to shake it loose. Sometimes, these sessions help Doc clarify, to himself, what’s going on with himself. “I see men and women, young and old, even some with alien features; they flash from one to the next.”

She writes again as I speak.

“And how does that make you feel?”

“Scared.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t know if any one of those faces, or all of them, are actually a part of what makes me, me. If I don’t know who or what I am, I won’t be allowed to be a full citizen because your government doesn’t trust what it doesn’t understand.”

She stops writing, again, and puts her pad and pen down on the end table.

“But you have to remember, what happened in Dresden should never happen anywhere else.”

“You’re right. One Chimera who hears a voice telling her to kill should never have happened. But she was created by the Zoller Corporation to be a replacement for INTERPOL agents who were trained to fight. She was programmed to fight. Something went wrong and she killed.”

“Thirteen people. She killed thirteen people after one person insulted her Marker Veins. Witnesses recorded everything, including her Marker Veins shifting from her neck to her face.”

“And that’s why you try to make us angry during these sessions. You want to know, at what point our anger turns to murderous rage.”

“Of course not. We simply need to understand the meaning of your Marker Veins on your chest so we can figure out where you come from and, by extension, the purpose for your being.”

“Why do you use those (I point to her pen and pad) instead of a flexi to take notes?”

“I don’t want to be too dependent on technology to remember for me.” (She smiles.)

“Writing provides me a link to my past ~ to my childhood.”

“Writing on a flexi uses the same muscles as writing with pen on paper.”

“But the feel of writing on paper is different than writing on a smooth plastic screen.”

“And that is my situation; your government prefers its citizens one way, but is being told to include... others. We are the same...”

“But not quite equal. At least, not until you we can be sure you are...”

“Acceptable.” Doc grits his teeth. “Agreeable. Not a threat in disguise.”

“How do you feel, now?” She continues to look for those clues of deception. Finding none, she questions further. “I only ask because you seem angry.”

The rest of session goes on like that. She says something to illicit a response. Doc tries to control himself. When time is up, she agrees to allow Doc to go home. Napping is difficult after a session. They always bring up doubt about Doc’s purpose for being. He believes he was created to heal. But these sessions seem to be geared towards forcing Doc, and the other Chimera, to question what they believe their purpose truly is. Doc chews on some ginger while listening to music. The combination helps him sleep.

Jocelyn's place is set up in an old railway station near the new business center of town, with stone and brick walls covered in plaster. When the Industrialization of Nations occurred, old companies were merged, bought out or simply died off. The Jacob Company (JaCo) took over the public transportation industry in most of the Americas. Modern speed rail transportation has made these old stations obsolete.

This station was small, even in its time, but Jocelyn added a couple of luxury railcars to the sides of the building. She had part of the walls of the building and one side of each car removed to make them part of the coffeehouse. The dark wood of the cars match the high-back bench seats in the main building. The plan works in giving the place a little extra last century feel. The reviews of her place says the place "smells like a coffee roasting paradise with a hint of earth from the stonework. The aroma of coffee, tea and earth is a prelude to the wondrous flavours that perform an acrobatic dance from tongue to the top palate of an undeserving mouth."

Most days, the average person can be found sipping their beverage while working on a novel, thesis or dissertation, and maybe even having a small get-together. Some say the coffee gives them energy while others claim it is calming. The Chimera have a different experience since they have their senses crossed.

Most evenings, a large number of Jocelyn's clientele are Chimera. Some get high on the grounds of different coffees blended together, and others get high off of the teas mixed from different sources. Sometimes, they blend coffees and teas. Another draw is Jocelyn's tasty treat experiments.

"The blueberry coffee makes me feel like summer rain," Jenna once said. Some of us agreed. Peter said, "I feel like sunshine when I drink it."

Today, Jocelyn introduces a newcomer to town, Elsbeth Wintermoon, to this little group. The long blonde hair frames the light brown skin, round face and deep brown eyes. Doc is instantly attracted to her because she reminds him of Xu. Both are nearly five foot five and slim with a full bust. But Xu appears much older with only a few white hairs, both on her head and her nostrils.

“Wintermoon. That’s a very nice surname – very fortunate.”

“Yes,” she smiles, then bites her lips as she eyes me up and down. “I’ve heard some pretty...interesting names.”

It looked as though she was about to say something, but was interrupted.

“Like mine. I’m David Salvage. Used to be David Dumpster. My registration clerk was such a noodle head. I suppose he figured that, because of the Marker Veins on my forehead, (rubs his fingers across them with a swirling motion) I shouldn’t have any issue with the name he gave me. I was finally allowed to change my surname to Salvage after petitioning the circuit judge.”

“I mean no offense, but why did you choose to go from Dumpster to Salvage? It seems like a lateral name change.”

“I work for the sanitation department. I love it because I get to keep what I find.”

Elsbeth’s eyebrows push together and she tilts her head to one side, as if trying to puzzle out what David means by this. Doc explains.

“He’s an artist. There is a small movement in the art world ~ an offshoot of metallurgical sculpting that uses discarded objects to create new sculptures.”

“I turn trash into treasures. Maybe you can visit my little studio sometime.”

“I’d like that.”

After a beat, Doc draws the conversation back to our purpose...explaining everything they can, about themselves and Jocelyn's place, to the newcomer.

“We are doing what humans did long ago when they did not have Flexies or writings on paper to communicate to a later time. We share our stories of ourselves and our history with those younger and without history. But we have a different reason to talk about ourselves. We are hoping that it might ring a bell with someone else.”

“That's what Jocelyn said happens here. It's because of these stories that Jocelyn started the memory bank. Our kind come in and record their first memory and their marker vein info. Everything is categorized in different ways. If you find someone with a matching story or markers, then Jocelyn makes the connection.”

Doc looks at his recordings once in a while as a reminder of how far he has come as a person. Wherever he was created, whoever made him, made sure he could not report anything about them to INTERPOL. Doc has no clue about himself, the world or his place in the world. One of the original recorded interview Xu made of Doc shows how he started off his life.

Hello. I am told my name is Jack. I do not know what else to say.

Tell us where you were found.

I was found...

Look into the lens when you speak. This thing, here.

Oh. Okay. I was found outside of Auia city.

How long ago was that?

Hmm. I do not know.

It was five days ago.

Five days? That is five, 24-hour periods. One 24-hour period is made up of...

That's all right Jack. You don't have to explain that. But, could you tell us what you remember before those five days?

Before five days? Umm. There was nothing. Nothing was me. I, I, was nothing.

Okay, Jack. We can stop now.

Doc still records himself whenever he feels the need. Xu says it can be helpful to express himself, whether to a machine or a person. He can release whatever stressful feelings he is having just by talking.

“The governments, including Mexico, have a similar recording program, but their connection results are classified. They only tell us they want to find the criminals to bring to justice. So far, only a few low-profile company executives have been arrested. No one knows what or whether they were ever punished.”

“I was found in Canada by a group of Hindu missionaries while they were on their way into town. In case you're wondering, my Marker Veins are in different places, but mostly my scalp.”

While Elsbeth blushes, the rest take turns introducing themselves and what they do.

“Peter Townhall. I'm a musician and a music teacher for the one school in town that still allows Chimera near its students. I have Marker Veins on the back of my hands that look like little creatures crawling about as I play most instruments. I actually made it to the town hall in Reynosa before anyone found me. Nobody saw me in the streets. According to the mayor, at the time, I just appeared.”

“Jenna Bridge. I work as an image and data analyst for an international corporation that operates many of the probes that speckle our solar system. I am the first to see new images from the probes.” Jenna is short, like Elsbeth, but light-skinned, has long auburn hair and small,

droopy breasts. “You can’t see my Marker Veins so easily because they are on the back part of my scalp. But I hear they are quite beautiful ~ like little butterflies. I was found under a bridge by a sturdy family of adventurers who carried me to hospital.”

“I’m Jack. My Marker Veins are on my chest and look like the wings of a bird.”

What Peter and the rest do not know is that Jack, Doc, is very different from them. He looks at his personal vids every week, before he meets his friends, to remind himself why he needs to keep from becoming too intimate with them. These vids are of Doc ~ his past.

At home, Doc sits facing the corner windows of his room to watch his journal vids. He finds that seeing the colours of the city and the lightness, even on dreary days, helps him keeps himself tethered in the present.

Doc sees his room in the first vid, this same room, stark, without colour. His walls are bare. He knew nothing more than the simplest of understanding of the world. He was warm, fed and had a place to sleep. That was the extent of the first months-worth of entries. As Xu taught him the healing arts, Doc grew to understand to colours of life, and so, his room reflected that.

The room decorations have changed, but his face does not. But Xu says everything is in the eyes. Doc looks into his eyes in the vid and see the enthusiasm one sees in children. And that is what Chimera are, when they are found. Xu says it’s good to know as much about one’s past as possible. For Doc, that past starts with these vids.

Hello. It has been more than a year since I was born/created, whatever, into this world. I know that sounds dramatic. Why not go for the drama. I’m really excited about this ability I have! I can get into people’s minds and make them want to do whatever I want them to do. I can search for and see memories like looking for

data on a Flexi. But it only works on Chimera. I get into someone's mind by touching their Marker Veins. The first time I did it, it was an accident. As far as I know, I'm the only one who can do this.

I tried it on a few other people. It seemed to work well enough. All I had to do is bring out some long-forgotten sexual memory to heighten their experience with me. For some time, it was great. Apparently, my sexual prowess became the topic of gossip. I was often asked to couple with Chimera and born-human women, alike. Though I could not have the same effect on born-humans, my experience and glimpses into the sexual lives of others, helped me enough to satisfy every woman I've been with. This is the greatest part of being me! Got to run. I have another coupling, soon.

It is so very strange every time Doc watches himself. The recorded Doc was so pleased ~ so oblivious.

It's not been too long since I found out what I can do. I... I ... I had to stop. I was wrong to think this was a good thing.

I was having sex with a Chimera named Charlotte when she touched the Marker Veins on my chest with her hands – her Marker Veins started midway up her arm, as an arch, and ran down her arm like wet paint on glass, ending at the palms of her hands.

In that instant, I was able to see backwards, in succession, every sexual experience. At one point, I did see she was raped by a police officer in a different

city. I wanted to see what she did after, and I was taken to the point when Charlotte reported the attack to the officer's superiors and he was arrested. Her anger, vulnerability, sorrow and anguish forced me out of her mind. What seemed like ten minutes was only a fraction of a second. When I came back to reality, Charlotte began to cry. We stopped having sex and I spoke with her.

“What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know. All of a sudden, I was reliving something horrible that happened to me not long after I was found. I was raped by a police officer. He threatened to hurt me more if I told. Then, he showed me the camera he was using to record his raping me. He said he would upload this to the data node for everyone to see, if anything happens to him.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Why? You didn’t rape me. I turned him in and the police were able to stop the upload and used it as evidence. They found other recordings like mine in his computer system.”

I wanted to confess that I had violated her mind, like that officer violated her body, but I was afraid – I still am. I don’t know what to do.

I didn’t want to have sex for several weeks. Every time I began to couple, my mind went back to Charlotte. I knew I had to confess to Xu. Of course, she was very angry.

“I don’t hate you, but I do hate what you have done. If the situation were any different, I would have you go to every Chimera woman and tell them what you did. But I now know why those people were looking for you – it was this ability.”

“I’m sorry. But what do I do? I don’t want to keep feeling this way.”

“There’s nothing I can do. And I don’t think we can go anywhere to find more answers without causing suspicion. I’m sorry, but you’re just going to have to live with this.”

I vowed to Xu and myself, that I will not use my mind control ability, again. I wanted to use it on myself to make myself forget, but Xu said it might be too dangerous. This will be my last recording for a time. I want to focus on more important parts of my life.

“You only have one name?”

“What?”

“I asked why you only have one name.”

“Oh. INTERPOL Identification Conditional Clause for Chimera and Clones. It allows the native peoples in any nation the right to adopt anyone, NBH or not, and name him or her in the customs of their people.”

“And what do you do, Jack?”

“He lives and works at Healer Xu’s llerberia and clinic.”

“Soorry, I’ve been living in Canada. What’s a llerberia?”

“It’s a store that sells herbal and other natural products for personal healthcare. He’s so good at diagnosing and healing that everyone just calls him Doc.”

“Oh? Which do you prefer to be called? Jack or Doc?”

“I’m okay with either. Seems like more people call me Doc than Jack. Thanks, Peter. My biography always sounds better coming from someone else. I’m just an apprentice, but Xu is an excellent teacher.”

Jenna interjects.

“Do you have an appointment set up, yet?”

“No. I was told there is a four-week waiting period before I can get an appointment. They said it was time for me to try out the country and see if this is really what I want to do.”

“They used to be more honest. They want to run a background check on you and see if there is anything they can do to stop you from applying. Barring that, they will look for anything they can use against you during your psychoanalysis exploratory sessions.”

Once the introductions are over, they go around the table for the usual quick updates.

“So, how was your appointment?”

“Fine. You?”

“Eh.”

“Anyone get deported?”

“Not this time.”

“Guess they all wanted out early for the weekend, so they didn’t press all the right buttons.”

“You still telling them you can’t remember anything?”

“It’s true... for the most part. I think I should be able to find my maker myself.”

“So who actually heard the recording played on the radio?”

“I was up late and heard this source say that they had proof there is a shadow government controlling what INTERPOL is doing.”

“Jenna. You can’t seriously believe…”

“Of course I do. You can’t deny INTERPOL has been acting a bit wonky since the Dresden incident.”

“Of course they are. They have to be careful with everything now. Whoever it was who authorized that first batch of clones/chimera without psychological tests should have been fired. But now, everything they do is under scrutiny. They can’t be making any more Chimera. It has to be some other corporations.”

“Come on, Elsbeth. You can’t say you’ve never heard any conspiracies. What about the U.A.S. wanting to send all those who failed the citizenship process, back to their *country of origin*. If that happens to us, that means they can deport us. This is our home before they took it over.”

“Don’t worry about that. Wherever we go we can’t escape the corporations. You know they’re the ones who have been taking our music and getting regular humans to cover our music.”

“I heard the Europeans and Asians are even copying our Marker Veins with some sort of adhesive copy. A program prints out the design—you can get arm, leg, chest, back and even face Marker Veins.”

“Really? Some of us are trying to hide them. Who would want them?”

“Youth, from what I hear. Those who know about the government trying to push us out and the corporations pushing out small and independent companies. They want to confuse whoever might be keeping track of us or trying to kick us out of our own homes. I’m thankful for what they are doing. I just wish it would spread here.”

“Well, personally, I think the corporations might have spies, probably wearing those false Marker Veins, infiltrate small groups like yours.”

“But why would they want to? Even if the rumors are true about one or all of the original clone-making corporations being responsible for the sudden bloom of clones and our kind, what would be the point?”

“They’re scientists.” Elsbeth lowers her voice and moves her head closer to the center of the table. The rest all move in as well. “Maybe they want to keep an eye on how their *experiments* are getting along in the *real* world.”

Doc is not the only one at the table with an open mouth after realizing Elsbeth might be right. Elsbeth then chortles as she hits the table with her hand. She is silent, but her mouth is still open as her body spasms in an invisible laughter.

“Seriously?” Elsbeth finally speaks after she wheezes for air. “It sounds like this station of yours is spouting lots of crazy theories.” Elsbeth coughs a bit. “And you say that most Chimera listen to the Chimera radio station?”

“The Chimera radio station is unfiltered and unrivaled in the amount of information that is disseminated. What information it gets comes from sources close to what is happening.”

“I don’t get it. They can’t be local, can they?”

“The station is able to operate from almost anywhere because no one uses these radio frequencies since all communications use a digital signal. From what my friend says, all that would be needed are repeating towers for the signal to carry farther.”

“And, the information broadcast can only be heard by us. Since some of us were created to hear at a range higher, while others at lower, than normal human hearing, the Chimera Radio station plays on two frequencies. Music is broadcast at a normal level on both frequencies.”

“Speaking of music, you should come by tomorrow evening.”

“Oh. Why?”

“Because, it’s Saturday night. And Saturday night is meant for friends to get together, dance and drink. We start here at the coffeehouse and by nightfall, we are buzzed enough for dancing at The Genome Club down the street. It’s the only dance club owned and operated by one of us.”

“Besides ownership, what else is there that’s interesting about this place?”

“It is a two-story, box of a building. Anyone with a vehicle usually parks at one of the nearby parking lots that are shared. Those who don’t park, drive around the club with their own music playing. Some vehicles have intricate light and paint designs.

“Inside is great, too. The club has an incredibly large dance floor that can handle about fifty people at once. When the fancy strikes the music master, a large volume of soap will be pumped onto the dance floor. It was something that started in a club in Peru a few years ago. Now, it’s just a novelty. And I’ll be there.”

“I’m sold. I’ll see you tomorrow, then.”

Doc spends part of the late night working on fixing or building radios for my Chimera friends. He has several finished and plan to leave them with Jocelyn to hand out. Out of the extra parts and even odd pieces of electronics and old technology, Doc attempts to re-purpose into something useful. Doc has built a machine that can work like a Flexi in communicating, but only through voice. He also built a transmitter to forcefully insert information wirelessly to non-wireless systems, such as the security posts.

As much as Doc enjoys his days, his nights are incredible. He dreams. Most of the other Chimera Doc has asked say they never dream. There are a very rare group among the Chimera,

at least in this city, who dream. Some dreams are incredible while others are frightening. Whatever his dreams mean, Doc finds himself craving it every night.

The frightening dreams are of Xu leaving him. Some of the incredible dreams involve Doc transforming into something else. Doc can tell that his sleeping self is smiling while he was dreaming because his face hurts when he wakes. It is the same muscles that hurt when he was practicing smiling for the psychoanalysts. He has been animals and birds and even other people. But the incredible part is when he transforms into a woman. In these dreams, Doc looks into any mirror. He sees his male self, then, is transformed into a young woman.

Xu says it is simply a dream of something he finds attractive ~ something he desires. Doc has this dream tonight. He thinks he is just anticipating being inside of a woman, if he gets the chance to couple tomorrow night.

Doc is glad that Saturday night was not a disappointment. Elsbeth met everyone at Jocelyn's. Since week end gatherings like these tend to terminate with two or more people getting together to couple, they wear as little as possible. The warm nights also determines how little one wears.

This night is extremely humid, so hardly anyone wears a shirt that is not mesh. The mesh shirts that most of Chimera wear only have a front and back side which are held together at the shoulder and wide collar. Instead of dungarees or short pants, men and women often wear short sarongs, kilts or just loin cloths called Pocketed Mantles which are strips of cloth that hang off of a belt, front and back. Length of the Mantle vary depending on the activity. The open sides of the shirt and Mantle allow for cool breezes, ease of voiding bladder and bowels and easy access to bare skin to entice one into coupling. Of course, not much enticing is needed.

It turns out that Elsbeth, Jocelyn, David and Doc are wearing the Mantle. David and Doc wear a long, wide Mantle. Doc hopes to find someone, also wearing a Mantle so he can couple with. Mantles make it easier to see Marker Veins. Elsbeth is wearing a narrow, but short, pink Mantle which suits her quite nicely. Since Doc can see her exposed Marker Veins on the small of her back, she and Doc might have a chance to couple. Doc already knew where Jocelyn's Marker Veins were. And in her long, narrow, low-slung Mantle, which barely covers her trimmed pubic mound, everyone else can see where they are.

They started with light coffee and moved on to the darker blend of Earl Grey tea and Excelsa coffee bean roast. Doc thinks the combination was too much for Elsbeth who was laughing a little louder than the rest of us. She became playful, both in language and in body.

“I don't see why the born humans are so often looking for one permanent partner for the rest of their lives. It doesn't seem possible to only be compatible with just one person,” she strokes Jenna's hair with one hand and David's with the other. “I mean, I feel very compatible with the two of you. Do you feel the same?”

“Absolutely,” Jenna and David say in unison.

Both Jenna and Peter are wearing the short sarong. Jenna looks like a Pixie with her hair in long braids and silk flowers intertwined. Doc has always been interested in Jenna to couple with. But when he found out from Peter that she has a small marker vein on the inside of her pubic lip, he knew he could not risk the contact.

“Of course, there's always room for more,” she says while looking at Peter, Jocelyn and me.

Immediately, the possibilities of a group coupling suddenly leaves Doc weak-minded, but he will has to stay strong. Doc can easily see himself accidentally making contact with

someone's Marker Veins in this situation, again. He has to maintain control, but the chance to couple with my good friends is very strong.

"I would love to join you, but sadly, I cannot. I'm in the middle of a short exercise to help me with my studies. Coupling tends to...make me lose focus."

"I'm in," Peter jumps in. "I'm happy to show you what my Marker Veins look like when they are at work."

"It's been a while since I've coupled in a group. I'm definitely in. But first, we dance. The drinks and music are an intense combination. Let's go."

The walk over to the Genome Club was long. Doc walked behind the others, so he could see who was groping who and the reactions. When Doc touched Elsbeth's bottom, she said, "I thought you couldn't."

"I said I couldn't couple. I can very much help with the administering of pleasure."

"Then, by all means, continue."

At the club, they immediately danced. If they do not dance as they come in, then they will be escorted out of the club. To get back in becomes a process in and of itself. Once a formal petition to re-enter has been filed, an audition number is given. Petitioners have to wait their turn to dance for the judges in front of the club. Some people do this just to have an audience ~ Chimera are not shy when it comes to the arts or their jobs. This, together with the widely-held belief that most of Chimera are physically appealing to most everyone (the jobs you are likely to find them doing, if not throughout their lives, then when they are first starting out) are prostitute, model or dancer.

If they want to just sit and drink, there is a back side to the bar that allows visitors to drink and enjoy the music, but keeps us separate from the club-goers. Most of the people you see

at the non-dancing bar side are a healthy mix of birthed humans and Chimera. Sometimes the mix is too much for ex-boyfriends and jealous lovers who are unwilling to share. Doc has spent enough time on both sides of the bar to know who is out to have fun and who might be bringing trouble.

People in groups of two's or more, who are synchronized in various emotional states, tend to have an effect on the rest of the dancers. Those who started off aggressive move into a state of bliss or vice versa. Our group brought the sexually-aggressive vibration to the mix.

Elsbeth, though not slight or tall, starts off with lithe movements that accentuate her curvaceous body. Jenna follows suit – her long hair exaggerating the movements of her head. Peter and I bookended Jocelyn while she began with her cursory gyrations which slowly melded into a slower rhythmic grind that more closely matched Elsbeth and Jenna. David, in the meantime, was sandwiched between Jenna and Elsbeth. Their hands were all over his chest and back.

Elsbeth leans in close to David and kisses him, then reaches over his shoulder to pull Jenna in to kiss her, too. Peter, Jocelyn and Doc are watching as they continue to draw in the sexual energy our friends are generating. In the meantime, Doc had to be mindful not to touch the Marker Veins on Peter's hands while we caressed Jocelyn's body. Eventually Doc saw that Jocelyn's eyes are closed while she continues to dance. Doc knew she was ready for more physical contact, so he nudged her and Peter into the trio to move the group's coupling along. Doc is against Elsbeth's back, his pelvis is grinding against her round bottom. Doc slid his hands down her back, then slowly slid them up the exposed sides of her torso, his fingers caress the sides of her breasts. She actively pushes back against his groin, twisting her upper body to reach everyone in the group so she can kiss and grope them.

Unfortunately for Doc, because it is so difficult to make certain to avoid contact with anyone else's Marker Veins, this is the point that he has to leave. At the same time that he walked away, the bouncers had noticed our group's activities and escorted them to one of three play rooms Doc used to frequent in his free-loving days. The rooms have wall-sized windows that allow anyone standing nearby to watch what is going on inside. A large, semi-circular sofa is positioned in front of the window, to allow others to be inspired.

Doc walked home, alone. He was so wrapped up with his thoughts of what Elsbeth must be like while coupling, that he did not notice the three men following him. They said nothing. The first thing Doc felt was a sharp pain to his skull. Stunned by the suddenness of the pain, he was unaware that it was caused by anything external. When, Doc heard, "get him", he realized he was under attack.

In that moment, he forgot the training he received from Xu and her friends on how to defend against attacks. Doc believed there was a club involved because of the crack he felt in my forearm as he tried to block the blows. Thankfully, the attack was not drawn out. Police arrived moments after his attackers abandoned the club and the kicks began. The three men were arrested and booked for assault, right there in front of Doc. The officer/medic tended the small cut to his scalp. She seemed very concerned, until she lifted Doc's shirt and saw his Marker Veins.

"Oh. You're a..."

"Chimera. Yes. Don't worry. I can tend the rest of my wounds. I know you might have to deal with differing attitudes from the other officers if they know you helped a Chimera. I work with a healer. Just take my statement and say you didn't notice anything."

"I have to give you a pain patch or else my partner will suspect something is wrong."

She reaches into her small medical sling bag and removes the almost inch-long analgesic patch. The patch is applied to an injured area on the body and delivers its medicine through the skin. The officer holds out her Flexi for Doc to place a hand on. The computer records his handprint and his quick testimony.

As she is getting into her unit with her partner, Doc heard the ending of one of the men's outbursts. "But he's just a Splice." To which the officer explained, "I didn't see any evidence of that, but if he is, you just violated INTERPOL law. That's a worse offence."

When Doc gets home, he explained to Xu what happened. She was upset that he let the attack go on for as long as it did.

"Does it hurt, much?"

"Not much, but I still feel it. I think it might be broken."

"So, what did the police do for you?"

"A trans-dermal patch on my arm." The police officer is only obligated to hand out the patch. If I require medical assistance, then a mobile medical unit would have to take me to a hospital and the whole situation becomes public record. The fact that I work with Xu and what I am, along with my image, is sent out on the News Data stream to every Flexi in the country. It's not so bad." Doc rubs his forearm.

"Come. Let's get you an Aspirin."

The pain-relieving, trans-patch is not as powerful as the Aspirin Xu keeps in the home medical cabinet upstairs. Xu continues the discussion as we ascend, but he moves his legs slowly because of the pain. He had not felt it until he started upstairs.

"Besides your training, Chimera are stronger than an average person."

"Yes, but you know I'm not so normal for a Chimera."

“And I’m grateful for that, but you protecting yourself should have been easy.”

She retrieves the Aspirin from behind the other popular compound medicines created overseas. Doc gets one pill. He knows that should be enough for the night, especially with the trans-patch.

“I don’t know what happened. I guess I just... I don’t know. I guess I was distracted.”

“Distracted? By what?”

Xu fills a small cup with water and hands it to him so he can swallow the pill.

“By whom. A new Chimera who came to town. Jocelyn introduced her to the group.” Just remembering what she was wearing and the energy she was exuding is getting him excited. Doc’s pulse is quickening and he can still feel her skin. Doc swallowed the pill and drink the water, trying to stop his erection by concentrating on the pill. “We were all out tonight and, well, she really got me ~ all of us ~ excited.”

“I can see that,” Xu is staring at my crotch. “It seems she is still able to affect you. So, what was the problem?”

“They ended up in one of the rooms.”

“Really? All of them? Wow. I still can’t get used to how easily Chimera can get into an orgy. But she does sound like an *interesting* woman. Someone like that must have been hard to resist. Right?”

“Of course I didn’t go with them! I know the risk. It’s just, I haven’t felt like that in a long time. The music and the drinking ~ we were in tune with her. She brought us together.”

“I know you’ve been hurting since you’ve stopped having sex.”

That phrase is uncomfortable for Chimera because what they do, they do for enjoyment. The natural born humans do it more as a way to feel connected, to release tension and even exert

dominance or be dominated. This is why Chimera use the word Coupling. They come together to experience something that takes more than the self to enjoy.

“Maybe you should find yourself a nice birthed woman to have sex with. What about that girl who keeps coming in for your massages?”

“Tegan? You think she might be interested in a Chimera?”

“That’s why she keeps coming back and she’s not shy about being naked during your sessions with her. Tegan also told me, during one of my sessions with her, that she wanted to try out a Chimera, but was shy about coming right out and saying it.”

“I hope you explained that we are more direct when it comes to coupling.”

“I did. I also told her I would talk to you before her next session. I see this as a sign for you to get back into safe sex with a birthed human.”

“I believe you have a valid point. I will take the opportunity to couple with Tegan. But, she’s not scheduled until Wednesday. I know we talked about us not coupling, anymore, but under the circumstances, would you be willing to couple with me until then?”

“Of course. That’s why I brought it up. But I don’t want you to get hurt more than you already are.”

“Do not worry. I know that whatever happens with Tegan, my feelings will be kept in check. I also understand you are doing this to help me out. And there will not be any romantic feelings involved between us as well.”

“Actually, what I meant was, we should take it easy, physically. To make it easy on you, I’ll be on top or we could just stand.”

Xu figured out how to couple with Doc while allowing him to rest. It is difficult to not fully participate in something so pleasurable. Her subtle movements and gentle hands allowed

Doc to orgasm without much effort. Pleasure was achieved without stress or strain. She fell asleep after massaging his arms and legs. By then, the Aspirin had worked its magick on his sore body and Doc fell asleep as well.

The whole of Sunday was what Xu called “catch-up sex.” Doc did not turn her away because, he was catching up as well. They didn’t answer the door or the Flexi calls. Shower, coupling, eat and drink, more coupling before showering, again. By Monday, Xu was exhausted. Doc was barely starting to feel an emotional connection, similar to what he felt in the Genome Club with the others, while Xu and he cuddled after coupling.

They shower again in the morning. After breakfast and tea, Xu and Doc sit in the meditation garden. He can clear his mind easily for this exercise, but cannot seem to find the peace that Xu often does because of what he sees. When he clears his mind, he is bombarded with images from his entire life, including the attack. Some are of the people he already knows, but others seem like people from his dreams. Besides the mind storm, he is still a bit sore from the attack. He is feeling much better than Saturday night, and slightly better than last night. It is enough for him to excuse himself from the garden.

Doc reads for an hour or so after his shortened meditation session. The book he is working on is one Xu has in her little library, by an author named Mary Shelly. It is a strangely familiar story about a doctor trying to cheat death, so he creates a man out of parts of other men. After bringing it to life, the doctor loses control and is killed by his creation. Doc wonders if the doctors who made Chimera had read this book, then the lesson was lost.

Of all the fantastical stories he has read, real stories of how Chimera fare in other countries draws his attention the most. For instance, there are fewer Chimera, per capita, in the Kingdom of Hawai’i than any other tiny nation on the planet. What few Chimera there are in that

kingdom, are treated as equals. Strangely, those Chimera blend into some places better than others. Really, any society where tattoos are acceptable is usually more accepting of Chimera. Chimera Marker Veins and tattoos are similar in appearance. Hawai'i and New Zealand, as well as subcultures around the world, have accepted tattoo and Chimera Marker Veins as things of beauty. Before long, it is time to open the shop.

Doc and Xu get their fair share of patients looking for remedies or to be healed by the world-renown healer, Xu. And why not? Xu has earned various honors for healing, as well as teaching the healing arts, from universities and agencies around the world. This is why she started her clinic and Ilerberia. Xu was tired of traveling so much.

Xu was known as a gifted healer since she was thirteen years old. Now, at almost forty, Xu claims to be entering a new stage of life. She wants to return to her roots ~ healing in one place and teaching in that same place. The university is allowed to send two students to the clinic for training on Mondays to learn how to work with patients and diagnose them. The students also come on Wednesdays to practice hands-on therapy.

The Ilerberia sells herbs, minerals, candles, incense and other curios for a variety of issues ranging from physical ailments to spiritual maladies. The candles, scented with all sorts of ingredients, encourages the body and emotions to find a balance. These candles come from different places. Simple, small candles, are made by Xu and Doc as requested.

The berries, herbs, flowers, etc. for tinctures, teas and medicines are dried and prepared in the store. There is a greenhouse next to the old north wall of the city. During the American War between the States, part of the city was a battlefield with thick walls to defend against attack. Xu believes the explosions softened and turned the soil enough to promote good planting over the years. Only soil is used for herbal plants. Food plants are grown using hydroponics.

For minor spiritual healing, massage, acupressure and acupuncture are offered with meditation. There is also the option of different drugs to help expand the mind and allow for the discovery of blockages to whatever is happening to cause patients emotional as well as physical pain. Every day is a different offering at the store, but medication and other medical requests are fulfilled every day.

Monday is for most patients' medication requests and new patient intakes. Xu does the intake because she is the certified healer of the two. Since South Texas' inclusion into the Union, there has been an uptick in Union-birther humans. Of course, they are none too pleased to see that a Chimera is assisting the famous healer.

Tuesday classes on nutrition and meditation are offered. Though not as often, Chimera do show up for this class. When the first Chimera were created, they avoided eating and drinking. Scientists thought this was okay. But after almost a week without eating and drinking only water, the Chimera became sluggish and non-productive, doctors and healers determined that Chimera still needed proper nutrition.

Wednesday is for massage and other physical therapies. This is the day Xu and Doc force themselves to slow down. Atmosphere is key for those who come to learn to relax, so Xu and Doc try not to be in a rush. If they have an increase of clients making an appointment for one type of therapy, they bring in extra help in the form of university students. If the weather cooperates, most therapies can be conducted outside in the enclosed meditation garden. If not, displays in the store can be moved around to make room for multiple stations.

On Thursday, they teach birther humans about coupling (either with each other or with a Chimera), birth control, pregnancy and childbirth. There has never been a case of a Chimera impregnating a birther human or a pregnant Chimera. This is something Xu and Doc have to

inform mixed human couples. Null pregnancies with Chimera could be a result of too many mixed DNA strands not able to sustain the gene for reproduction. Or Chimera were simply made that way. Whatever the case, because Chimera have such sturdy bodies and they don't seem to visibly age, there may not be a need for reproduction.

Friday is open to just about anything that clients need. There is a limit on physical therapies on Friday because of time. Xu and Doc found that Friday is their busiest day. The greatest reason for their success as a place of healing, both in the store and Xu's clinic, is that preventative work is the best way to stop major illness.

Should the need arise, the city does have a hospital. But, for the most part, the people of Auia city have effective options for healthcare. With years of experience and training, Doc teaches all the classes, fulfill and administer medicines and perform most of the low-priority healings.

Almost from the beginning, Doc has been learning how to interact with patients. The most difficult times he has is when a patient speaks to him in any language other than English. When they find out that he is mono-lingual, they are really embarrassed for him. They speak slowly in English to make certain that he understands.

Most of the patients know the routine. If they have not sent their request ahead of time, they must fill out a form in the store. Xu and Doc usually fill these request just after breakfast. The more difficult-to-get items come later in the day. Those who fill out forms in person have a bit of a wait before their request is put together. They definitely have a longer wait on Wednesday. Aside from putting together patient requests, Doc sweeps the store, airing it out as needed. Though they rarely light incense or scented candles, there is an earthy odour that can become overwhelming if left unchecked.

So far, Monday has been slow at the llerberia. In the three hours that the store has been open, only five patients have shown up. Xu and Doc have prepared requested items for 40 patients. If there was an issue in picking up requested items, public communication stations are available so Xu and Doc can be notified the patient will not be coming. Some of these items have to be kept cool and dry. At the end of the day they have to either store unclaimed items, taking up valuable space, or deliver them to the patients. Given this information early, Xu and Doc feel they could have coupled a lot longer this morning.

In between handling customers, Doc goes out to the meditation garden and sits under the healing rays of the sun. Normally, he is self-conscious about his Marker Veins being too dark, but today, he does not care. He can feel himself becoming energized by the sunlight.

Doc is almost relaxed when he hears the front door's bell ring. He can see another customer from the bench. The double glass doors that lead to the garden are placed to allow Xu and Doc to mind the store without having to be in the store.

By Tuesday night, Xu and Doc have only coupled once. Doc has almost no soreness, besides what he gets from whenever he holds a position during coupling for too long. He is ready for Wednesday appointments. He hopes Xu is right about Tegan.

It is Wednesday and Tegan, massage girl, comes into the llerberia. Instead of taking her into the usual room, I escort her upstairs. Normally, we don't take anyone upstairs, but Xu said it might be better. There is a strange sound-proofing layer between the ground level store and our living space above. And with the door closed to my room, Tegan and I can be as loud as we want. It's been my experience that birthed humans tend to be louder during climax than Chimera. I, and some of my partners, mostly growl while others purr. I suppose that we have feline DNA in us among the helix strands.

In the past, Doc did not care for the cuddling that takes place after coupling with birthed humans. Xu told him that it was an important part of having sex. The afterglow interaction, though mostly non-verbal, created a bond between partners. But because Doc was only interested in the pleasure of coupling, and cuddling was not pleasurable, he would leave immediately afterward. But since his couplings have stopped, and he has been pleasuring himself, Doc craves the physical connection. He hopes he can perform nearly as well as he did with Xu and the other birthed humans.

Doc was finally able to move more freely. Stiff muscles and soreness were gone by the end of his Wednesday appointment with Tegan. They coupled again on Thursday. In bed, Tegan told Doc everything they did together was great, but she needed to go back home to her family in Boston. She thanked Doc for the experience, but felt she needed to “get back to reality”.

It has been almost a full week since the attack and Xu is still being over protective. Unfortunately, she cannot protect Doc from his emotions. After Tegan left, Doc is not wanting to couple. Doc tried to keep his emotions out of his actions, but feels a great loss from Tegan leaving. He is grateful for Xu’s intrusion into his life outside of the store. Xu wants him to have his Flexi on his person at all times when he is away from the store and insists Doc take more self-defense lessons. He finds it difficult to argue with Xu after having started coupling with her, again.

FRIDAY, 8:30 A.M.

Doc wakes at his table with the Flexi still in his hand. It vibrates and wriggles, alerting him to incoming news.

The News Data streams across the top of my Flexi as the announcer reads off the story. *13 June, 2014. Funeral arrangements are underway for Canadian Minister of Law, Teresa Connelly after she and eight other officials and staff were killed when an uncontrolled steam pressure build-up in the Toronto Public Building led to a deadly explosion. We now have more information on the events in South Texas from our reporter.*

Doc wipes the drool from his face and the grit from his eyes while listening to the news. He does not bother to shut it off, just yet. He feels the need to know what's going on so he can be better prepared for what might be coming to the state. He ties his hair in a top knot and staggers to the toilet to wash his face and relieve himself. Both acts help in waking him aome more.

Police erect barriers in San Antonio between Pro-Clone/Splice and Human-Only groups during a march on the state capital for automatic rights for all. Besides the for and against declarations on the issue of cloning by the two sides, there are allegations that opponents to Clone Rights only moved to South Texas prior to the vote for annexation in order to tip the scales in favour of this proposal. Some of the Pro-Clone Rights are not upset with the annexation, but do take exception to the "bigoted stance of the interlopers".

The opponents of Clone Rights do not deny this allegation. In fact, they claim their ancestors were part of the war that led to the destruction of the old Union. But because of the limits on immigration, they were not allowed to become citizens of the U.A.S. The vote for annexation was their only chance. No one would comment on the accusation of bigotry.

It's time to switch off the news. Doc is awake enough to know there is no real good news.

“Why can't we all just get along?”

Doc turns on his old Tesla radio receiver to an unused frequency. The sound of the hiss helps him forget the news so he can concentrate on cleaning up his room. Bits and pieces of electronics Doc is working with to get an old toy rover running again, are strewn about the work table. In one corner of the room, near the windows, flowers and parts of plants dry on wires in the sunlight. To the right of these is a shelf with potted plants and herbs. On the opposite wall is a bookcase with four shelves full of paper-bound books on various subjects.

Doc is putting the electronic bits together into small containers when he hears a repetitive transmission burst coming from the radio. Strong enough for him to hear under the hiss. It is like the broadcasts from the Chimera station, but it is on the wrong frequency. Doc drops everything and reaches for the Flexi to record the sound. At the same time, he opens another function for making notes on the time and place of the noise.

Because it is Friday, Doc needs to go downstairs and help Xu get the requested items together before opening the store for the first patients. Lately, only on Fridays, Xu has been seeing a lot of the same type of patients. They make the trip from the main states of the U.A.S. specifically to see her. They pay well, so Xu won't turn them away. But she is getting tired of having the same conversations.

Doc assists Xu whenever he can ~ especially with some U.A.S. patients, for a time. Before being told that Doc is a Chimera, they praised Xu and their little state.

“Healer Xu,” a gaunt, older woman glowing with joy at being seen by Xu, said. “I was so happy when the Union got the best of the three Texas back.”

The patients in U.A.S. are grateful their healers were allowed to train under the tutelage of great healers such as Xu. Since the inclusion to the U.A.S., patients complain to Xu that their healers still lacked knowledge and experience. This patient is no different.

“Our holistic centers in Maine aren’t as good as the rest of the world. And we suffered when Mexico wouldn’t allow us to come here for treatments.”

The patient then explains something that is weighing on her mind.

“We were warned by our travel agent to stay away from, you know, (whispers) clones and splices. Said they get flustered easily... especially when we're talking a different language from them. It's surprising they only know one language.”

There are a few old friends of Xu who know about Doc and what he is ~ really. They are okay with his being in the exam room. When Xu points out that Doc is a Chimera to the other patients, these patient tense up. Xu asks them if they want me to leave. They usually do.

In the shop, besides handing out medicines and other items for healing to the regular patients, Doc tends to issues of major and minor stomach upsets, achy bodies, colds, the flu and injuries to the outside of the body, as they come into the store.

At the end of the work day, Doc tells Xu about the signal he heard in the morning while he attaches a new antennae to his portable radio. When he is done, he dresses in his dungarees and pull-over shirt ~ the workers’ special. Doc finishes the look with his rubber-soled lace-up boots and long-coat in case there is more crazy, unpredictable weather of late.

“It's dark already. You know you have to be careful if you run into NBH-haters.”

“You know I never start fights. But the moon will be out, later. It'll almost be like noon outside. I can see trouble coming a mile away.”

“Do you have your Flexi?”

“I have my Flexi with me. Don't worry. It will probably be nothing but a kid playing with an old Tesla communicator kit or something.”

Doc gets on his bike and head down the cobblestone street towards the last direction he was able to get a strong signal... the warehouse/distribution district.

The signal only just began transmitting, again. It happens in bursts of five minutes of transmission and ten minutes quiet before beginning again.

Doc gets close to a group of warehouses with some railroad tracks running right next to them. The darkness of night is almost as black as pitch because the moon has not yet risen. The darkness across the whole of the complexes of warehouses, except for a single light above a side door nearest Doc. Two figures, wearing matching black hats and beige trench coats, appear from the shadows, nearly 20 feet in front of him.

“Excuse me. I was looking for a friend of mine. A little strange fellow with a lightning bolt scar above his right eye. Goes by the name Harry Potter.”

“Trespassers will be shot,” a mechanical voice says.

“That doesn't sound very friendly. Perhaps you two are hot in those trench coats or just hungry.”

“You have been warned,” another mechanical voice adds.

“Would you like some Jelly Bel... .”

Bullets whiz by his head and forces him to ride as quickly as he can down the tracks. his teeth clank as he is jostled by the railroad ties. He hears the heavy footfalls of his pursuers

keeping pace with him. Doc realizes that if he keeps moving in a straight line, they might actually shoot him.

“I might be able to lose them in the crowd at the Genome Club.”

Doc hops off the bike and carries it through the brush surrounding the mesquites lining this part of the old railroad tracks. A quick ride between a few buildings and Doc is at the club. Cars are lined-up around the block, providing music to dancers outside the club. Doc hides his bike behind the hedge on one side of the building before sliding past the dancers and going in. Unlike the clubs in Europe, entrance here is free, provided there is enough space.

Inside the club, the music maestro plays to a foam-covered, packed house. Inside the club, Doc pushes through the wet, foam-covered bodies of Chimera, clones and birthed humans lining the bar and the tiny tables pushed against the piped barrier that separates the dance floor from the rest of the club. The music is a mix of audible beeps and booms with the sub- and supra-sonic melodies and rhythmic tones that has been likened to a tantric orgasm. For a birthed human to experience the euphoria of STREAM, they simply have to ingest a minute amount of Lysergic acid diethylamide, which they call LSD. The LSD allows them to pick up on the frequencies and harmonics normally hidden from their kind.

Doc is quickly swept up into the music. His partners hold and grind onto him as he does the same. Doc is nearly at the moment of ecstasy when he feels the music is blocked from one direction. The Trench Coat Guys are on the second floor catwalk, in front of one of the speakers. They spot Doc after a moment, but he escapes their view by hiding in the foam on the dance floor.

The Trench Coat Guys watch as Doc pushes off of one of the pipes next to the dance floor and launch himself across the floor like mustard just squirted out of a squeeze bottle. As

Doc arrives on the other side, he is escorted off of the dance floor by a bouncer. Looking over his shoulder, Doc sees the Trench Coat Guys pushing through the crowd.

Doc breaks free from the bouncer, pushes past a group of dancing clubbers and shouts, "I didn't know Justin Timberlake was here!"

Clubbers begin snapping pictures of the surprised bouncer and the Trench Coat Guys coming out of the club. Doc makes a mad dash across the street to a grouping of three, free-standing, brass sculptures. Trench Coat Guys pull up their sleeves and fiddle with some electronic devices. As they hold up the devices in the air there is a quick flash of bright green light that washes over the whole area. Doc ducks down lower behind the sculpture – and closes his eyes.

FRIDAY, 8:30 p.m.

On his way home, he sees Elsbeth come out from an alley and walk up to the driver-side window of a van. Doc calls out to her, but she looks a little taken aback at his being here. She says something to the driver and he leaves. The van has a small sticker on its rear window. Doc cannot make it out, but it looks a little like a sun symbol with multiple points.

"Hello. Fancy meeting you, here."

"What are you doing out so late...and wet, Jack ~ er, Doc?"

"Just coming from the Genome Club. This (I open my jacket) is just part of the soap party. You should come, again, sometime. It's great fun."

"I did have fun the last time. I have been really busy with some projects."

"Projects?"

“Yes. Trying to find things I can do, while I’m here, for work once I’ve become a citizen. But, I’ll think about it.”

“By the way, who was that in the van?”

“Oh. They were just lost and needed directions back to the main road out.”

“Poor timing to be leaving at such a late hour. Speaking of which, I need to get home and out of these wet clothes. See you soon, I hope.”

“Absolutely.”

Doc keeps walking. He only needs two more blocks to get home. When he turns back, he sees Elsbeth get into her small, two-seater transport. It has a similar, if not the same, sticker on her rear window.

Doc finally makes it home. Xu is waiting for him in the kitchen with a cup of the high-caffeine drink yerba Mate.

“I need a faster bike!”

“What? What happened to you? You look like you got caught in the rain.”

Doc explains what happened to him as he locks the door and helps Xu close the blinds of the store.

“After the light show, there is silence. No power for street lights. Cars are off. Even the club sounds are gone.”

Jacket and shirt come off first.

“The clubbers inside, the bouncers, the people in the parking lot and the ones in their cars stuck in traffic in front of the club — all are just standing around. The Trench Coat Guys disappear.”

“What about the pictures?”

“I took a look at the cameras and they're all blank.”

Shoes and socks come off, next.

“Who would have a weapon small enough to wear on the wrist that could erase digital camera memory and stupefy humans?”

“No government or individual. But you never know about the corporations.”

“I was ready to call the local INTERPOL Inspection Station.”

“You can't get involved with them. They won't deal with you since you are a Chimera. You can't bother with them.”

“I know! I didn't.”

“Then you should understand that we can't get involved with whatever this is.”

“What this is, is dangerous! You were shot at! Leave it alone!”

“But there must be something really important they didn't want me to find. Why else would they have chased me away?”

Doc sees Xu wrinkle her forehead. She is struggling to find a way to keep him safe.

“Think of it. A weapon that stuns people and knocks out electronics is serious tech. If they are using things like that, whatever they are guarding is either very precious or very deadly.”

“I'll try to contact some old friends tonight. They may have ideas about what we're dealing with.”

“I can probably get my friend at the university to help figure out this signal. Thank you for believing in me.”

“I always will. Now, go shower. You smell like a strip club.”

I finish stripping while walking upstairs.

“When was the last time you were in a strip club?”

“Never mind.”

LATER THAT EVENING...

Inspector Shelondra Zacharias Embrolia Kree visits the Genome Club crime scene an hour later. Inspector Kree was on her way to becoming the youngest Captain with her choice of stations until she was demoted to the State of South Texas.

“So, what's happened here, officer Flagon?”

“It's just a club for those ... People.”

Inspector Kree reads over several of the reports by eyewitnesses. A green flash of light... wake several minutes later... Looking up and down the street and then checking her Flexi.

“Strange. Nothing electrical working within a one-block radius. Officer Flagon. I need you to ask the manager of the club, and anyone else in these three occupied buildings, if they noticed anything strange since the incident. Anything you find, send directly to my Flexi.”

Inspector Kree positions her Flexi directly at the officer's and beams over her information.

“I will question the people in the buildings on the opposite side of the street. Send me the information whenever you are done. It looks like I will be working from home, tonight.”

“Yes, Inspector Kree.”

SATURDAY, 12:45

Doc is coming to the John Vincent Atanasoff Computer Division at the University of South Texas where he is visiting a friend, Misha Cosgrove, who is using radio waves to map the universe. Though the current interstellar probes are doing the same job, his friend believes radio

waves can give scientists a better understanding of what lies outside the visible light spectrum. As Doc is walking into the building, who should appear but Elsbeth in a long-sleeved shirt and dungarees.

“Twice in as many days. Xu would say that it is fate which brings us together so often.”

“I get your meaning.” She smiles and places a hand on her hip as she speaks with me.

Then, she hooks her arm through mine as she turns us in the direction we were originally heading. “Perhaps we should couple and see how it goes.”

“I was thinking the same thing.”

They walk a bit before Doc stops when he realizes, he does not know where she is going.

“We should discuss that later, and I would love to continue our talk, but I have a meeting.

What are you doing here?”

“I’m here to see the radio specialist.”

“Me too. He’s a friend of mine.”

“Is he Chimera, too?”

“Yes. He was approved for citizenship the moment South Texas left Mexico and came back into the Union. They let the intellectuals in without much of a problem. He is actually one of the first Chimera to show up in this area. He already knew lots of stuff. Some of us think he’s a genetic mix of Einstein and Tesla, but no one can prove it.”

“What is your interest?”

“I’m thinking about starting a radio station like the one you and your friends listen to. I just need to boost the signal to cover the whole city. I’m hoping this gentleman will be able to help.”

When they meet Misha, Doc lets Elsbeth explain her situation first.

She is hesitant to do this, but Doc insists.

“So, as I said, I wanted to make sure that if I were to broadcast, no one would be able to use the same frequency or interfere with the signal. You know, like the person on the radio says happens sometimes to him.”

“Unfortunately, there is no way to stop a frequency from being taken over or blocked, if the invading signal is stronger. If the signal is just being blocked, it could be natural.”

“Natural?”

“If you think of spraying a mist of water through a hose onto a lawn. A signal can block part of the lawn from the water with an umbrella, or you can block the water from ever reaching the lawn by blocking the mist at the source. Solar storms, high winds, electrical storms are all natural causes of signal loss. If you broadcast, make sure your transmitter is high, powerful and physically protected.”

“Thank you very much. You’ve given me something to think about.”

“No problem. Now Jack. From what you said on the Flexi, I would say that a signal can definitely travel on the waves of an unused frequency. I can scan what data I can find from my satellites and frequency sniffers. They track and record all levels of the radio spectrum all the time. I have to create a program to search specifically for the unused frequencies, but I think I can do it. It might take a few hours.”

“That sounds like a wild goose chase. It could have been interference, like he said, from some solar storms or winds.”

“Well, it’s better to be safe than sorry. I mean, it might be a coincidence, but being shot at doesn’t sound like it.”

“You were shot at! When?”

“Last night before I ran into you.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t think you should have to worry about my problems. Besides, it was probably a miscommunication.”

“Miscommunication? You are a very strange person, Jack. I don’t believe I’ve ever had the pleasure of meeting anyone like you in my short life.”

“Do you want to cancel our talk about coupling?”

“Yes.” Elsbeth smirks. “I think we should do it as quickly as possible. I believe the chance that you might have been killed has triggered an eagerness in me.”

“Lucky Jack,” Misha says with a bit of a grumble in his voice.

“Send me directions and I’ll meet you later this afternoon.”

“How about I call you? I can pick you up.”

“Agreed. I have to go. Thank you, Misha, for your help. Let me know what you find.”

Doc leaves Elsbeth and Misha as he rushes out to catch the next trolley to the llerberia.

After he leaves Misha and Elsbeth discuss this bit of news.

“Did you or your men shoot at him?”

“No. I thought the elders sent someone else.”

“Then we have a problem. The frequency of the signal he was following matches the one you were emitting. He followed his signal to the warehouses near the old rail line. Where were you?”

“Walking the city, like I was supposed to. My men were circling to find any traces of a reaction.”

“I wonder who could be using that frequency. I’ll work on Doc’s issue and contact the elders about the situation. Continue with your mission and keep an eye on Doc. Make sure he’s okay.”

“Why?”

“Because he is my friend.”

“I’ll be coupling with him, later. I can put a tracker on him, if you like.”

“Sure. That sounds fine. Be safe.”

When Doc gets back to the store, Xu has something to tell him.

“Well, I received a few responses from some friends who work for small police contracting companies. They sent volumes of proposed weapons and defense schematics... Some were rejected for being too harmful.”

“Any chance the device I saw is near the top of the list?”

“No, but there are quite a lot of designs and proposals by this one person. Her name is Layla Stormdaughter Manx.”

“Stormdaughter? Was she born or conceived in a storm?”

“Funny. I checked up on her. She is from the Raven Clan of the Tlingit people on the West Coast of Canada through her mother. If she's brilliant enough to come up with all these other designs, I'm sure I'll find that stun device with her name on it.”

Xu shows Doc her Flexi.

“Here we have information about groups who are financially capable of buying or building the weapons used at the club, but only one has the money to pull it off. They call themselves the Children of One God.”

“One god? Oh, I remember. That refers to one of the three sister religions, right? Which is in charge of that group, Christian, Jewish and Muslims?”

“It seems like all of them. Together, they have raised a fortune to pay for the defense of anyone accused of killing ‘Clones or Splices’, according to their data-verse site. It would be easy to move money from a defense fund in order to fund an attack or kidnapping.”

“I did some more digging and found out a few things. First, Layla Manx has not been seen in person for almost three months.”

“And nobody has any leads, right?”

“Right. She was last seen coming from an interview with a high-tech prosthetics lab in Somali, Africa.”

“Second, this wasn't the first attack on Clones. A mercenary group calling themselves the Vespa Brotherhood were implicated in at least 18 other attacks, though they claimed another group was to blame.”

“Who?”

“They could not come up with anything verifiable. The attacks were usually messy. Small attacks in a large area which forced victims into a larger crowd in a central location for a final, more brutal attack.”

“Now third, guess who openly criticized the victims before they were attacked?”

“The Children of One God. Well, that seals it. We have to tell INTERPOL.”

“Agreed, but not directly. You can use your computer skills to inform INTERPOL and the News Data service without getting traced.”

“I would wager an inventor who is capable of creating weapons like the one used at the club would be worth a lot of money on the black market.”

“Do you really think they are holding Manx hostage in one of those warehouses?”

“It is very likely.”

SATURDAY, 3:45 p.m.

Doc gets a Flexi call from his friend at the university.

“We have to meet as soon as possible at Jocelyn’s.”

“I can be there in ten minutes.”

He’s waiting there, in one of the car sections near the back. Doc didn’t see him because Jocelyn had moved a large potted plant between him and the entrance. Jocelyn told Doc where to find him.

“Someone lured me away from my computer room with a call to the front desk. When I returned, the computer and all its data had been destroyed.”

“Sabotage? I’m sorry I involved you in this. So, if your computers found anything, the information must have been destroyed.”

“Actually, by the time of the sabotage, the system was on its tertiary run. The data for the first two runs were already uploaded to my Flexi. I was going to compare all three findings.”

“So, what did you find?”

“A couple of things. First, the frequency you pointed out, and those surrounding it, were not active. But, on the higher end of the spectrum, there were plenty of competing signals. They were short-range signals. My program could not make sense of them, but I might know someone who can probably write a program that can.”

“I sense there might be a problem.”

“There is. On record, there are a few people, and one computer, capable of deciphering this signal. Unfortunately, the computer belongs to INTERPOL and is operating in Switzerland. I asked. They won’t let me use it. Of the people who are alive, all are incapacitated except for the one who is missing. She was an expert on lots of things, but was ostracized for her pro-Chimera leanings.”

“Her name wouldn’t be Layla Stormdaughter Manx, would it?”

“You’ve been hacking my Flexi.”

“Not at all. Xu found out that she designed the weapon used at the club.”

“What is going on that my computers would have to be targeted?”

“I am sorry I got you involved. I will work out what I can on my own. Thank you.”

On his way home, Doc tries to piece together all the information he has and make sense of it. But, because there is a limit to the evidence, he is stuck. Maybe coupling with Elsbeth will help. He only has to wait a short time before Elsbeth comes to get him. He decides to take a short nap to help himself process everything he has learned so far.

SATURDAY, 5:15 p.m.

Elsbeth has a nice place. A large, open space with bedroom, kitchen and bath in plain sight. The toilet, Doc presumes, is on the other side of a short-walled section near the corner. Elsbeth asks if he want a drink before they start. The bubbling, fizzing drink stings a bit as it runs down his throat. Doc recognizes this from his visit to North Texas, a few years ago.

“Dr. Pepper, right?”

“You’ve had it before?”

“Yes. A small town called Amarillo. I think Xu said it means yellow. I now feel I am going to have to be extra careful to help you to orgasm in our coupling.”

“Good. I don’t like it when my partner holds back. Jenna held back less than David, but I did not enjoy every aspect of our coupling.”

“I will attempt to not disappoint.”

They remove each other’s clothing. Thank goodness most women in the Americas rejected the use of restrictive undergarments for daily life. Elsbeth’s breasts, though larger than those of most sister Chimera, rest high on the chest. The same feat of genetic engineering that gave all Chimera some sort of talent and physical capabilities, also gave Elsbeth her full breasts, wide hips that helped accentuate her bulbous rear end.

Elsbeth saunters around the room, naked, allowing Doc to drink in the subtle bounce of her breasts and buttocks. Doc thinks that kind of graceful movement must come from lessons because Xu walks around the house the same way.

Doc’s reaction to Elsbeth is the same as he had with Xu, after they were lovers for a few weeks ~ he grabs her by the waist, from behind and pulls her to him. Doc is sitting on the arm of the couch. From his sitting position, Doc can help her by being the solid base for her backward thrusts.

Later, Elsbeth’s hands run over Doc’s chest and his over hers. He grips her from under her breasts as she arches her back in the middle of her own orgasmic body spasm.

I am in a strange place. Someone is asking for mercy, but Elsbeth stands above him and shoots him in the head. Next, she is being beaten by three men before breaking free, taking a 2X4 and breaking their legs.

Doc realizes he is in her memories.

I must have touched her Marker Veins, by accident. What is going on? Why is your life so violent?

He is whisked away to her creation. He sees her creator.

“You come from someone who was very special.”

I can't see any more. I try to stop, but she seems determined to hold onto me. I am now seeing more violence! I am finally able to break the connection. I shake because I am cold. Somehow, her hands moved from touching my chest to squeezing my neck. I am about to pass out. I will her to stop and she does. I pull my hands away from her breasts and see, there, on the bottom portion of the mass of her breasts, are the smaller Marker Veins I had not seen. I can't believe I was careless, again!

“I'm sorry!” Elsbeth says as she stares at her hands. “I don't know what happened.”

He can't look Elsbeth in the eyes.

“It's alright. You didn't hurt me, but I have to go. I forgot I need to help Xu with a project.”

Doc pulls on his clothing and leaves quickly. Tears trickle down his cheeks when he knows he is out of sight of her apartment. She almost killed him because he brought up old, violent memories. Doc sufficiently recovers by the time he gets home at 7 p.m. He says nothing to Xu about the slip and go straight to his room for a rest.

SATURDAY, 10 p.m.

Because every Flexi transmits its identification code along with whatever data is sent, Doc attaches a small dish onto his home-built computer. The dish allows for an extended reach of the wireless data transfer available for police to access information from the security posts.

Doc transmits the data about the device used at the club, who designed it and her missing status, as well as who has the financial resources to build this and other weapons Manx designed. Doc also included the theory that Manx is being held prisoner and by whom. If anything happens to Xu and Doc, whoever gets the data will know where to start looking.

A SHORT TIME LATER...

Inspector Kree receives an alert at her desk from the security post near where the mesmerizing incident occurred.

“This can't be right. Our people investigated... It has to be a trick. But why would anyone...? Oh. That explains it.”

Inspector Kree glares at the screen.

“I can't trust the police to help. The Chief Inspector wouldn't bother coming out of his office for this ~ there's no proof. If I can bring Miss Manx in to file a complaint against her kidnappers, I could be back on track to be the youngest Chief Inspector, ever.”

Inspector Kree works furiously at her computer to identify who uploaded the information and how they were able to do so without physically connecting with the security post. Inspector Kree smiles after an hour. A nearby security camera captured the image of someone lurking just out of sight of the Security Post.

“Now, we just need to identify you...”

SUNDAY, 9:30 a.m.

An INTERPOL inspector walks into the llerberia and straight to Doc. You can always tell an inspector from the regular police by the way they walk. Police walk like they own the air you

breathe. Inspectors walk with a purpose—no slouching or slow walking. They are stiff and swift. This one is also almost six feet tall, slim, light skin and a narrow nose.

“I am Inspector Shelondra Zacharias Embrolia Kree with INTERPOL. We need to talk.”

“I'm sorry inspector, but I'm the only one here and there is a line. You have to wait your turn.”

“This can't wait. It's about the kidnapping you reported.”

“I don't know what you're talking about.”

“If you want to play games, I can do that. Ladies and gentlemen. I am closing this shop to investigate possible illegal activities...”

Doc quickly runs out from behind the counter and put his hands up in front of her face.

“Fine! Stop!” I pointed to the door near the side stairs. “We can talk in the back.”

When the inspector walked through the door to the back room, Doc addresses his customers. “I have to close the shop, for a short time. Please check back in about an hour. Thank you for your cooperation and patience.”

Doc finds the inspector standing, facing him as he enters the back room.

“So, what's so urgent you feel compelled to threaten me and my store?”

“Miss Manx. If what you say is true, we have to rescue her as soon as possible.”

“Why are you telling me and not setting up the rescue operation with a police squad?”

“I know they wouldn't lift a finger to help, just because Miss Manx is *pro-Clone and Splice...* their words, not mine.”

“We don't like that term. We're not spliced together like Frankenstein's monster. Call us Chimeras, Human or NBH's, but not *Splices*. Because I was created outside the womb, I have no rights and thus, am under no obligation to help the police or INTERPOL.”

“But you have to ~ you can help me rescue one of the few people who is willing to put herself at risk for your kind!”

“If this IS her, and the people holding her are Natural Humans, and they were to be hurt or killed during the rescue, what would happen to a Chimera like me?”

“Self-defense and the defense of others is part of the Universal Rights as a living being. You are protected in any country because every country is under the jurisdiction of INTERPOL and its Universality Laws.”

“Well, then, I suppose you can help me rescue her, Inspector Kree.”

“Great! Now, how certain are you she is in this warehouse?”

“There is only one warehouse area in this city. I know it very well. I know security systems and traditional and non-traditional traffic routes in that area.”

Inspector Kree raises an eyebrow.

“Yes. I'm that smart.”

“I know. I still want to know how you uploaded this information to a system that only accepts manual input.”

“It's called hacking. I equate it to using a hatchet to unlock a door. Sometimes it gets messy.”

“OK. Let's hear the plan then.”

“Wait. You talked me into helping you rescue Manx, but I want to know why you want to?”

“I worked hard to get into INTERPOL, just like my mother, so I could help keep the peace. But I found some of my fellow agents in St. Petersburg had a problem enforcing the law

when it came to obvious hate crimes against your kind. I was told to be silent and was shipped off to this part of the world when I brought it up to my superiors.”

“And what? You want to prove are better than the rest of the agents by saving this woman?”

“I suppose it's something like that. But what does it matter? I can help. I have training in rescues and exotic weapons.”

“If this woman IS Layla Manx, nobody is trained for the weapons we might encounter.”

“Whoever has her has been using her designs to make real weapons.”

“So, what do we do?”

“Well, I've got a friend who found designs Miss Manx submitted to INTERPOL's Weapons Division.”

“Send me what you can. I still have a few friends in INTERPOL who might be able to get us more info on the Vespa Brotherhood.”

Doc hears a scuffle. Inspector Kree and Doc takes on two attackers, each. The men escape before he can take off their masks.

“What was that about?” I asked Inspector Kree as she slumps against her vehicle, then slides to the ground. “Are you okay?”

“Yes. It was a targeted attack on me. Help me get inside my vehicle.”

“Maybe you should come inside, Inspector Kree. Xu can help...”

“I'm fine. Just need some rest.”

“Do you know why you were targeted?”

“They want me to stop investigating the incident at the Genome Club. I guess I got someone's attention.”

“I’ll find out what I can about the warehouse and let you know tomorrow. Be careful, Inspector Kree.”

“You can call me Shelondra. I think you've earned it.”

Shelondra drives away. Doc uses his computer to look for information on the warehouse.

“So, the building is about fifteen years old. That means your information should be in the American system node. Well, that's interesting. Blast-style bay doors to prevent theft. Central power control panel in the main office. This used to be the final assembly site for the Data Dirigibles before they moved to Toronto.”

Doc broadens his search for unusual things ~ and finds it.

“Energy consumed through the city is tightly monitored. Off-city energy is free if using approved technology. So, nothing being used. Satellite image from last week shows no solar panels, wind turbines or steam furnaces. Where are you getting your energy from?”

SUNDAY, 11:45 p.m.

Xu and Doc share their findings, via the wall transceiver, with Inspector Kree.

“Well, Inspector Kree, I was finally able to get a full list of Miss Manx's submissions to INTERPOL and a quick blurb on how they work and my ideas on how to guard against it. I'm sending you a copy. By the way, how are you feeling? Doc told me what happened.”

“Fine, thank you. This is quite an interesting list. They could have made all of these!”

“That’s my fear.”

“Doc? What about you?”

“It took all night, but I found out energy is being siphoned through a power line that runs under the warehouse, which feeds into a government facility nearby. It's a lot of electricity, but small enough not to be noticed.”

“I used a thermal imaging camera mounted on a quad-copter this morning to confirm.”

“You can call me Shelondra, Xu, since we're about to conduct an unsanctioned operation together.”

Xu and I sit on the floor the wall transceiver with maps and models of the area.

“If we can get all this together, we should be ready to rescue Miss Manx by tomorrow evening.”

“I think it's safe to say the shop and clinic will be closed for the day.”

They spend a few more hours putting together a plan.

MONDAY, 7:30 p.m.

Xu, Shelondra and Doc jump out once the railcar passes near the fenced-in loading dock. Doc shorts out the electronic keypad that controls the side gate using a small lawnmower battery. Xu hides behind barrels outside the entrance as planned.

Shelondra and Doc are hit with an explosion of green goo which splatters them from chest to foot. The substance begins to degrade their clothing.

“SHIT!”

“SNOT!”

“It's not what?”

“No! It *is* SNOT: Super Nano/Organic Tri-acid. The first acid breaks apart fiber molecules so the nanobots can use those molecules to fuel their engines.”

“I don't remember reading about this one. Why are my clothes falling apart?”

“We have to hurry because the second acid starts to break down metals and other non-organics, no matter how small, for the nanobots to physically ‘digest’ them.”

“How do we get it off?”

“Carbon dioxide! There! On the wall!”

The carbon dioxide quickly covers Shelondra.

Shelondra next sprays Doc with the carbon dioxide.

They eventually warm up enough as they move through the warehouse.

“Let's get going. We have to rescue a different special person.”

“Yes. Let's go down that hallway.”

The clear cage sits in the middle of this open section of the warehouse.

“Careful! The floor is electrified!”

“How do you know?”

“I can hear the crackle and my hairs are standing up. This is where all that power is going.”

“What do we do? They could come back at any time.”

The office is to the left.

“The power is controlled from in there. We just need to find the switch.”

“Okay. Let's go.”

Shelondra finds the switch and flips it. A young woman lies naked in one corner of the clear cage. Doc smashes the electronic lock using a heavy paper cutter from the office.

“I'm Doc and this is Shelondra. We're here to rescue you. Are you Layla Stormdaughter Manx?”

“Yes, but call me Layla. You heard my message. I need to take my work. They made me design more weapons. I can’t let them keep that information.”

Doc helps Layla up while Shelondra squats down to grab the laptop. As they are leaving the cage, Xu comes running down the hallway, naked.

“They're coming! And I got splattered by SNOT! Where's the CO2 canister?”

“Here, in the office. How did I not read about SNOT?”

The office fills with a fog of cold CO2. The warm South Texas air coming from somewhere nearby allows the fog to billow. Layla and Doc join Shelondra and Xu in the office.

“Spray some more out there. It will give us more time if they can’t see everything.”

Xu finishes her canister while Shelondra retrieves another larger one from behind the door. We set it on a rolling chair and cause a leak at the nozzle that will send it down the hall. It should distract the Trench Coat Guys and fog up the hall some more in the process.

While Shelondra and Xu work on the chair, Layla tells Doc that they need to check the drawers in the break room next door for tin foil.

“Not really sure you realize this, but we need to find a way out, not save a sandwich.”

“No! It's to protect from the EMP, if they deploy it. We need to wrap it round our heads.”

After Shelondra and Xu activate the last canister, they all move to the next room and search the drawers and cabinets.

“Found it!”

Shouting and heavy objects are being tossed about in the main room get our attention.

We wrap foil around each other’s heads and quietly make our way out the side door marked EXIT. We sneak around the building and escape into the van. Inside the van, Layla tells everyone there is a problem.

“They put a tracking device in me ... under the skin on my back.”

“Doc! Drive to the train station near Main Street. Don't go over the speed limit. We don't want to attract attention. I need to cut this thing out. We don't want those guys tracking us home.”

“This is going to get bloody, isn't it?”

“Yes, but I have what I need in here. You're not afraid of a little blood, are you?”

“Don't judge me. I'm in law enforcement. I don't normally deal with blood.”

“Don't look. Just hold her down. Here Miss Manx. Bite on this towel.”

Xu cuts quickly and deeply into the scarred area Manx pointed out. She removes a wafer of silver infused with a silicone circuit layout and powered by a micro-lithium battery.

With great ease, Xu pries the battery from the wafer.

“We need to get home, Doc. I need to clean and seal this wound. “

“And you need to wash off this SNOT. The carbon dioxide only arrests the action until something else makes contact to restart the process. Soap and water will stop it completely.”

“These are leather seats, right?”

MONDAY, 8:55 p.m.

Doc drives as quickly as he can to get everyone back to the shop. He thinks to himself that maybe he should have not followed that signal. Why was that sound so compelling? Maybe he would have just been content with the life he was leading, if he had ignored the sound. Of course, Miss Manx would have still been a prisoner.

Miss Manx has finally passed out. Whether from the pain or exhaustion or both, it doesn't matter. What matters to Doc is that he will have to carry her ~ and she's heavy. He puts her over his shoulder to get her up the stairs.

"I'll get my things and be back to take care of her wounds. Put her on the shower floor. She'll be fine. You two should rinse off the SNOT before it reactivates."

"Here. Let me get your back. It'll be easier if we take turns with the scrubber, since it's the only one and we only have the one bar of soap."

Shelondra is holding the scrubber in one hand over her crotch. Her other hand is doing something behind the sponge.

"It's a little too late to be shy. I've already seen you naked. I think if you're going to do that, it would be best to hurry."

Shelondra smiles and holds up the portable data node.

"I didn't have any other pockets to hold it in."

She tosses the scrubber to Doc and walks out to leave the data node in his room, then returns.

"I'm ready for you to get my back."

Xu comes back with the alcohol, aloe leaf and her suture kit from the clinic. Miss Manx comes alive when Xu pokes the wound to remove the excess blood. Then pours alcohol into and over the wound.

"They killed the Canadian Minister of Law! The explosion that caught everyone off guard?"

Shelondra stands under one of the six shower heads while Doc lathers the scrubber with soap.

“Calm down. I received an alert about that through my INTERPOL Flexi. But they said it was a faulty cooling system.”

“The Vespa Brotherhood sent a notice to Canadian Prime Minister D'Barge to expect another ‘accident’ if certain prisoners were not released by next Thursday when he is scheduled to be in this state.”

Doc scrubs her back, starting at the neck, to make sure the excess soap is allowed to travel down, in case he misses a spot.

“That's...crazy!”

Doc now knows Shelondra's posture is strongly connected to her quite toned back muscles. Shoulders are back and create a ripple effect on her skin. Doc is not nearly as strong as Shelondra, but feels he looks alright, naked. She doesn't seem to mind that Doc scrubbing has slowed as he reaches her waist and the top of her buttocks.

“I'm the only one who might be able to — Ow! — ”

Xu uses her little finger to stuff the small cavity with some aloe pulp.

“Sorry. The cut was deep.”

“It's all right. I might be able to stop or defend against the remote fliers.”

“The what?”

“Remote fliers. They are small aeroplanes that have cameras and carry explosive devices which can be fired at a target from a distance. They can also be crashed directly into a target.”

“What if... can we get one of those electro-disruptive devices onto another flyer? Could it be set off to stop the flier?”

“Yes. But if that happens, the explosives might go off when the flier crashes.”

“Then, we have to hack our way into controlling the fliers and divert them.”

“Whatever we do, we still have to deal with the Vespa who are here, already.”

“Xu is correct. When the Prime Minister comes to the city, we will have to deal with two sets of mercenaries. If we can take care of the ones here, first, we might have a chance with the others.”

“That's brilliant! The Vespa Brotherhood are coming in with the Prime Minister, so they won't be able to bring their own equipment. I'm guessing they just want to make sure the Prime Minister will be open to attack. If we attack the Vespa Brotherhood here, we can more easily derail the attack. It will force the others to act.”

“But if we spread the word first, they won't have too clear of a shot at the Prime Minister. They will have to improvise ~ meaning they will make mistakes ~ or abort the attack.”

“So, we'll have to focus on taking out two problems simultaneously. Won't be easy, but it's doable.”

TUESDAY, 12:30 p.m.

Doc is working with Layla's early designs to help build the defensive devices to protect against what the Vespa Brotherhood already has. Layla is also working on designing offensive weapons that might be needed.

“If we can strip them of their protection, it will force them to not use the EMP device.”

“How?”

“The body suits, hats and sunglasses have the same flawed protective circuitry making them susceptible to electrical discharges.”

“Meaning, if we can get lightning to strike their protective suits, we should have a chance.”

“Actually, a large amount of electricity should do it... say, 1000 volts. The suits can only handle a few hundred volts, but these guys use leather lining for insulation.”

Doc holds up some fabric and schematics for Layla to see.

“I think we'll need a seamstress and a welder for this one.”

On his way into the store for a bit of tea, Doc overhears Xu contact one of her friends, a former client, who is a contributing reporter for the National Data Stream Service. “No. Layla Stormdaughter Manx was kidnapped, forced to create weapons and defenses against weapons, for an association of zealots working with mercenaries. Yes they want to get rid of Chimera and Clones, but they're going to kill the Prime Minister because he is an advocate for equal rights.”

Xu continues to give the reporter what information she has. Shelondra does the same with her contacts. Doc meets his friends at Jocelyn's with another portion of the plan.

“I hate to ask, but I need help.”

“You should not hate to ask anything. Simply hate the response.”

“You are correct, as always, Peter. Well, I and some other friends are in a situation.”

Doc explains to Peter, David, Jenna and Jocelyn what his plan is to capture the mercenaries. Jenna twists her lips like she does when she's working out an equation in her mind.

“What, exactly, will be our role in all this? I'm not sure I want to risk life and limb.”

Though David is a very gentle person, his size hides that fact. But David smiles broadly and says, “I'm ready to hit someone after what happened to that inspector friend of yours. Count me in.”

“I'm am shocked, David. I never expected that from you.”

“Well, I've always been a physical person. That's one of the reasons why I love my job. If these mercenary types become violent, I am ready, willing and able to do my part.”

“I just need you to keep a look out for anything or anyone suspicious near the building (I link to a map on my Flexi and point out the llerberia/clinic.) The ones we’re setting the trap for wear trench coats and hats. But they may not be alone.” The four watch me with greater attention. “When our attention is on them, others might show up. If you do see anyone hanging around outside the building, call me and let me know. If you can capture their image, that would be great, but do not put yourself in harm’s way. These people are not afraid to kill.”

Jocelyn asks, “Where do you need us?”

“If we can have someone in a window in the building just south of ours, they will have a broader view of the street and other buildings. One of you can be in the little restaurant on the northeastern corner. Another can sit in the delivery van Xu has borrowed, which will be situated on the western side of the building. The last one will have to be ready to help the others, or get help. So that person will be on a bicycle.”

WEDNESDAY, 9:30 p.m.

To get the Vespa Brotherhood to come to them, Doc re-attaches the micro battery to the tracking device pulled out of Layla.

With the invitation sent to the Vespas, the group only has to wait. The tubing is laid in the backyard. The dry ice fog is thick on the ground. A delivery system for the atomized silver to seed the dry ice fog, when it is needed, is set up. The bait waits at the center of the backyard on a table, out of harm's way. Shelondra, Layla and Doc are hiding in our respective locations which are protected by brass shielding.

With only minimal lighting from the solar powered lamps, the trap is laid for the Vespas.

Two shadows jump down from the next building and land in the alley. The dim lights of the meditation garden were moved up, away from the ground so as not to show the fog.

The Vespas jump down from the high wall into the meditation garden ~ in the middle of the fog. The fog lights up and the Vespa Brotherhood cry out in pain when Doc activates the trap.

“What you are experiencing is your electronic protection being fried. If you attempt to use the EMP device, you will be affected as well.”

“You're bluffing!”

“He's not. It's a design flaw I couldn't quite fix. Not only did it destroy your protection, you are able to feel the shock of about one thousand volts.”

Doc shocks them, again.

“Take off your coverings. Now!”

The two remove their hats and masks first. The men look very much like an average human male. They have no Marker Veins or beards and their hair is cut close to their scalp. There is nothing special anyone can see.

AT THE SAME TIME...

Elsbeth and her men have their computers monitoring all digital and radio frequencies when they are alerted to a simple, but strong, tracking signal in the low-end digital spectrum. While in their van, Elsbeth see two people, completely covered, on new, powerful, motorized bicycles heading in the same direction at a high rate of speed.

“That doesn't look suspicious, at all,” Elsbeth says to the driver. “Let's keep them in visual range. If they stop somewhere, move past.”

The two park behind a building, down the block from the llerberia. Elsbeth and her men move on to the three-story building across the street from the llerberia.

“The signal is definitely coming from there. Oh look. The cyclists have made it to the roof next to our target. I think we will have the advantage on the roof of this building. Shall we, gentlemen?”

“The coats, too.”

The coats come off and there is more machinery over leather and other materials. Sections of metal on their legs give them the ability to run, kick and jump greater than an average human. There is a chest plate that was meant to protect from the EMP device and bullets. It is all powered by a device made up of silver strips of metal on their backs.

“The power switch is on the power pack at the bottom. At least, that’s where I designed it to be.”

“So, now that you have us, what are you going to do?”

“Hurt you really badly.”

“But first, we’ll give you a chance to tell us what is going on. How do you plan on killing the Prime Minister?”

“And what did you do to me? I can’t remember what happened to me in the months I’ve been missing.”

“Honestly, we took you from another group. We found out they were using advanced weapons. Based on designs you submitted to INTERPOL, and your liberal leanings, you were the most logical choice for abduction and coercion.”

“When we raided the facility where you were being held, we discovered the plans to kill Canadian Prime Minister D'Barge.”

“We were hoping to bring you out of your altered mental state long enough to create something that would stop the fliers.”

“Since we didn't have you long enough to explain all this, we had to keep you from trying to contact the police or INTERPOL since they cannot be trusted.”

“If you took her from someone else, who put the tracking device in her?”

It takes the Vespa Brothers a moment to come up with an answer. Looking up then down, then, at each other.

“I did that. We knew that if she were to be taken, again, or she escaped while under the influence of the drugs, either we or our brethren would need a way to track her.”

“Is that why she was naked?”

“She kept taking her clothes off, saying she was hot. We left her a blanket to use whenever she did get cold.”

“So, who originally took Miss Manx? How did you come about to find her? Who are these *brethren* of yours?”

“Our families have opposed the Knights Templar since the Crusades ended and the Templars' powers increased. But, because their influence was everywhere, we had to go into hiding.”

The second Vespa Brother continues.

“When the newest incarnation of that order had confirmation we still exist, they began a campaign of disinformation and slander against us. There have been attacks committed in our

name, but it was not us. We are so few, which is why we mostly conduct surveillance and information gathering. We rarely venture into more dangerous situations.”

“And that’s how you found out about Miss Manx. So, why risk so much for her? No offense, Layla.”

“We had accessed her designs the moment they were rejected. Our engineers were able to make most of them work. When we found out she was taken, we found it necessary to stop anyone else from acquiring whatever future technology she might produce.”

“This latest incarnation of the Knights Templar are responsible for the abduction of Miss Manx. The Templars have also been in control of major corporations since global industrialization began.”

“And if the Templars can’t get a clone in a high office, they can have them killed ~ like the Minister of Law.”

“The threats have nothing to do with releasing prisoners,” I add. “They mean to kill the Prime Minister no matter what. His replacement is probably a clone or someone they can control.”

“Precisely why we were trying to get more information from Miss Manx on her remote fliers...”

“To stop the attack. Fine. But why would *they* go through all this trouble?”

The first Vespa Brother says, “We have been gathering intelligence from all corners of the world. There has been innuendos and hints about an event planned for decades by a small group of corporations which involves Clones and Chimera.”

“We already know about replacing top leaders.”

“I fear there is a plan far more dangerous than just replacing leaders. What if one or more of these corporations wanted to overthrow the current system of governmental rule,” The second Vespa Brother includes. “We have guessed Clones in positions of power are working for the corporations. These clones have been slowly changing policy for business, society and even influencing INTERPOL and its investigations.”

“To what end?”

“We do not totally know what the final act will be, but it involves the creation of something a sourced called Alpha Chimera. Chimera with the ability to control a group of Chimera, like a general controlling his army.”

“What do you know about these Alphas?”

“Just that there are lots of them. They should be easy to identify because they have writing on their backs. And they have been made to only respond to messages sent through a special signal, when they are activated.”

Writing on the back. Xu and Doc look at each other at the same time. She takes Doc’s hand, squeezes it and pulls him to one side.

“What do you mean, activated?”

“I don’t know. I was only told that there is a chance these Alphas don’t even know what they are. Just like the other Chimera don’t know they are soldiers.”

Xu whisper into Doc’s ear, “We’ll figure it out.”

Doc growls his response as he begins to understand why Doc is able to do what he does.

“What is there to figure out? I’m one of them!”

Shelondra continues to interrogate the two and doesn’t hear my conversation with Xu. If she had, Doc does not know what he would have told her.

“But you are mercenaries. Why should we believe anything you say?”

“We heard of the case you worked on in Russia. You did not believe Viktor Zhivago was guilty of murder. Your continued investigation was close to revealing the truth. Then you were demoted and reassigned.”

“We also heard about your Chief Inspector Morse.”

“What about him?”

“Why do you think he is so adamant that you not investigate all of this? He is receiving orders to keep you from finding Miss Manx before they do.”

“Why not just kill me?”

“Perhaps, until now, you served a purpose. Or perhaps your death would draw unwanted attention.”

“From what we learned about your group, you don't like to share information. So, why are you telling us all of this?”

Before he can answer Kree, Doc receives a call from Jenna.

“There are three people on the rooftop just to the south of you. One of them looks like Elsbeth Wintermoon. One of them appears to have a long rifle. If you have something to hide in, you should do it, now.”

“Everybody, under the fog! Work your way back into the shop! We have guests nearby!”

They dive under the fog moments before the first volley of shots whiz into the ground. Doc shout into the Flexi, “tin foil covers, now!” He grabs the arm of one of the Vespa Brothers.

“Activate the pulse.”

“But that'll stun us!”

“Yes. But we'll have the advantage of stopping them from shooting at us. Do it!”

Both the Vespa Brothers activate their pulse weapons. The blast radius covers one block, plenty of distance to work on Elsbeth and her companions. Unfortunately, it also affects his friends. There may not have been enough time to warn them, but they will understand.

“Shelondra, we have to get to that roof before they snap out of their stupor.”

“We’ll have plenty of time. The last incident kept people stunned for almost 45 minutes.”

Doc’s Flexi is out of commission, so he can’t contact the others. Doc hopes they followed his orders. Shelondra and he leave to get to the other building. Xu and Layla stay and tie the Vespa Brothers to one of the outdoor sculptures.

Doc cannot check on his scouts. He needs to find out for certain if Elsbeth is involved. Shelondra and he run across the street, into the building and up the stairs fairly quickly. But something is wrong.

Instead of finding Elsbeth with her minions completely stupefied, they are moving very slowly to gather their observational gear along with the rifle.

“Why did the EMP work differently on them?”

“It could be the make-up of a Chimera brain protecting them. I don’t care. I just want to arrest them for attempted murder.”

Jenna and David make it up to the roof a moment later.

“Did you get them?”

“They’re having a weird reaction to the EMP. But we should tie them up before they come back to normal and try to kill us. David, would you and Jenna help Shelondra with those two? I will tie Miss Elsbeth to these pipes. I’ve got some questions I need answering.”

“You sure? She seems as slithery as a snake.”

“I’ll be fine. I just need to question her, alone.”

David shrugs. The three of them take the two men and their equipment off the roof.

“You have to know I won’t tell you anything. For what it’s worth, I was hoping we could have stayed coupling. I enjoyed myself with you.”

“And for what it’s worth ~ I’m sorry.”

“Sorry? For what?”

“I promised myself I would never do this again.” I unbutton her blouse.

“If you wanted to couple, again, all you had to do is ask. But tying me up to manipulate my breasts seems a bit desperate.”

Doc pulls her blouse open.

“If I could believe what you say, I would just ask you. But, like you said, you won’t answer anything I ask.”

Doc slides the palms of his hands slowly over her cold breasts.

“You leave me no choice.”

Doc remembers where her Marker Veins are. He draws her breasts up with the heel of his hands as his fingers slide towards their targets.

“Before, when I touched your Marker Veins, I was able to see into your memories. What I saw confused me. So much violence and death. But, now I know it’s your job. Now, I am doing what I can to keep people safe from you.”

Contact. Doc hesitates to invade her memories. Last time was a surprise. He knows now what to expect. He has to go beyond those memories. Concentrate.

“No!” Elsbeth looks surprised and hurt. She struggles with her bindings. “You’re not one of them. I would have known. We had sex. You can’t be!”

“Stop struggling.”

Elsbeth stops.

“You don’t have the words on your back! You can’t be one.”

“Xu was able to hide them. Anyone who originally saw them did not speak of it because the people who came searching for me scared them.”

“I just need you to think about the people you work for.”

Doc reaches into Elsbeth’s mind. Instantly, he sees the green light of the EMP device and call out my questions directly to her mind.

Doc’s mind asks her the question, again. Who do you work for?

The images come like a whirlwind.

The first image comes as a surprise. Elsbeth has full knowledge of her makers and where she was made! The lab is exactly as was described in the history vids. When Elsbeth awakens, her skin is still sensitive. The liquid falls off her body as she is left to find her footing. The floor is cushioned to protect her as she flops about while she learns to control her body. The room, from her view, has two more tubes which are meant to house the body blanks before they are given the DNA that will start the process of shaping them and giving them their gender and the rest of their body specifics.

“Take your time, my dear. You are brand new. We created you because we need your help. Do you understand?”

Elsbeth nods her head, then, pushes herself onto her knees. The men in the room, all Chimera, help her stand.

“As interesting as this is, I have to find the answers.” Doc screams into her mind, “I need to see who sent you!”

Doc next sees messages on her Flexi telling her where to go. He sees her setting up a camera that searches for the Marker Veins near the entrance of Jocelyn's place. The initials on the messages are M. C. This is not what he needs. He pushes his mind into hers, with greater urgency.

“Who do you work for?”

This time, her thoughts betray her. Doc sees her being trained as an assassin. She meets with a small group of people in a dark chamber... they are Chimera, too.

“Why would Chimera hire an assassin?”

Doc can hear the meeting. Now, instead of seeing through her eyes, he is standing by Elsbeth as she is told about her assignment. Everything seems so real that Doc can clearly see and hear everything that is going on. But there is someone in a dark corner behind the two Chimera speaking to Elsbeth. Everyone is wearing robes with hoods. The two before Elsbeth have drawn their hoods back. Doc does not recognize them immediately.

“Our operative and friend, Doctor Valeria Reisa, died to make certain all their research and resources were destroyed so they could not make any more of those Alphas,” said the Chimera with Marker Veins on the left side of his temple. A tear forms at the corners of his eyes before he turns away.

Another Chimera with Marker Veins on the right side of her temple continued for him.

“If there were any other way, we would certainly do it. But, they have been programmed with a specific trigger and objective. We cannot stop them or reason with them. They don't even know, themselves, what they are programmed for.”

“I suppose I'm lucky, knowing what I am programmed for. How do I identify them?”

“Doctor Reisa was able to send a coded message before she destroyed the base. It said the Alphas have writing on their backs that spells out FORMIDO CORPUS... which roughly translates to Body of Terror. You can use a thermal imaging camera to pick up the writing. Find them and eliminate them.”

Doc disengages from her memories. He feels nauseated from the experience. Just as he vomits, Doc see Shelondra is standing next to him.

“You said you wanted to question her, not play with her breasts.”

“I was reading her mind.”

“Last I knew, her mind was in her head, not her breasts, you perverted son of a...”

“Her Marker Veins give me access to her thoughts and memories. I can also control her and other Chimera, but only with direct contact. It becomes a bit like a post-hypnotic suggestion.”

Elsbeth shouts – “You have to die! We can’t have you, or the others like you, controlling a Chimera army!”

“I can’t control an army like what the Vespa Brothers described. I had direct contact with your Marker Veins. That is the only reason I can make you follow orders, but I don’t know for how long after I disengage.”

“Maybe that ability only comes after you are activated,” Shelondra suggests.

“No. I’m beginning to think that Doctor Reisa did something to me. She either took something out or put something into me. Whatever she did ~ I’m incomplete.”

“I don’t believe you and neither will my bosses. They want you dead. There are others like me around the world, hunting your kind down. If you kill me, my bosses will send another.”

“I’m not a killer. But, you’re right. Your bosses want to kill me. And those who made me, want to use me. With most of the other Alpha Chimera presumably dead, I might make a tempting bait for my makers.”

“You’re not thinking about...”

Doc does not let Shelondra finish. He immediately put his hands back onto Elsbeth’s Marker Veins to re-establish contact and control.

“I need to speak with your bosses. You will call them so we can meet within half an hour. You will be truthful whenever you speak with me. Do you understand?”

“Yes, of course.”

“And do not try to escape.”

“Of course.”

I disengage and release her from the handcuffs, hand her my Flexi.

“Are you sure about this?”

“No, but what else can we do?”

Elsbeth makes the call.

“Misha. Your friend, Jack, wants to meet with you.”

“Why? What’s the matter?”

“You are an elder and he knows about me. He wants answers.”

“Bring him to the lab.”

“We can be there in 20 minutes.”

“Fine.”

“Misha is a part of this? He’s an elder of what?”

“Like you said. He is one of the first Chimera found in this region. He, and the others like him, aren’t able to be controlled by Alphas like you. The conspiracy was created after them. The Elders united to form an alliance to further the cause of Chimera. When they found out about the conspiracy, the Elders set out to stop it by creating me and other Chimera like me. Funny that. Clones of Chimera who are trained assassins and whose job it is to kill Alpha Chimera.”

“And the humans who are creating the Alphas go free because you and your elders will not go after the right target.” I’m annoyed more than angry. I never knew Chimera could be as ignorant as birthed humans. “Shelondra. I’m going to need you to help with the other part of my plan. You’re going to have to betray me to your superior, Morse. I should be able to signal you after I meet with Misha. Also, are there any in the local police you trust?”

“I don’t really work well with them, but I think I might find someone who can get me the help we might need.”

“Good. You’ll talk to the police before going to your Chief Morse. I’ll explain on our way back to the store. We’re going to need a few things.”

WEDNESDAY, 10:15 P.M.

Doc gathers everyone at the llerberia. As he explains his plan, they gather the tools and protective equipment they will need. Xu is not pleased, and protests Doc’s choices, but she cannot stop him. Xu, Layla, Jocelyn and the others are going to distribute Doc’s radios to the police Shelondra’s friend, officer Flagon, points out. He hopes none of them are clones. By the time they get through, each police officer is made aware how serious and dangerous the situation is.

WEDNESDAY, 10:30 P.M.

On the other side of town, Shelondra is working on her assignment, Chief Morse.

“Chief Morse. I have some information that I hope will please you.”

“So far, you have failed to achieve that goal.”

“I have a reliable source that tells me a Chimera, one with writing on his back, is having a meeting at the University at 11:15, tonight.”

“What? Why is this important to me?”

“First, he is meeting with one of the leaders of a secret society of Chimera. I read a report, last year, about a Chimera with words on his back, being killed in Paris. Obviously, someone wants this Chimera dead, too. If we capture him and that leader, we could get more information out of someone and, perhaps a promotion. I, for one, am tired of protecting these things at my own expense. I just want to go back home. Please, sir.”

“If this information does produce the capture of these Chimera, I can almost guarantee your being reinstated to your old office in St. Petersburg. I just need a few moments to make some calls and check into these crimes you speak of. Please wait for me outside.”

Misha is sitting in front of his computer. In the daytime, the lab’s computers produce a hum from their workings. But by night, it is an eerie silence that greets Elsbeth and Doc.

“That’s a nice hat. Are you alright, Elsbeth?”

“I’m fine. Jack wants to talk with you.”

“Jack? What’s going on?”

“I want to know why you want to kill me.”

“I don’t want to kill you. Why would you think that?”

“Because Elsbeth tells me that you and the other *Elders* are killing off specially-made Chimera ~ the ones called Alphas.”

“And Elsbeth believes you are one of these Alphas?”

“It’s true, Elder. He has entered my mind and made me contact you.”

“How did you hide yourself from Elsbeth? She’s one of our best.”

“I have a friend who can erase some of the Marker Veins. The letters on my back were what those people were looking for. So, she put me on a treatment that hides them.”

“I’m confused. You say you have letters on your back, but the Alphas have two words in Latin on their backs.”

“He believes Doctor Reisa did something to him that has changed him. That change is apparent in his losing most of the letterings on his back.”

“I suppose anything is possible. So, you’re not fully an Alpha?”

“No. But, from what I gathered from Elsbeth, these people might be willing to take me to their facility, since I am all they can get their hands on.”

“So, what are you thinking of doing? The few operatives we learn about are killed by the corporations before they can talk.”

“I’ve had Miss Manx rework the tracking device to be small enough to swallow ~ which I have done. I’m not sure when, but pretty soon, the people who made me will be coming to get me. I would like you to call off your assassin squad and help me stop these people.”

“And why would I do that?”

“Because we want the same thing. We want to stop these people, people who control major businesses that are funding the coup, from destroying everything and perpetuating their hate.”

“We’ve tried to find evidence on the leaders, but were never able to get close enough. Dr. Reisa was our best hope, but her death has only left us with one option. You and your kind have to die.”

“You will fail because you are trying to do everything as on your own. One minor organization trying to fix everything. If you place all your attention on a minor task for which the outcome is the equivalent of taking away one bullet from a loaded gun, instead of taking away the shooter. If you had help, you can take away the real threat.”

“And where are we going to get this help? We can’t trust anyone.”

“But you can, Elder. Jack has introduced me to another group. They have provided some useful information. And Jack has found more allies...the Chimera themselves. At least, a voice that can reach the Chimera.”

“Only, I’m going to be that voice, this time, if we can boost the power and take over the frequencies the voice usually uses. I want everyone to hear clearly. Can we do that from here?”

“Yes. This small lab has what you need. And I suppose I can get the rest done. I’m starting to see what you’re up to. When this is all happening, where do you want us?”

“You should go to Jocelyn’s. People might be confused or angry. They’ll need a leader there to keep them level. Elsbeth already knows her job. I think Xu, Layla and the others should be done with their job by now.”

“As you wish.”

“Elsbeth.”

She stops at the door and turns to look at Doc. He kisses her long and hard, running his hands up her shirt to contact the Marker Veins on her back. Breaking the kiss, he tells her,

“I’m going to miss you.”

She smiles, “I know. But I won’t.”

WEDNESDAY, 11:18 P.M.

Shelondra and Chief Morse burst through the door, pistols drawn, of Misha’s Radio Lab and find Doc there, sitting behind the desk.

“I wonder what it would be like to have hundreds of thousands of people listening to every word I say.”

“From what I am told, you will have your chance, soon enough, if you cooperate.”

“Yes. About that. Dr. Reisa, the one who rescued me from the facility and destroyed all that research, actually tweaked my DNA a little. She made it so that I can’t control Chimera, en mass.”

“I believe that can be reversed. You’ll just have to come with me to the nearest lab.”

“How much should I pack?”

“Actually, the lab is here on campus. Or, rather, under the Bio-Medical facility of the campus. Almost every major university in the world, except for those with closed borders, has a Chimera and Clone lab underneath. Who do you think built the schools?”

“So, your masters are creating more Alpha Chimera, again.”

“No. Since Dr. Reisa destroyed our only repository of data, genes and samples, my masters haven’t been able to reboot the project. We can’t even find your brethren so as to copy the DNA.”

“Yes, Dr. Reisa did a great job with her data erasure and razing the facility to the ground. So, what’s been the plan B since my kind were out of reach?”

“Don’t flatter yourself. You were only Plan J. There are many more projects in the works.”

“Let me guess. Do any of those other projects have to do with The Children of One God? That is one of your masters’ organizations, right?”

“I don’t have that information, but suffice to say, INTERPOL will be destroyed. The corporations will finally be free to rule in its place.”

“Rule is right. They’ve been trying to rule since the Crusades. You’ve been created by fanatical Templars who have one goal. Enslave the world. And you are willing to help them do that.”

“Of course. That’s what I was created for. I have a purpose and I know it. You Chimera think too much of yourselves. You were created to take up space, literally. The more of you there are, the easier it is to cause unrest. At least, that was the idea.”

“Too many on the side of peace slowed that plan, but didn’t stop it. So, your masters took on the guise of the Vespa Brotherhood. You linked their identity to crimes and made sure that the evidence pointed to a fake Chimera organization. Your masters did not realize that there was such a group.”

“Whatever the case, we won’t have to do too much, just sit back and have the born humans kill off your kind after the PM is killed. Then, your kind will kill them. Before long, war will break out. INTERPOL won’t be able to stop it. In the chaos, heads of state and other powerful people will be killed and replaced with Clones.”

“Ah, yes. And it has already begun. The Minister of Law and all those people. And you have already cloned her replacement.”

“Of course. Soon, after the Canadian PM is killed, the rest of the dominoes will fall. After INTERPOL falls, the corporations will come together publicly and announce a cure to the Chimera scourge. We Clones will pass laws and the world will move on to a more natural state of bliss.”

“Until you’ve served your purpose. Then, it’s time to hunt Clones. And, if the remaining humans become restless, they can be killed off, too.”

“If that’s what the masters want. Come on, let’s go to the facility. It’s time for your therapy. The doctors will map your DNA and find the issues, fix it and re-introduce you to the world as a working Plan J.”

The dimness of the hallway did not let Doc see the figure coming up behind Chief Morse. The small “pop” and the sudden moisture on Doc’s face leaves him in shock.

“What the hell!”

A hole the size of Doc’s thumb appears where Chief Morse’s left eye used to be. His body slumps to the ground. Shelondra turns in time to grab the pistol. Doc activates the EM pulse weapon, but is too late. Another “pop” and Shelondra is on the ground. Shot in the chest. The pulse does its job and stuns the assailant. Doc take the weapon and ties him to Chief Morse’s body and takes Shelondra into the hallway. Out here, there are two other men with pistols drawn.

“I hope you were wearing the armour under your...” Doc rips open Shelondra’s shirt to see she is wearing the bullet and knife-resisting armour. “Good for you!”

He disarms and strips the other two and handcuff them to an exposed water pipe in the hallway. When they wake, the men will be less-likely to escape. Outside, there is some commotion coming from the other side of campus where the Bio-Medical facility is located.

Police were kept at least two blocks from the university, in case Doc needed to use the EMP device. Those closest to his location finally arrive.

“Is everyone alright? I heard the shots over the radio before everything went dead.”

“Morse is dead.”

“What about Inspector Kree?”

“Alive, but stunned, inside. There are three suspects in there as well. I took care of them.”

“We’ll take them into custody. I’ll stay with Shelondra until she recovers.”

“Thank you. I want to see what they find at the ...”

Doc feels the wind get knocked out of him—the feel electricity coursing through his body as he is pushed forward, off his feet before landing on his belly. By the light of the stars, the waning moon and the vehicles, he sees the deep green grass he is lying on. The smell of the rich earth that nourishes every living thing. It doesn’t take but a few moments for the colour to fade and the lights to dim.

Every pulse from his heart sends blood through arteries throughout his body. He feel its rhythm slow. Every fourth beat becomes a double beat ~ it is trying to correct itself. His heart does not know what is going on. Doc hears shouts from Officer Flagon directing her fellow officers somewhere. Directing medical personnel to him. She calls her supervisor for support.

Doc does not hear any more. He does not see any more. Does not feel any pain, except for the fall.

THURSDAY, 8:30 a.m.

Flexi Data News Stream

Canadian Prime Minister D'Barge is safe. A group of three miniature unmanned aeroplanes were en route to bomb the PM's aeroplane after it was to land at La Granada Aero Docking Station.

According to an official open bulletin from the Canadian government, security agents for the PM released dozens of helium-filled balloons with miniature explosive devices to intercept the unmanned aeroplanes. The ensuing explosions rained shrapnel down upon the docking field.

FRIDAY, 8:30 a.m.

An update to our overnight top story:

Facilities around the world have been raided by local authorities. Information found at these facilities has led to the arrest of corporate heads and others in positions of authority. We have an unconfirmed report that these same heads of corporations all claim to be part of a modern line of the Knights Templar. The original Templars considered themselves the champions of their religion, but were disbanded by Pope Clement in the 14th Century. .

Information retrieved from private data nodes have yielded long lists of people whom authorities believe to be Clones.

MONDAY, 8:30 a.m.

The collapse of this mutinous organization against humanity was started, according to business owner Jocelyn Lakeshore, by a Chimera in South Texas. He was created to be an instrument of this organization, but was given free will by a brave doctor who gave her life to save others. The Chimera noted here was killed after assisting police in finding the location of the Chimera lab. A statement was released by newly appointed Chief Inspector Shelondra Kree which says, in part, "The assistance by the Chimera in this city is a testament to the goodness in the human heart to help one another in times of need. We thank everyone involved for doing what is right. We will mourn the loss of Jack ~ healer, hero and friend."

On a related note:

A list of clones was compared to the voters' list in South Texas. This proves, conclusively, that the vote to rejoin the United American States is not valid. Citizens, both created and naturally born, are still a part of Mexico, according to INTERPOL. There will be an investigation into whether anyone within the U.A.S. government were aware of the illegal vote.

FRIDAY, 8:30 A.M.

With the end of the largest Chimera production facilities, the potential loss of an entire species of people is great. INTERPOL legislators have agreed to ask scientists for a way of nullifying the sterilization of the Chimera. Because natural and non-birther humans have been marrying for several years now, it stands to reason they be allowed to procreate naturally.

“So, what are you going to do, now? I mean, South Texas is back together with Mexico. You are officially citizens. There’s no reason to go. Not really.”

“When I broadcast Morse’s confession so everyone in the region could hear, I put a target on my back. There are corporate sympathizers and Humans First groups who still hate our kind free in the world. If I stayed alive, I would have been looking over my shoulder for however long the rest of my life is. It’s better this way. Plus, I get this great global citizen passport.”

“Also known as an INTERPOL badge. Working for INTERPOL as a consultant is a great opportunity. And if you decide to leave them, you can still travel and help people as a healer or just relax.”

“Or even start a family, from what I’ve read.”

“Since no one knows how long Chimera live, I wonder if de-sterilization will have an adverse effect on you.”

“Not knowing is a part of being human. You do the best you can with what you have.”

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jesus Beltran II has worked in a broad range of jobs, from peer writing tutor, photographer, journalist and teaching assistant. With a certification as an emergency medical technician and nurse aide and a bachelor's degree in print journalism, as well as training as a security officer, Beltran has been allowed to gain a better understanding of the inner workings of different aspects of our world and its people.

Beltran, not feeling the need for approval from editors or publishing companies to let his works find an audience, has published his own books under the White Raven Works label. Through the greatest advancements since the Guttenberg press, computers and the Internet have allowed Beltran and other non-conformists to envision, create and distribute their creations without the hindrance of someone else's vision of worthy writing, through companies like amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com and lulu.com.

After earning his Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, Beltran plans on using what he has learned to start an online magazine, teach creative writing at the college level and/or begin working on his web series. But whatever Beltran chooses, he will continue to write and publish on his own but also wishes to continue to expand into other creative fields.