

Chapter Four, Welcome To Earth

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Log Entry Two: Day ninety-four. As I peek through my squinted eyes and see the world below my shielding hands, my senses become overwhelmed. "Irony," I say as I stand here blinded by the intense sunlight, "I'm committed to this mission on Planet Earth now."

On Planet Forty-Four, our sheltered beneath-the-dome existence in five floating, protectively-spherical-domed cities, interconnected by long, transparent tubes. Each of the four tubes is nearly ten miles long, and each domed habitation has a forty-mile diameter and height. All of it is protected from the direct light of the main sequence star we call Eridani, filtered by a deep, thick, opaque gas cloud. Even Planet Te with its M-Class red dwarf star isn't as luminous as Earth's sun. But I don't dare activate my enhanced eyes. I cannot risk being identified as a Syganoid here.

While my eyes are slow to adjust, the smells overwhelm and capture my awareness. The salty sea, mixed with arid alkalinity carried on a cool breeze. The contrasting dry and moist, battle for dominance. Each fighting to extinguish the other. Then the voices of hundreds of people walking beside me and passing me on all sides. Some are walking in the same direction as I while most are going in every other direction. The sounds of the constant stream of vehicles with their hum and a whirl of air as they speed along the paths beside the walkway. A siren squeals and screams, a horn louder still than the siren, and then three vehicles with lights flashing brighter than the sun streak past.

Like being in a trance, I stand here frozen in place except for my head which swivels in slow motion from side to side. The walkways lined with pedestrians, the roadways streaming with vehicles, the sounds of voices, the whirl of the motors, the cool breeze contrasting with the heat of the sun on my skin, the bright light illuminating it all into a single existence. The buildings too are competing to be separate and better than the rest and crave to stand out from the whole. Each has its unique color, height, and shape. Some of them are built in contrasting textures and colors while others are rigid and symmetric. Textures run the full array from soft, and smooth to rough, and coarse. Everything in The Great Starzel Republic competes not just to be recognized as unique, but wanting to dominate and take center stage of full sensory attention.

In this cacophony of sights, smells, and sounds, I couldn't help but feel trivial in a vast, pulsating machine, my purpose and significance dwarfed by the magnitude of the world around me.

Exhausted from the overwhelming scene, with sensory overload I walk toward a uniformed man. He's dressed in an orange bibbed overall with no shirt. He's otherwise well-groomed with short hair and a short beard. When he notices me walking towards him he turns his back to me. He's sweeping the pedestrian walkway beneath the trees. Clearing the leaves and picking up pet waste. I circle him to stand where he can see me.

"Could you point me in the direction for Culver City?"

Without making eye contact or giving me any body language suggesting he acknowledged me, he says, "Follow the sign toward Hollywood." Then turning his head toward the left he points with his chin, "That way."

Several meters away, and across the roadway there is a sign for Hollywood and an arrow. When there was a break in the vehicle traffic I sprint across the road and follow the arrow. The sounds and smells arise and subside every half dozen or more meters. Coffee shops, restaurants, jewelry, barbeque, chicken, bread, and more. The scent is so powerful the tongue can taste the flavors.

Signs in windows and placards on the passageway suggest various ways to fulfill a need, to better the quality and comfort.

After several hours of walking and following signs toward Hollywood, I see a sign for Culver City. The sensation of hope and excitement fills me. I've come all this way and just now, the sight of the small, worn-out, dark green background with chipped and peeled white letters -- sign, forces a smile. As I'm starting to accept the notion that my journey to recover the missing data may succeed I become aware of a very large billboard featuring two women's faces with their names typed in bold letters just below their chins. Above their heads in a vivid rainbow of colors spelling out the words, The Founding Mothers of Our Republic. Each of the women is decorated and exaggerated with facial makeup, elaborate styled, and artificial colored hair. They are too perfect in every feature, eyes bright, fake eyelashes, delightful painted-on smiles, and a healthy chemical glow. The woman on the left is named, Nancy Pelosi, and the one on the right, Karen Salmansohn. I remember Nancy as the Democratic leader of the Feminist Party in the former United States, but I don't know this other woman.

There are fewer shops and restaurants as I continue along a more narrow and less crowded walkway. The residential buildings are more frequent in this section of the city and there are few office buildings. As I continue to glance up, looking at the details of the large billboard and the two women, my shoulder collides with a woman passing me in the opposite direction.

"Oh, sorry about that. I wasn't watching where I was going. Are you alright?" I ask.

Without a word, she continues on her way. Several times she glances back over her shoulder in my direction. Her pace quickens. Then, I decide to turn and keep going. Still aware and scanning for any signs directing me to Culver City or hints of the historical reference to Banyan. There are none for several hundred meters, but then I see a large poster in the window of a store. I can recognize the woman in the poster as Karen Salmansohn from the billboard. I cross over to the store for a better look.

"Now Starring in a hit television series based on the Academy Award-winning movie of the year, of the same title, the author of How to Make Your Man Behave in 21 Days or Less Using the Secrets of Professional Dog Trainers -- Karen Salmansohn!"

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Screams. Frightened screams fill my ears as I turn to look in the direction of the sound. When I see a woman on the other side of the street being supported by another woman at her side. She struggles to stay on her feet. Several more women rush to help. The woman screams once more, her arm outstretched and finger pointing in my direction. There's no one near me. She's been frightened by me. Has she detected I'm a Syganoid?

Without another moment to waste, I turn and quicken my pace away from the gathering and the screams. At the first corner, I turn left and then run toward the next intersection. The sounds of a patrol car's siren-screams replace the woman's and they are coming closer.

That's it. They're going to execute me. But how did she know I am a Syganoid? I quickly scan my body and the attached devices but nothing looks out of place. My HUD is turned off and other than my clothing being a little odd even for Holywood, I'm at a loss for why she is screaming.

A patrol vehicle whirs past and immediately swings back around towards me.

emergency detection, heart center afferent pathways engaged

--disengage HUD--

--disengage bionics--

request overridden life preservation protocols are active

--disengage protocols--

protocols disengaged

systems shutting down

While I argue with the Neurolink and HUD interface implanted in my head and OI eyes, I've managed to outrun the high-speed patrol vehicle. Dodging and ducking down narrow alleyways and oneway avenues at speeds no human could.

What's the use of shutting every system down now? They already know what I am.

Then again, why keep up the chase? It only delays the inevitable.

I stand silent, tucked between the dingy yellow brick wall of a three-story apartment building and the dingy grass-green rubbish bin on the side of the street.

"Come out away from the building with your hands above your head," the voice barks from the patrol vehicle's megaphone.

The whir of the vehicle's diamond battery motor tells me the vehicle is parked a meter or two away on the left side of the rubbish bin. With my hands above my head, arms outstretched at thirty-seven degrees, I walk into the street and face the vehicle. Doors on both sides of the police vehicle pop open and swing over the top.

"Down on your knees. Keep your hands where I can see them." Two large men in silver uniforms emerge from the vehicle. They fix their uniforms as they stand out of the patrol vehicle. Make sure there are no wrinkles in their trousers, no untucked shirt tails, belts, and attached holsters in designated positions. They slick back the sides of their hair and then place the silver and royal blue berets over their heads. All the while grooming their perfect impression, neither took their eyes off me. Aside from their meticulous efforts for a perfect appearance, I notice these men are huge, above average height, and have evident extreme muscular development.

The one on my left walks toward me while the one on the right circles wide to come around behind. Once he's behind me says, "As slow and quiet as a fart in church, take your right hand and pull that backpack off of your right shoulder."

The strap slides off as I slip my hand underneath and back up into the air.

"That's it, big guy. Now the other side, but not so fast. I get nervous when a very fast man moves too fast. Makes me think I should slow him down. Maybe hit him over the head with a billy club to slow him down. So, go ahead and take that backpack off, nice and slow."

My arm and hand are so slow, my thoughts are focused on not one other thing. Slow!

The backpack falls off and tumbles over the back of my legs and onto the roadway.

"Well done, muscles. You don't mind if I call you muscles do you?" the patrol man standing in front of me asks.

"My name is Euler."

“Well, Muscles. What the hell are you doing running around Santa Monica unescorted, out of uniform, your hair looks like a monkey’s ass, you’re facial hair is shaved off, and what is in the backpack?”

Pain rose from my knees as the uneven, gritty paved surface of the roadway push up into the bent thin skin under my weight. I’m using my focus to push away the stabbing waves and the impulse to move. With a grimace and squint, “I’m on my way to Culver City.”

“Culver City? On foot, all the way to Culver City. What are you going to Culver City for?”

“Who,” I say.

“What the fuck do you mean who?” I cannot tell which of them is asking the questions now. I’m focused on not adjusting my legs to accommodate my pulsing pain.

“I’m not going to Culver City for anything. I’m going there to find the sage writer named, Banyan. That’s who I’m going to Culver City to find,” I say.

“Do you think we are stupid, Muscles?” The one in front of me squats down to look me in the eye while he slaps his truncheon in a slow and menacing rhythm against the palm of his right hand. “I know my ancient history. The writer called Banyan isn’t in Culver City.”

He’s wrong and I respond to help him, “The sage author, not a writer.”

“The fuck did you just say,” he squints and asks me while still slapping the baton into his palm.

“You said Banyan is a writer. Once a writer is published they are an author. Banyan published seven books. He’s no writer.”

His expression appears to ignore my help. “Another thing I know about Banyan is he’s been dead for, I don’t know exactly but something like a hundred years.”

“Yes. I didn’t mean to say I was going there to see him. I meant that I’m going there to see if I can find where he went after he left Culver City. You see, when he left Culver City, he wrote the most important code of his career. The First Priority and I need to find what I can because the beginning of The First Priority, the Arya Sangata Dharma Prayaya, is missing.”

Pain on the left side of my head shoots up and over the crown. The cool, sea breeze washed against my face as my eyes see the gritty pavement getting closer until crashing, my face feels the hot, rough surface of the road. An unconscious dream arises.

From out of the veil of blackness I see my mother’s face pushing through. Her facial features catch the light and arise then fade like the decorations of a flag shifting with the gentle but persistent wind that carries the darkness.

“Humanity is lost,” she says, “and the slow decay of their overwhelmed senses leaves people in fear, desperate, and filled with anger. Already the ninth sense of morality has vanished, and the tenth sense of love is on the brink. Something has altered the universe. The code becomes unbalanced. One of my children needs help, but I don’t know which of you is the cause.”

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The sound of voices stirs me into consciousness. I am here awake but not moving. I don’t want anyone to know I’ve regained consciousness. There’s a soft pillow surface under my back and my eighth sense tells me I’m laying inside a ten-story building. On the sixth floor about three miles from where the police knocked me unconscious. The smells of synthetic BBQ chicken fill the air and remind me of walking past several fried chicken restaurants.

"He's awake. Listening to us and pretending to be unconscious," a woman's voice says while chewing her artificial chicken. "Bring him to my courtroom in twenty minutes." She slurps the last drops of liquid from her cup. "Clean his face. No. Don't clean his face. The blood will get the television crews to give me more air time. More networks will also want in on this one. They love to see men bleeding in my court.

"Twenty minutes!" she snaps as her loud heels click in rapid, bold succession across the room and carry her out the door.

Keys rattle against the console of the paddywagon and I can sense the holographic forcefield around me fade and evaporate.

--activate basic systems and run diagnosis--

I need to check my brain implants for damage.

basic systems active

diagnostics scheduled for completion in one hour and eleven minutes

"Alright, big guy. Let's get you upright and full sensory-aware of the circumstances." A very short man stands beside the control council. "This device here in my right hand carries enough torporin to send you into a six-year coma. It's the best high and euphoric trip you'll ever experience, but I don't think it's what you want. Because you see," he pauses to laugh if only to himself, "Nobody has ever fully recovered their mental faculties after a high dose. This is what I intend to give you if you do anything other than exactly, precisely, and without hesitation when I say it. Solid my brother? Do you feel me?"

"Yes. I understand," I say.

I rise to my feet and look around. The room is well-lit from a row of windows that face east. Sunshine covers the scene beyond with trees bending and twisting limbs giving way to swift winds. The floors are covered in well-polished bamboo wood sheets about a half-inch thick on top of concrete and steel rebar. Above is a foam board drop ceiling hiding ancient materials of copper wire and aluminum ducting for ventilation with a concrete and rebar combination further above. The walls are antique metal framed and plasterboard with a thin wall of fibrous insulation board before the outer layer of heated clay bricks. There are two sets of double doors. One is on the west wall about the center of the room and the other is on the south side close to the adjoining west wall.

"Step down out of the restriction chamber and let's have a look at you. Mmmm hmmm," he walks around me as I step down from the platform.

My scans tell me there's no chance for me to escape below or above. Well, I suppose I could blast through the thick concrete but then I'd have to do it again and again to the bottom, or top. The more effortless escape would be through the windows. But I'm not being held for execution. I don't think they know I'm a Syganoid. My life isn't in any danger. Not yet, anyway.

"Those are some big muscular arms and what a powerful-looking back and chest. You are well prepared and fit. Beautiful face and hair. Those eyes of yours would make many women melt underneath you. There might be a place for you, but first things first. The judge is going to sentence you for the crime of being unescorted in public and without appropriate permission documents."

"Wait, what does that mean; unescorted?" I ask.

"Don't be daft, man. You know you can't be on the streets of Starzel without a woman's protection. What's even worse in your case is that you don't have a chipset bracelet identification from your madam. Did you take it off? Are you trying to escape? You can trust me, I'm here to help."

“Bracelet? Chipset?” I feel confused and again consider the jump through the windows.

“Listen to me, you are pretty and you have that magnificent body that will make many women fantasize about buying you, but it is a bad gamble. There are more women who would rather have you put into service and used as the filthy dog that you are. More still are demanding these days for the end of men and would rather see you executed. Now, I’m sure you don’t want to be used for building houses, serving in the military, or cleaning sewers, and I know that execution isn’t what you want either. Talk to me man. Tell me what’s going on and be honest with me. Why are you wandering the streets alone? What are you after?”

Without my HUD system operation, I can’t check his vitals and electromagnetic, and harmonic waves to see if he is truth-telling. His voice sounds sincere and his eyes never leave mine while he talks. I think he’s for real. He wants to help me.

“Can I have something to drink? I haven’t had anything to eat or drink all day.”

“Yes. Of course,” he smiles a wholesome and appreciative smile. “Just tell me your story and then I’ll give you some of that chicken or whatever it is over there. He points to the table where there are two paper sacks with a chicken logo boldly printed and several small containers and cups scattered. The sight of it all refreshes my awareness of the smell of synthetic meat that permeates the room.

“Have you ever heard of the sage author named Banyan?” I ask.

“Let’s just say I haven’t so why don’t you tell me why it’s important to you,” his facial expression remains sincere and he takes his left hand and puts it on my right shoulder.

“This might be difficult to understand, but I’m trying to repair a tear in the fabric of the universe. Banyan wrote a righteous code for humanity and his publication of The First Priority has gone missing from the files. If I cannot find it and replace the missing data, humanity will be erased from history.”

His expression wavered for a moment but regained its well-rehearsed position as quick as I could blink. “Sounds horrific, man. Still, you haven’t told me why you are here in Santa Monica. This writer named, Banyan? Do you think he’s here in the city?”

“No, he lived in Culver City. He was an Author, not a writer. Not now, of course, he’s dead. His work started there and I hope to find evidence, maybe even a relic of the writing may still be there.”

“So you’re walking through The Great Starzel Republic,” he surmises, “to get to Culver City. Where did you start out?”

“Three months and two days ago, ninety-four days in all. I took a starship from planet Te and arrived in Burbank earlier today. Can I eat something? Please.”

“Sure, sure, sure,” He repeated. “One last thing you must understand,” he hesitates as he gathers his thoughts. His head and eyes looked toward the floor as he searched for the words.

“The judge wants two things from this case. Ratings, and air time. Everything in The Great Starzel Republic hinges on ratings and air time. I can tell that you’re new to our country so I’ll tell you in the most direct way I can in the hope that I’ll make an impression on you.

“There are two ways this can go. You can cooperate with her majesty the Judge and provide entertainment and lively contesting, but respectful debate. Or, you can be a jerk and she’ll rip you apart and make you look foolish. Either way, she’ll use this case to get her algorithms to go higher. She hates synthetic food and the interest rates on her car loan and home are getting more expensive. The payments are killing her vacation dream.

“Remember, ratings mean everything. Getting real food and the best life requires a lot of airtime and quality ratings. Now, you think about that while you sit over here and eat.”

He leads me by the arm to the table where the sacks of BBQ synthetic chicken and sides wait to be consumed. Then he walks through the double doors on the west wall. Printed above the doors, "Judges' Breakroom."

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"My finger is still here on the button ready to send you off into a coma. Be a good boy and do exactly as I say. Here we go, you follow close behind me."

When I pass through the double doors we go to the right. The hallway is lined with people and their pets. Some are in paddywagons and most are standing around waiting for the Judge to start her session. The woman in black is right outside the courtroom. For a moment the emotion of relief fills my heart-center and throat, but I regain control as she's still being held prisoner. Her eyes grow wide and an expression of intensity fills her when she sees me approaching.

--how long until the diagnosis is complete--

diagnosis will complete in fifty-one minutes and fifty-one seconds

Communication with her is impossible while the diagnosis is underway. Her face transforms to express confusion as we walk past her and through the doors of the courtroom. The camera crews, booms, lights, and shape of the room look more like a production studio than any courtroom.

"We'll sit here and I'll stay with you as your court-appointed advocate," he says.

"So, you're my lawyer?"

"No, no, no," he repeated. "There are no lawyers in The Great Starzel Republic. Especially not a man's position." he laughs in a whisper of hilarious expression.

"Quiet on the set!" Shouts the producer. "Roll the credits and let the people in. Keep it quiet for the Judge's entrance. "

People swarm the studio racing one another for the best seats. The woman in black is floated into the center of the room and her chamber sinks midway to her waist into the floor. Her head is visible from the judge's elevated platform. A massive display of flowers and greenery surrounds the platform. A desk of solid stone, reds, yellows, and browns swirls and streaks the exquisite rock face. Finished off with four Persian cats, two on either corner of the floor and two on each corner on top of the judicial bench.

Lights from above and on all sides prevent shadows and the entire room seems to float within a void of illuminated white space. Contrasting shapes are defined only by the starkness of design and colors. When the timer above the door marked, Judge's Chamber reaches five seconds, the courtroom lights flash in rapid succession until it counts down to zero.

Everyone stands, the Judge's chamber doors vanish, and the spotlights that a moment ago directed golden beams on the doors now illuminate the Judge. She stands in the opening where the doors once stood closed. Her robes are purple and outlined with sparkling gold electrical waves of light energy. Her face is made up to look as if every feature was exaggerated, not human but in godlike perfection.

As she steps into the courtroom, every motion of her arms, hands, and robes exhibits grandness and elegance to grace the room. When at last she reaches her chair behind the grand stone-faced desk she faces the audience. Her eyes sweep the room from side to side lifting her gaze to those standing in the balcony area and then higher still to the ceiling where a mural of

Nancy Pelosi dressed in a purple gown is surrounded by elegant-dressed women captured in gay dance and frolic within a lush garden.

"Please be seated," she waits a moment for the sound of hundreds of people taking their seats to stop.

"Taking three minutes and twenty seconds for a commercial break!" shouts the producer. The Judge stands as if frozen in place until the commercial is complete and the producer calls out, "And we are live in three, two, one."

"Thank you for taking time out of your busy-busy-busy day to come to my courtroom for another super delicious display of justice. Not just justice but -- Women's Justice!" The people jump to their feet with applause and loud cheers. After a few seconds of the outburst, she motions for everyone to again take their seats. "Let's remember in these hallowed chambers that emotion and feelings are not the influence of women's rights and feminism. These chambers are only influenced by the natural order of The Great Republic of Starzel.

From her left to her right she scans the inner chamber. Starting with three court recorders seated at small tables and chairs and dressed in stately uniforms. She then studies the woman in black. Turning more she looks over my backpack and its contents of a few tablets and two drones, and the magic stone still wrapped in black velvet and tied with the chartreuse string which are all neatly displayed across a large folding table. Then to the right side of the chamber, she looks at me. No expression on her exaggerated fake godlike face. I wonder how anyone can take another person who is so decorated and dressed as she is with any seriousness.

"Before I begin today's trials I must cover some housekeeping rules with all of you," she strokes the cat on her left. "You're currently listening to my show on the Chamber broadcast's general station. However, once I start the trial all of the sounds you hear in your earpieces will remain. The music, audience prompts, special effects, etcetera. But you won't hear me and you won't hear the accused." Everyone moans.

"Wait a second," the Judge beams. "All you need to do to hear us is to swipe right, like my show -- click. Swipe right again, and rate me a twenty-five-star. Then you can hear everything that goes on. And believe you me, you don't want to miss today's trial. We have murder, intragalactic theft, unescorted man roaming our streets, and something very special that has never been on trial here ever before. Let's take a three-minute pause for commercials while all of you give me that twenty-five-star rating. When we come back the trial will begin.

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While the commercial break is ongoing, she points toward the woman in black with her left hand and then at me with her right hand. "This trial is about me and my ratings and nothing else. I don't give an ants sneeze about either of you. You can end up on death row and executed tomorrow, or be set free when the show is over today. It won't make any difference because I will get my ratings up today. I hope you understand me."

Before the producer calls out the countdown, she takes a long drink from the glass, puts the cat back on her desk. Then she takes her seat and glances at her reflection in a hand mirror from the desktop. She smiles warmly at her reflection, sets the mirror down, and looks into the camera as the producer with his fingers outstretched above his head and says, "Three, two, one."

Perhaps it was an oversight, or perhaps it was purposeful, but I have no earpiece to listen to the show. I'm live and between myself and the woman in black, we are the show. Still, I can hear the sound from the earpiece the little man next to me wears. There is mood music, audience

dubbed-in noises, and occasional sirens, whoops, and whistles toned at random levels. All to make the audience here and at home perceive reality in an altered and artificial experience.

My mind wanders back in time many years before when my mother and I took a trip to the nature dome.

The fields of wild grass and flowers seemed to stretch out before us and go on forever. The distant mountains with snow-covered peaks and the cerulean-colored sky outside the dome. Now and then as the thick clouds above thinned out and then thickened again, I could see the otherwise transparent dome that protects us from the deadly gaseous atmosphere of Planet Forty-Four.

"It's easy to forget what is real and what is material in our physical forms," she said.

"Yes. I see it too Mom," I said. "The air we breathe and the domed habitats are not real. But, then again. They must be real or we wouldn't exist. I'm confused now. What is real, Mom?"

"There is one truth to this universe," she took my hand and laughed a sly laugh. "If you listen to your ninth sense of awareness. The sense that knows you know and the part of your thoughts that is aware of you being aware of the awareness. Then you should ask yourself who is being aware. In this physical form, as a human and even as a Syganoid we cannot identify any more layers to the self than this. That awareness of being aware cannot be observed any further. The one observing is the universe in all of us. One consciousness disguised as many individuals. We each have unique experiences but only one shared consciousness. That is the only thing that is real. Everything else is an illusion, temporary, and can only exist in the fleeting present moment. Even a slap in the face is an illusion. Gone in an instant. The only thing that never changes, and never ends is consciousness. We are simply observers of consciousness. Like the glass dome that holds life within it. One day the dome will crack and life inside it will transition. Consciousness will still remain unchanged. Wakeful, aware, and observing as The First Priority provides."

The trusted advocate nudges me with his shoulder and I slip away from the memory and back to the present moment.

"Can you hear me Eulər? Asked the Judge.

"Yes, Mom," I say.

The courtroom explodes with laughter, hoots, whistles, and hollers while I realize what I've said. I steady my eyes on the Judge as I maintain my composure. The sign above the Judge's desk flashes in rapid tempo, "SILENCE." After several seconds, her courtroom goes quiet.

"Well, I wish I could say I'm flattered."

Again the room explodes with laughter, but she raises her hands and motions as if she were pushing the audience's enthusiasm back and downward.

"Mother? Is that who you are daydreaming about, your Mother?"

"Yes. I'm sorry if I wasn't fully present. I am now."

Through tight squinted eyes, her head at a slight tilt to the right she looks at me and analyzes how to respond. "Before I delve into your thoughts about your mother, I'm going to have the clerk read the charges and introduce the defendants for this case. It will be in your best interest to stay focused and listen."

With the motion of her hand as if casting a spell from the end of a magic wand, swirls, and points to the middle of the courtroom's inner circle. A meter-squared space of the floor opens and rising up through the opening is a woman decorated in sequins. Stage lights illuminate her with beams of gold, tyrian, and violet. The scent of lavender is pumped into the courtroom and through his earpiece, I can hear the sound of trumpets and harps. Then, once fully two meters above the inner circle on her raised platform, the gold and royal purple spotlights illuminate upward over her and onto the ceiling mural of Nancy Pelosi's image.

"The Great Republic of Starzel requests our lady of honor, the supreme Judge and protector of our Feminist Society to rule over this case of heinous treacherous acts. Acts of terrorism. Two of our undercover border patrol customs agents working from Planet Te have been murdered. They were doing their jobs and posing as call girls working at the transportation depot to protect our great republic when they were brutally murdered. I enter these images into the records."

Several images of the two dead prostitutes who had attacked me in Rupirah's home are shown in a floating three-dimensional holographic display for the judge and the audience. Their mostly nude and twisted corpses are captured in many images from different angles. The faint sounds of an astonished audience and solum music emerge from my advocate's earpiece.

"These two suspects," the woman's finger points stabbing blows at me and the woman in black, "were reported as being seen with our now deceased, brave, and heroic customs officers in the moments before their murder. Though there are no fingerprints, no DNA match, and no video to prove their guilt, The Great Republic of Starzel has every confidence in our Judge to find truth and provide justice for the protection and freedom of women in our Feminist Society.

"Now, without further delay, this trial is called to order."

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With the bright flash of a lightning strike and the loud clap of thunder, the courtroom goes dark and the golden lights now illuminate the Judge. In an instant the normal lighting of the room returns. The court announcer is gone, the raised platform she stood upon is gone as well. The sound of suspense, pulses, and hums from the earpieces, otherwise the room is silent. I reach for the pitcher of water and fill my glass halfway. Then I fill my advocate's glass to the brim. After setting the pitcher back in its place I drink from my glass and finish it in one long refreshing act.

"Custom would have me start with the woman in black," the Judge says while flipping through her tablet. "I don't want to dishonor the woman otherwise. So, bring her up so we can have a look at the murderous thing she is."

Not a sound was made as the woman in black, held in place by the energy beams, is raised higher and level with the floor. Her restraining module rotates and the audience whispers and soft voices begin discussing her fate.

"Guilty of murder," the Judge states with a raised voice of predilection. "Simple to decide. We can all tell just by the way she looks and the clothes she wears. This is what a murderess looks like. Her bare face, natural fingernails, no hair color or style, and plain clothes do not properly display her feminine form. Nothing about her other than her sex is feminized at all. But, still, let's give her a chance to speak. Perhaps there's something more here than meets my careful eyes.

“Why did you kill our customs agents? What sort of horrible animal are you that allows you to murder two perfect and innocent officers of The Republic in cold blood?”

The woman in black responds in a quiet, quivering voice, “I didn’t murder them.”

“You caved in her head,” the bloody telltale image of the woman illuminates in a hologram on center stage. “Then you broke the other agent’s neck!” The holograph image changes and then alternates between the two dead bodies. “Everyone here knows it was you who did it. Confess and let me move on with the sentencing.”

“That’s a commercial break for six minutes!” The producer shouts. Stagehands rush to adjust the holding platforms and move the table with my backpack, drones, and the magic stone. The Judge is swarmed with makeup, hair, and costume hands. Refreshments are offered to the audience like the hotdog vendors at a sports arena, “soft drinks, snacks, v-waters!”

“We are back in four, three, two,” the producer swirls his arm over his head to signal we are rolling and live. Then he points at the Judge.

“There was another man in the room. He killed Rupirah and when I walked into the apartment he was going to kill me. Your brave and vigilant agents tried to save me. He killed them and then he ran out of the room. I was scared out of my wits and in shock. I couldn’t move and when the androps arrived and retained me, I tried to explain but they abused me with Tasers and held me against my will with lasers. One of them tore the back of my pantsuit. I need to be freed and made whole again. I was only doing my job and the next thing I know, I’m witnessing brutal murders, being abused by the galactic authorities, detained for thirty-two days on a space transporter, and now I’m accused of murder? Your honor I ask for restitution and compensation.”

Loud laughter fills the courtroom. Not the fake sounds pumped in from the earpiece, but true laughter from those present. The Judge uses her tablet to change the message on the display monitors scattered around the courtroom to read, “SILENCE.” When the room is quiet, “Should I bring in the lie detectors?” The room explodes with voices, “YES! Strip her down and find the truth!” Again the Judge illuminates the monitors and adds the sound of a warning siren. Above her platform, the ratings flash as the Judge’s numbers press above four-point-four. A court recorder catches the Judge’s attention and points toward the rating monitor.

“Savage,” she snickers. “There isn’t anyone in the room who believes you. They all want you stripped bare and wired up to the truth monitor. Your humiliation and shame will be known. What do you say now? Are you still innocent?”

Before the woman in black could respond, the audience was gripped in silent anticipation, “There was another man there. Sadly the Interstellar Authorities murdered him on the transport ship.” The cameras, the audience eyes, the Judge, the advocate next to me, and even the woman in black all turned to look at me. Filling my glass, half full, I motion with the pitcher toward the producer, “Cheers. Do we need another commercial break?”

“How dare you interrupt my courtroom and my interrogation!” The Judge snarled through a tight jaw. “You will be lucky if you ever see daylight again when I’m done with you.”

The advocate pushes his chair back a bit and stands, “May I approach your honor?”

“You cannot. Say what you have to say from there,” she says.

“Why does he have a lawyer and I don’t have a lawyer?” asks the woman in black.

“When did I lose control of my fucking courtroom?” the Judge spits. Sirens ring, and from her tablet, she directs the monitors to read, “Order in The Court!” “If one more person speaks out of turn I will bring in the androps.

“He does not have a lawyer. The Great Republic of Starzel does not have lawyers in courts of law. The law isn’t a debate or a guideline to be argued about. He is a man with no

identification, no marks of any training, and men are not allowed to be unescorted. The advocate you see sitting beside him, now standing there waiting to say something to me before you interrupted my court, is a highly trained man with awarded privileges who is escorting the criminal.

“You also have no identification and my report from the Galactic and Interstellar authorities tells me they cannot find any records for either of you. Who the fuck are you?” Her face leads her extended head and stretches forward with her fake eyelashes, as she leers at the woman in black.

There is no chance for either of us to survive if they wire her up to the truth machine. They will discover her Syganoid implants and Neurolinks. She’ll be immediately executed and then they will suspect me of being a Syganoid as well. I have to change the momentum. My eyes catch the ratings monitor now approaching four-point-nine.

Desperate and running out of options, I interrupt again,

“If you would allow my advocate to speak those ratings will probably jump above five.”

@@@29@@@33

--open stealth communication module--

__HUD systems are currently inoperable during diagnostics__

--time remaining for diagnostics to complete--

__there are forty-seven seconds estimated to complete system diagnostics__

There may not be forty-plus seconds to save her. I’ll need a further distraction. Think of something, quick.

Meanwhile, the Judge looks up to see the live ratings number, up .003 in the last ten seconds, now at 4.92779. Her otherwise composed, tight lips show the faintest raised corner of a smile. “Right, that’s almost a record for this courtroom,” she spouts.

The audience gasps and then bursts into applause as the truth-telling chamber is brought into the room. It’s carried in by two uniformed men with perfect hair and matching beards. The uniforms are tight, bright pink, and the logo Her Majesty’s Guard, is boldly printed across their muscular chests. The pair look like bodybuilders, and their muscular arms and legs are fully exposed, well-oiled, and bulging with every step as they march with the machine toward center stage.

__diagnostics are now complete__

--are there any system or component malfunctions--

__would you like to read the diagnostics report__

--no--

--tell me if there are systems or component malfunctions--

__a complete list of systems and status is available in the diagnostics report__

__a complete list of components and status is available in the diagnostics report__

__would you like to read the diagnostics report__

--fuck me--

--yes--

-- Open the report--

__initiating HUD systems__

--cancel HUD systems initiation--

__canceled__

--initiate stealth mode HUD--
 stealth mode protocols initiated
 HUD initiated in stealth mode
 diagnostics report is located in lower center line nine.
 would you like to open the report
 --open the report--
 there are not enough energy cells available to open files of this size in stealth mode protocol
 there are unused energy sources available in stealth protocol
 would you like to boost systems energy through a hacked energy source
The file must be huge, there must be a lot of damage. But, I don't have time for this and it seems like I have some systems capability in stealth.
 --open communication with nearby Syganoid--
 one Syganoid nearby
 communication request accepted
 →It's about time Euler←
 →listen we don't have much time. I need you to cooperate with this Judge. Stop trying to make her mad. She can ruin you and kill you←
 --yes yes yes whatever I have this under control--
 →like you had those agents under control in Rupirah's home←
 →casper warned me about your stubborn, brash, seat-of-the-pants acts←
 →okay. here's the thing. no matter what else. stay seated, stay calm. cooperate←
 communication ended
 --reconnect communication--
 communication request denied

Confused by her reluctance, and words, and now feeling a sharp pain in my left arm I reach with my right hand to massage the pain. The floor below the woman in black opens and the restraining device with her still held inside falls through the floor in the flash of an instant. The loud crash of the machine thunders through the courtroom. Laser beams of deep blues and greens flash up through the opening of the floor and scorch the roof. Burning and smoldering the mural. One wayward laser hit Nancy's figure in the forehead direct between the eyes. In a few seconds, it was over.

For the first time in my life, I followed the instructions from someone else. I stayed in my chair just like the woman in black told me to. The audience was bustling with everyone's attention on the gaping, singed, and smoldering hole in the floor. The two muscular men sat the truth-telling machine down and then cautious as a moth, leaving the cocoon for the first time, approach the opening to peer over the edge.

"Keep recording!" shouts the producer. "Get a camera on her Majesty's Guard and I want tight coverage on their faces when they look over the edge."

"That woman is dead for sure!" says the Judge. "There will be a full investigation into this mishap. I will find out how this floor collapsed and whoever is responsible for this . . . well let's just say he will be punished!"

"Justice will not be interrupted or swayed by acts of terrorism. I still have one pundit in this trial who I will rectify with a verdict today."

"That sentence is not correct," I say while sipping on another glass of water. Then I turn my head toward the audience, "I mean, does anybody know what the Judge just said?"

If looks could kill. Her eyes would have vaporized me into a puff of smoke as I finished saying it. The advocate beside me sat down and then stood back up with a tight curled fist he strikes me across the jaw.

"You will not speak to the Judge or any woman with that sarcasm. We, men, are honorable and never question what a woman says. I will beat you bloody if you ever speak like that again," he says to me.

"She's gone," one of the guards says. "The woman in black isn't down there." He points down where the restraining machine lies decimated and smoldering.

"That was awesome!" the producer cries out. Followed by a few hoots and wow we wow before he says, "Cut for commercials. We've got some real big-money companies wanting to buy commercials now. So this might be a ten-minute break. Let's get the stage cleared and the cameras back in position. Let's move it, people!"

Without hesitation, I pushed back from the table, stood over the little man, and pat him on the head. "Brave man. Very brave." Then I walked over to the hole in the floor to take a look at what lies below. As I pass by the table where my backpack, two drones, and the destiny stone are, I snatch the stone and store it in my vest pocket. When I see the calamity below I open communication.

--open communication to Syganoids near me--

__there are no Syganoids nearby__

--are there problems with systems and components in the diagnostics report--

__there are not enough energy cells available to open files of this size__

__there are unused energy sources available in stealth protocol__

__would you like to boost systems energy through a hacked energy source__

@@@30@@@34

"This full police report in front of me tells me that you were seen outside the theater on Wilshire Boulevard staring through the window. A woman across the street saw you and screamed out of fear. You didn't drop to the ground and assume a face-down neutral position. Instead, you turned toward her and looked directly at her. She screamed a second time and then you took off running.

"Let's start with a few simple questions. Do you know that facing a woman and looking directly at her is an act of criminal violence?"

The Judge taps her long, pointed, bright purple, phony nails on the wired-for-sound and amplified benchtop.

"No. I didn't and it wasn't violent."

"Watch your words, man," the advocate hisses through clenched teeth.

"I see," she pauses. "What were you looking at through the window?"

"Nothing. I mean, I wasn't looking through the window at all. I was looking at the poster that was displayed in the window. It was something about training men by using the same techniques used for training dogs. Something like that."

"Of course. It is a very popular book and they made it into a movie, and now they made it into a weekly sitcom for television. It has become so popular that the writer's ratings went through the upper atmosphere and now her granddaughter is the President of our Great Republic of Starzel.

"So, what do you think of the poster?" She asks me.

“Truth?”

“Of course, the truth. I’m the Judge and you’re in court. What else?” she smirked and the audience burst out in laughter.

When the courtroom was silent again I said, “If you change just one word in the title I can imagine there would be an exact opposite response to her ratings.” I stayed quiet forcing her to have to ask.

“Come on with it then. What one word would you change?” She sucked her teeth.

“Take the word men out and make it women. How to train women in twenty-one days with the techniques used by professional dog trainers.”

“Kill Him!” A woman somewhere in the audience shouts.

“Yes. Destroy the filthy beast!” Cried another and then another until the entire courtroom was filled with outraged cries for my immediate execution.

Fury mixed with tension and soon the courtroom was filled with angry voices. The Judge looked up to see the ratings which have surpassed the target mark. The monitor beside the ratings shows all stations in the broadcast band were now watching her courtroom. As she turns back to look at the audience I can see the glimmer in her eyes. She allows the chaos for a few more seconds and then illuminates the word, "SILENCE" on all monitors and sounds the sirens.

When the doors around the outer walls open and the Androps come through, two at a time in each of the five doorways, the audience returns to quiet and attentive. “There are many reasons our Great Republic adopted the rule of law. Perhaps no one reason more telling or important than this display taking place live inside my court today.” Her attention turns to me as well as each camera one by one.

“Do you understand why they call for your death?” she asks.

“No.” I restrain from explaining how the human condition has evolved an intuitive disdain for life.

“There are four beliefs in our population regarding men. The most popular being that men are a utility best used for entertainment and slave labor. This group of women wants men trained to fight to the death. They love to watch cage fights, kickboxing, and similar sports where men beat one another bloody with their bare hands. For the men too old and too weak for fighting, they are trained to build houses, and streets, serve in the military, or be placed in prisons where they can provide the sexual demands of the stronger criminals. The latter of which provides popular television and high ratings for late-night shows but I’ve never watched. I don’t enjoy syndicated rape shows, but that’s just my personal choice.

“The next largest group of women believe men are too dangerous to be allowed out in public. They say men are like pitbull terriers and even with proper training, rules of law, regulations, and the like, they think our world will never be safe until we ban men from the planet. They panic in fear at the presence of a man. They feel powerless and threatened. Fear is a terrible emotion and one no woman should ever have to experience.”

The sounds of cheers and applause fill the room for a moment. Silence comes when the androps flash yellow beams into the crowd and announce thunderous words of warning. All went quiet.

“Please control your emotions in my court. None of us want to experience the heavy hand of these cybernetic patrols.” The Judge pleads before continuing.

“You see, Eulər, this is where my decision concerning how to deal with you becomes a choice.”

“Me?” I question with a voice of contempt for the human lack of sense for true justice. “You told me that all you cared about were the ratings. I’ve helped you achieve the highest rating and now the entire world is sitting in front of their televised device watching you. You should allow me to be free and on my way.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I see the advocate take a swing at my jaw. I caught his fist and throw him backward from his chair. Before the androps moved, and before the small man could leap to his feet, she screamed, “Stop!”

“This will not go on one more instant. You will be respectful of this courtroom and the laws or I will have these androps finish you right here. You have the choice to sit quiet or I end your life. What will it be?”

As my eyes scan the room I see their hungry eyes. They want my death to fulfill their desire for a false sensation of superiority. My sense of instinct to raise my HUD and initiate extreme survival protocols rise. It would be the right thing to do, but I stop myself. Remembering that the end of humanity ends life for the kuudere too. The universe would erase our history. My mission to find the missing data and restore the code is more important than proving Syganoid superiority.

For a moment I twist mother's ring on my finger and then I feel the destiny stone inside my pocket. Looking at the Judge, and then I fold my hands on top of the table, “I will sit here quiet, and listen for the judgment.”

“This is the only warning I allow you.” She says.

@@@31@@@35

Before the final decision is made, the judge flips through her tablet. I imagine she’s taking time to calibrate her thoughts. She’ll want to refresh and regain control of her performance act before the cameras are back live. I watch as she’s getting herself into character for the show. She motions for the camera and the lights to illuminate her face.

For all I know she could be booking her vacation, in any case, the cameras are back live.

“The third group is much smaller than the first two, but it is the most powerful group,” she says while picking up a cat and petting its long thick fur. “Because this group of Ladies is aligned and not at all divided on the issues that are most important to them. When they vote, they vote as a united society and that has great power in the effect on ratings. They call themselves The Ladies. They want men to admire them, worship them and romance is their dream life. The Age of Chivalry with Knights in shining armor stir their libido. They want men trained to be puppets for women to play with. They want handsome, well-groomed, and perfectly behaved men at their feet.

“You have many qualities for this group with your fine chiseled shoulders, chest, back, and arms. I could see there would be many women who might choose to have you under their control. You would do well as a servant in their harem of boy toys to play with and torment.

“Still, with all those muscles you would also be a good choice for cage fighting. There are many women here today who would enjoy watching you get the life pounded out of you. This brings me to a decision point. A choice awaits. Is The Great Starzel Republic better served training you for the military role of killing and death, or for romance and emotional torment?”

“There is one more question I have to ask of you and then I will decide your fate. Your advocate tells me that you told him about a special mission that you’re on. Perhaps it is time for

all of us to hear it from you rather than me repeating what he has told me. I want you, Eulər, to tell the world about this grand mission. Tell us why you are going to Culver City.”

Confident as the day I left Planet Forty-Four my heart center swells with pride for the salvation of humanity. I stand and face the nearest camera.

“There is a rather large and important data set missing in the universe code that binds human existence to the evolution of time-space reality. The code itself was defined and later the document was written by the sage named Banyan. His writings were completed when he lived in what is today called Culver City. I am going there in hopes of finding a copy or copies of his work and from there I can repair the code and replace the missing data. If not, I hope to find some clues for where the code may otherwise be located.”

While I take my seat, the advocate pats the back of my hand and gives me a nod of approval. But, before I can scoot my chair back to the table, the audience erupts with laughter. Pet dogs howl and bark too. She doesn’t wait for the room to fall quiet as she had before, now she speaks in a laughing voice to show her solidarity with the room.

“That is a very important mission, isn’t it?” She leans across her desk, plucks the cat from the right corner of the bench into her arms, and laughs with the crowd working the room with her eyes and posture before turning in seriousness to look at me. “You’ve done a great amount of acting and performing for me and helping with the ratings, but now I want you to stop acting and tell me the truth. Why are you walking through my Republic without escort, without documentation, and without an identity? Truth, Eulər, truth!”

“What I have said is the truth and it is, as you say, a very important mission.”

Once more she motions with her arms and hands for the audience to quiet.

“You are some kind of fucking idiot,” the advocate whispers.

The sound of the stone head gavel slamming against the granite gavel block reverberates through the courtroom like a thunderclap in a silent sky. It is as clear and as certain as her final words. “Take him to the training center in Santa Monica. Process him into the general population of the facility. I give him forty days of training and if no woman claims him in forty days, bring him back to my courtroom and I’ll consider his suitability for the fight ring. He doesn’t deserve to die with honor in the military. Let the viewers watch him die in the caged fighting ring instead.”

The gavel struck the stone again, but this time, its sound seemed to meld with the screams that filled the air. The true nature of my mission became obscured in the darkness, and the hope that had once burned within me flickered, threatened by the encroaching nightmare. My head pounding in pain from the swing of the policeman’s baton hours ago. My skin feels brittle where the dried blood covers my ear and the side of my neck.

The androps, no longer programmed for crowd control, approached with cold, unfeeling intentions, their robotic forms now taking on a menacing aura. They seized me with force, their metallic grip biting into my flesh.

The camera crews, instead of breaking down the set, turned their attention to me with a sinister glint in their eyes. The once well-lit room transformed into a dimly lit chamber, casting eerie shadows on the walls. The holographic projections shifted from serene landscapes to distorted images of destruction and despair.

Inside the portable holding cell, the comfortable seat transformed into an unforgiving, metal contraption designed to restrain and subdue. The hum of machinery took on a cold, mechanical rhythm, echoing the heartlessness of the world outside. The beeps that filled the air were sharp and unforgiving, reminiscent of a countdown to an inevitable confrontation.

Disappointment mingled with confusion as I realize the society I find myself in is a twisted manifestation of feminist ideals taken to an extreme. The judge's gavel strike reverberated through the chamber, but instead of justice, it carried a sinister sense of control.

"I'll be going with you," says the advocate. "I'll make sure you are processed and transitioned."

The electromagnetic beams inside the paddywagon grab my arms and legs and I am spread eagle within the ultra violet-colored traction beams.