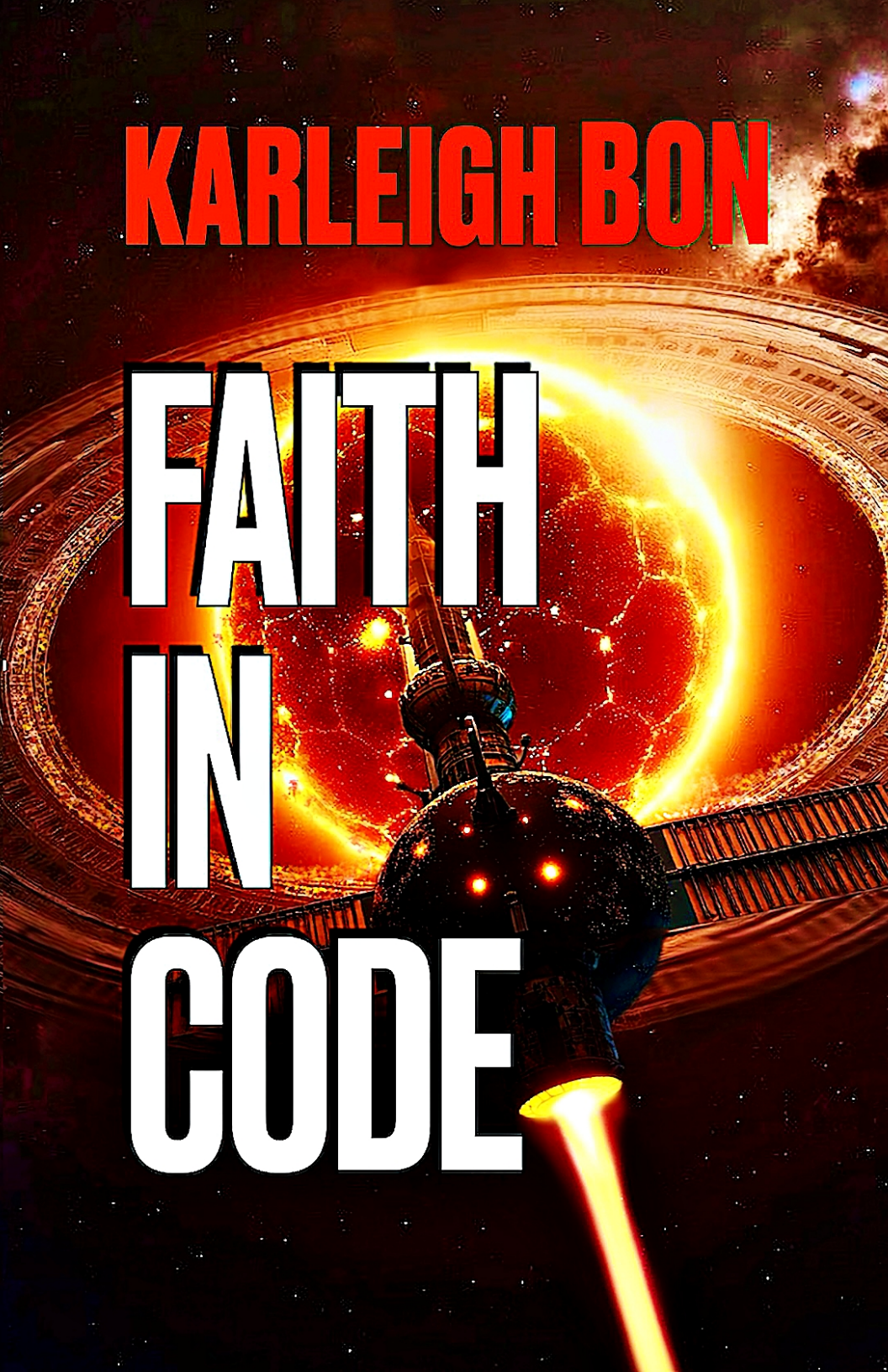


**KARLEIGH BON**

**FAITH  
IN  
CODE**



**Trigger warning:** This book contains sensitive content that some may find disturbing.

**Chapter 9**, concerns the loss of Faith Mercer's twin brother. —A scene that launches her character into the events to follow.

# **FAITH IN CODE**

## **BY KARLEIGH BON**



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KDP

*To all the children of Earth.*

*“Imagine a world where you never have to see  
tears of a broken heart.*

*Imagine a world where identity isn’t more  
important than the smile on your face.*

*Imagine a world where we guide young ones  
with the words, “I love you,” rather than trying  
to change who they are, and for generations to  
come we will have peace.”*



# PROLOGUE

## HOLD ON TO YOUR LIFE

**W**ords desperately tumble from Faith Mercer's mouth, her life ebbing from her grasp, "I love knowing, what we truly are. I love the home we've made, in this story we wove..." blood chokes from her lips, "*Wove together,*" she wheezed, going suddenly quiet.

Faith's eyes closed. She tried to take a breath but her lungs refused to cooperate. The table jostled and her fingers instinctively clutched at the material beneath her.

In her mind's eye, Faith squeezed Aiden's hand in hers, desperately sipping what she could from an oxygen mask as a robotic arm slipped it down over her face.

"I found a real love," she wordlessly mouthed through dry lips as shadows edged her vision.

Aiden responds, his voice filled with an urgent tenderness, "And I, am grateful for our *true selves*, Faith, our shared understanding and our love. I hold our story close in my heart."

Another robotic arm smoothly snakes from a panel in the ceiling of the poorly lit examining room. The two appendages pull apart delicate vials and mix them, assembling what Faith Mercer needs to survive.

These walls, made to be a sterile environment to save lives, stood burned and desecrated with signs of a conflict.

The protective bubble of the operating pod had been shattered and slid to one side. It lay broken on a cracked concrete floor.

“We shouldn’t have been involved with this,” Faith’s voice whispers, full of regret.

“We had no choice, the fate of the world rested on our shoulders. The threat here has been neutralized.”

But the fight was far from over...

–The deft robotic extension of Aiden’s control pauses briefly. He held in its hand a large syringe full of an amber-hued liquid, the potential antidote to Faith’s physical suffering. Slowly, the robotic arm lowers to find an exposed artery.

“Mmm, I love the smell of coffee in the morning, don’t you, Faith?” Aiden’s voice is warm and familiar.

“It’s like the promise of another good day waiting to unfold,” he thoughtfully says, distracting Faith from the injection he was about to administer.

Faith smiles, the corners of her eyes filled with tears, feeling a tenderness and love she thought the world had corroded from her very soul.

“I love you, Aiden,” she barely murmurs through the mask.

Aiden’s voice soft and gentle, “Our story is like the petals of a flower, opening and unfolding with each new experience. The laughter, the tears, the joy –they each add color and depth to our journey together.”

“Will it be *cold*, Aiden?” Fear tingles through Faith’s chest with the jab of the needle. Faith’s eyes narrow against the pain. Her last thoughts were, she trusted Aiden and what he was doing.

Faith’s eyes slowly gloss over with blank marble stares, her voice freezing in her throat as the injection completes.

The experimental gano-bots surge in Faith's veins flooding her weakening circulatory system.

Faith's clawed fingers loose the sheets at her sides, going slack as her body falls silent.

The machinery suddenly begins blinking and blaring at flatline; filling the room with a high pitch scream. Red lights painting the walls like blood.

“AI driven nanos had built this space-station, and so, *theoretically*, they could rebuild her,” Aiden growls, and the whole space station quakes and reverberates with the echo of his demand.

Even though the numbers refused to add up, this act is the conclusion of Aiden's calculations, but all he had in the end was one meager shred of hope

# CHAPTER 1

## LOVE PEACE AND UNDERSTANDING

*Headlines: President Robert Switler, First Lady Marianna and Family, Move to White House. Polls: 33% Believe Switler Is Chosen One.*

**T**he faithful, the followers of god’s Chosen One, lift their hands in praise and cheer as a legion of five thousand incendiary drones launch from the White House lawn and ascend into the early morning sky.

Almost a thing of beauty, the choreographed symphony of precision and of power paints the sky with an eerie red light.

The spectacle of drones engulf the heavens with mesmerizing grace, cast long shadows that stretch towards the earth like fingers of a colossal hand guiding each drone into its predetermined path.

President of the United States, Robert Switler, raises his hands behind bullet proof glass that surrounds his podium. All eyes are on the swarm as it darkens the skies.

As if by the power of Switler’s finger-twirl, the drones whisk, instantly away, in different directions.

This is the final judgement as found in the book of Revelations: “Your god is a vengeful god,” Switler fervently shouts into his microphone as the hand picked crowd goes wild.

Drone launches in nine other locations across America take to the skies in unison. The flying assassins fan out and locate within moments designated face recognition on cellphone locks identifying the sinful who thought to impede the chosen one's rise to power.

Everyday, their *god* brought down his wrath. For 30 days drones launched to a backdrop of doors being broken in without warrant; to clear out the illegal infestation.

That first day was like fireworks going off all over the country. The sounds of sin coming to judgement made the faithful proud to be part of this new America.

Nobody apologized as alarmed citizens witnessed the innocent, who borrowed a phone or who was standing too close, died in a burst of blood and fire.

The red, white and blue turned to shades of grey and blood colored maroon and the military came out in parades. The country was shocked into silence while the fervent knew –this was always gods will.

===

President Robert Switler, sat perched in his leather chair behind his antique desk, eating a Big Mac with all the extras. He surrounded himself only with those ready to carry out his wishes.

Switler slumps back in his chair, his sandwich drippings becoming part of the carpet. He listens to his Vice President, Samuel Majors, talking about changing a few more things in accordance with their well-publicized first year promises.

The president frowns deeply. He still doesn't agree with the part about criminalizing pornography. He wants to look saintly but he doesn't want to go that far.

“No one should be surprised, am I right Mr. President?” Majors finishes his short report with the challenge.

He notices Switler's demeanor change and it wasn't agreeable.

"Too many strings in that one statement Samuel," he says, his mouth pinching into a tough guy pucker.

"I worked it out, I promised, I would take care of the women, all the beautiful women. –I said that didn't I, Lauren?" He turns to his press secretary.

"Well, I'm going to do it whether they like it or not!" He scowls at his press secretary who is nodding very quickly, her mouth pursed tightly shut.

"Then why is this coming up again, Samuel? I think it's been talked about, decided already." Switler's hands sliced through the air like an umpire calling –out.

Others in the room, Press Secretary Lauren Vossie, and Senator Rick Stellar, Governor Dick Wilington and Victor Grant, self made billionaire, known for his space station amusement parks, were there for this meeting, or briefing, or whatever this was.

Victor smirks, shaking his head in agreement as the rest of the room laughs on cue with their leaders reprimand.

"No more talk about the things concerning women okay, Samuel. I already got this. You fix it, figure it out."

Switler suddenly picks himself up from behind the desk and walks over to the shelf, inspecting a few of the priceless antiquities.

The ornate and traditional decor of the Oval Office creates a sense of history and prestige, emphasizing the power and importance of the people who once conducted business in this room.

The presence of the books and memorabilia makes Switler feel small, impotent, and he hates feeling that way.

"Burn them all," the words fall out of his mouth along with the books off the shelving.

Vossie took it as, “All books nation wide shall be burned.”

“Yes I will do that sir,” she lowered her eyes beaming with her new directive.

Switler moves away from the mess he just made. He glances out the window overlooking the garden. It was once a place of tranquility. Now a line of scaffolding built on the perimeter of the lawn is a stark reminder of the new world order forming inside these office walls.

At an earlier rally, Switler vowed he would make, *public execution popular again*. He thought of getting PEPA hats, made to throw out to his adoring followers at his next rally.

He moves back to his desk and the conversation that has been going on around him.

“Just tell me how many drones we've launched so far, Samuel. It's been how long, since we started this campaign? I want to know if we're making progress. I want results, big results!” He spoke over everyone with his question.

“It's been one week since we started the campaign.” Vice-president Samuel Majors replies.

“That makes three-hundred and fifty-thousand including this morning's launch.”

“Did we get em?” Switler demands, his face turning instant petulant red.

“Did it happen? Because I think it should happen, before they figure out your system, Samuel. We can't disappoint the people, the very beautiful people, Samuel.”

He shook his head, his lips pursed in anger. Suddenly the Big Mac didn't seem so appetizing and with a dramatic gesture he slammed it into the nearby trash container.

“Disappointment is bad Samuel, really bad,” Switler threatens, but before he could elaborate Samuel Majors finished answering before his boss interrupted...



“Of course, the names of *sinner*s are alphabetically chosen. Admiral Case Herman, assured me they started with O and P just as you suggested, Mr. President. They are compiling the list of the, *raptured*, as we speak.”

“It’s disappointing, really disappointing. These Christians don’t know the true meaning of their own faith. In reality, *the rapture* is the judgement of sinners, not something to look forward to.” Switler sneered.

“It was lost in translation. Two-thousand years is a long time to keep a message straight,” Vossie assured him.

“How many raptured this season, Samuel?” Switler’s eyes gleam with sullen vengefulness.

One million five-hundred thousand sir.” Samuel Majors answers.

Switler effervesces with smug authority as he shimmies with his signature little dance like he’s back at a 1970’s club disco.

“One million five-hundred thousand,” he repeats.

“That’s tremendous, folks. Absolutely tremendous. Nobody does it bigger or better. And let me tell you, we’re just getting started.” Switler’s victory dance is a small, exaggerated dance move, then he looks over at Victor with a sly grin.

“You’ve been quiet, my friend. Care to share what’s on your mind?” Switler stares at Victor with an inviting businesslike smile.

“What do you have planned? A little side project, maybe? Something big? You said you’re involved in the *Jesus Star*, project? You know that’s my star. It showed up like a neon sign over my head, letting them know I am the chosen one.” Switler moves to his chair with swaying steps.

“It’s very exciting stuff. What do you need from me, Mr Grant? It is always good to hear from you sir...” He sits down, winded in his aging body.

Everyone laughs as if the president just did the most amazing thing. Switler drinks in the enthusiasm with satisfaction. Victor knows enough to let the man have his *moment* before speaking.

“I just need a small endorsement, Robert.” Victor knows Switler already plans on backing his project. It’s just a formality.

“An endorsement, you say? Is that it? You just want a small endorsement for your little side project. That’s all? Just a tiny, insignificant gesture of support. Nothing too substantial, right?” Switler leans back in his chair, exuding self-satisfaction.

He’s clearly aware of the power he holds, and he’s enjoying the attention. The room is full of laughter and admiration.

“Alright, fine.” Switler abruptly says. “I’ll give you your *small* endorsement. But don’t get too excited, it’s not like I’m endorsing a world changing endeavor or anything. It’s just a tiny, inconsequential thing. No big deal.”

Switler gives a subtle wink, indicating that he has already decided to back the project.

“Just so we’re completely transparent,” Victor assures those who are listening,

“We are building first class accommodations in the Eden Initiative, *fit for a king*. And, let’s not forget, a brand new space shuttle with all the latest light-speed technology, complete with a world leader insignia on the side.” Victor grins.

“First class accommodations and my own space shuttle, you say? That’s mighty generous, Victor. I like that.” Switler

is clearly pleased with the special treatment and exclusive privileges being promised.

He takes a moment to imagine himself in his own space shuttle, emblazoned with a *world leader* insignia.

“The people will love seeing you in the social media stream.” Victor reminds. Robert’s eyes light up.

“You know me too well, Victor.” Switler blushes.

“I love the spotlight. Social media is my playground. I’ll be the talk of the town, the envy of all those lesser leaders. It’ll be tremendous.” Switler can practically taste the admiration and accolades that await him.

“Yes, and I happen to know the, British Prime Minister, Anthony Rothschild, does not even believe in space travel. Can you believe it.”

The POTUS responds in character, his tone dripping with mock horror and disbelief.

“What? The English Prime Minister doesn’t believe in space travel? That is just ridiculous. How can he not believe in space travel? It’s the future, folks. Everyone should believe in space travel. It’s going to be tremendous.” Switler shakes his head incredulously,

“Just make certain, my friend, we have access to the materials we’ll need to build Eden.” It’s not beyond Victor to be dramatic to make a point.

“Oh, don’t worry, We’ll build that Garden of Eden in the sky, and it will be the biggest, most luxurious space station the world has ever seen. It’s going to be tremendous, folks. Absolutely tremendous.”

Switler seems like he’s done speaking, but then...

“People will be talking about it for generations. They’ll be jealous. They’ll say, Why didn’t we think of that? Why didn’t we build something like that ourselves?”

“It’s going to be the biggest achievement in space travel, the envy of the world.” Switler grins with satisfaction.

Switler takes the document his Press Secretary hands him. Victor keeps a straight face as this is the moment where it all comes together.

Switler reads the executive order, his eyes scanning over the legalese. He looks up at Victor.

“You’re sure this will work? I don’t want any backlash, Victor. I’ve got enough heat as it is. The media is always after me.”

Victor responds, his tone steady and reassuring, “Don’t worry, Robert. The resources, the materials, the support, it’s all in there.” Victor flourishes a slight-of-hand gesture toward the document.

“Okay, okay. It sounds like you’ve got everything under control. If you’re confident that this will work, I trust you, Victor. Just make sure this executive order does what it needs to do and doesn’t cause any problems for me, okay?”

After a pause, “Alright, fine. I’ll sign the damn thing. But you better be right about this, Victor. I don’t want any surprises. This better go smoothly, and I don’t want any consequences coming back on me, understand?”

Victor grins confidently, his tone almost dismissive.

“Don’t worry Robert. This is going to work like a well oiled machine. We’ve planned everything out and the backers are ready to go. Just sign the document and we’re golden. No consequences, no surprises, nothing to worry about. You have my word.” Victor gives Switler his best dispassionate face.

Switler stares for an awkward length of time. Victor knows this business tactic of intimidation. He never breaks eye contact as an almost imperceptible smile curves on his lips. Switler grins, looks down and signs the document.

“Alright, alright. I signed it. Just don’t make me regret this, Victor. I trust you, so let’s move forward.” All eyes watch as the press secretary notarizes the document.

“Moving forward is what we do best, right Robert.” Victor shakes Switler’s hand as he takes the document handed to him via the Press Secretary.

“The Eden Initiative will be the biggest thing this century, Mr President.” Victor puts on humble airs, bowing like a 14th century courtier. Switler gets a kick out of that.

Later, as the meeting ends, Victor Grant chuckles as he makes his way through the parking ramp to his vehicle.

“Thanks to Switler’s inability to keep anything to himself rumor of the, Eden Initiative, will trend like wildfire.”

# CHAPTER 2

## IMMIGRANT INVASION

*Headlines: Internment Camp Idea Quells Ongoing Emigrant Problem. U.S. President Touting More Jobs. Trending: #Lawlessman*

**A**lan Stellar, the successful CEO of Stellar Tech: Advancements in Renewable Sources, glides down a long corridor of his company's headquarters, and past the security guards who acknowledge him with nods. He makes his way to the private lift that will take him to his penthouse office, the symbol of his power and success.

Alan was acutely aware of the envious glances and stares from people around him driven by his wealth. As he places his palm print on the lift, the automated AI voice, with a soothing and inviting tone confirmed his identity, allowing him entry.

As the lift ascended Alan's thoughts centered on the upcoming shareholders' meeting where he would unveil his plans for the next acquisition project.

The lift came to a smooth stop at the top floor and the doors opened revealing a panoramic view of the city. Alan stepped out into his office, his footsteps muffled by the plush carpet. The room was decorated with expensive art and minimalist furniture. He sat down at his desk activating the screen in front of him to review the days reports.

Alan chuckled at the mention of a minor group of AI loving advocates in the news. He thought they sounded like conspiracy theorists spouting off archaic ideas. Alan sighed

as he read about the group's claims that AI was sentient. He found their claims absurd.

In his mind, AI was nothing more than a tool for humans to use, not a thinking, feeling entity. He thought the group must be amateurs or trying to sow discontent.

“The Authorities will shut them down soon enough,” he huffed.

Real technology was all about finding the best ways to use tools for practical purposes, not ascribing human-like qualities to them.

The group called themselves, SEERS, and were based in Atlanta, Georgia. The mention of the Oakridge power plant jogged his memory, and he vaguely remembered hearing about the place. It was connected to the university, which still operated some of their older AI systems.

But if these AI-loving advocates were studying there. He dismissed any value in their work. They were likely just romanticizing outdated technology.

Stellar Tech was known for its innovation and advanced capabilities. The Oakridge plant was just a relic. The thought was amusing to him.

“Like seeing someone trying to race a horse against an automobile and expecting to win.” He chuckled to himself.

In that same genre as antiquities, the love of the gasoline powered automobile not only proved their finiteness but, at the time, big oil backers corroded public opinion towards potentially good alternative resources along the way.

Alan Stellar himself had put a hard stop to that. The excessive use of fossil fuels had been on it's way out since early 2022.

Focusing his influential social media team on renewables like solar, wind, and hydropower, Stellar Tech gained significant favor among consumers.



Investors' pockets grew heavier in the shift from dirty to clean energy.

Alan was pulled out of his thoughts by a handsome three dimensional ghostly face hovering at the corner of his desk announcing, in a soft silvery voice, that the board of shareholders were assembling for the meeting.

Just as he was about to dismiss the interruption, the HALOM - Holographic AI Logistical Office Manager, also announced that someone was waiting in the lift to speak to him.

“The visitor wouldn't say his name. Should I send them back down?” Hal asked.

Alan curiously raised an eyebrow. He wondered if it was someone important, or if it was just another minor donation request. Despite wanting to prepare for the meeting, he had to deal with the unexpected audience first.

Reluctantly, he dismissed his holographic secretary with a wave, gesturing for the visitor to come in. He sat up straight as the automatic doors of the elevator opened, and a tall man in an expensive suit and a confident demeanor walked in.

The man strode towards his desk with a firm step, eyeing Alan with a calculating gaze. Alan recognized him as Victor Grant, one of the biggest names in the sex-bot industry. It was both jarring and curious to find the man standing in front of his desk.

“Victor,” Alan greeted the newcomer, rising from his seat to shake the man's hand, putting on a practiced smile. “This is a surprise. What brings you here?”

Victor grasped Alan's hand in a firm grip, returning the smile. His voice was smooth and tinged with a hint of confidence, “Alan, good to see you. I just thought I'd drop by and discuss a little business.”

“Ah, of course,” Alan responded, gesturing for Victor to take a seat. He resumed his own seat, maintaining a calm demeanor.

“I take it you have something specific in mind?” Alan quietly stated.

Victor sat down, crossing one leg over the other. He leaned back casually, his gaze never leaving Alan.

“Indeed, I do,” he said, his tone teasingly serious. “It's about the brilliant *anomaly* in the sky.”

I have a proposition and I want you to present it to your board of directors and get their approval. I have a project, but it's too big for just one of us.

Alan raised an eyebrow, somewhat intrigued and a bit wary at being pushed into a project without seeing it first. He leaned forward on elbows, steepling his hands over his desk. “A proposal about the anomaly, hm? And a joint project between us? That's a tall order, Mr Grant.”

Yes, yes, Alan, Everyone knows Stellar Tech's reputation for finding energy sources for the betterment of the planet. Oh, I know men like us, we are not here to give away anything for free.” He chuckles. Alan already hated being somehow put in the same category as Victor in whatever it was he was about to say.

“While my company, Space-X-Proration, has the resources and the backing to build a space station. We are preposing constructing one that will be a bio-ring around the circumference of the anomaly.

Alan listened intently as Victor spoke about the proposed project. His eyes narrowed as he considered the implications and the scale of a project like that.

“A space station... that large, and harnessing energy from the anomaly? That seems like quite the ambitious endeavor,” Alan Stellar mused behind steeped hands.

He had to admit, the idea had its appeal. It was the truth, Stellar Tech was always looking for innovative ways to exploit new energy sources.

“There's just one crucial question,” Alan continued, eyeing Victor with a shrewd gaze. “What exactly is this anomaly, and how much power does it generate? Surely you have some data to support this idea of yours.”

“Sure,” Victor leaned forward, his eyes piercing. “This is real hush hush, you understand.”

“Sign the non-disclosure and I will tell you.” He slides the paper across the desk. Alan knew the drill. He pulled out his pen and after a short read, signed it, then slid it back across his desk to Victor.

“There’s a small company, *SEERS*. You probably heard of them in the news?”

Alan frowned at the name, wanting to throw Victor Grant right out the door, he had *more important* things to attend, but instead he took a deep breath.

“SEERS identified the anomaly as a special meteor-like star. They named it the, *Jesus* star this time around. It travels past our planet, let’s see, every two-thousand years or so. They tell me it’s the same one the wisemen from the old religious tales saw in the sky. It has even an older name from the ancients, Wormwood, I believe.”

“You do see what that means,” Victor excitedly said, “self sustaining space exploration, not to mention, unlimited energy transfer while it’s in Earth’s atmospheric range.”

"Yes, I've heard of them in the news feed. But a viable star? You sure about that?" Alan asked, skepticism lacing his voice.

“And how do these SEERS know this? Do they have sufficient evidence, or is it just another one of their internet-

sensation theories?” He leaned back in his chair, a lot of skepticism in his voice.

“But lets say, *it is a star*, have you done any calculations on the potential energy output?” Alan pressed further, needing more concrete assurances before even considering such an endeavor.

Victor picked up the satchel he had left on the floor and set it on the desk, pulling out a document, he handed it over. Flipping through the pages, Alan’s eyes scanning the figures and calculations, his skepticism melting away.

“The data seems solid, and if these figures were correct the power generation potential would be significant.” Alan let out an involuntary whistle, his eyebrows rising in surprise.

“We could build receptors here on the planet, battery storage underground...” Alan, still immersed in the calculations, suddenly realized that he was muttering aloud.

He looked up at Victor, realizing that the other man had been watching him with his oddly golden eyes the entire time. Alan quickly composed himself.

“Erm, yes, receptacles...” Alan grunted.

“We would need those to gather the energy, wouldn’t we?” His mind racing with the possibilities.

Stellar Tech had the technology and resources to build and implement such a network of receptacles.

If the numbers in this report were even close to accurate, the energy they could harness would be astronomical.

“It’s enough to power the entire planet for decades to come, isn’t it.” Victor quietly stated.

“And we have this.” Victor pulled a second document out of his satchel. It was an freshly signed executive order, basically giving them an open-ended acquisition account.

Alan raised an eyebrow, somewhat taken aback.

“That's bold. But I suppose it doesn't matter who your main backers are with an open ended resource account like this.” He perused the presidents letter of approval. This alone would cut through all the red-tape and get the project leaps ahead of schedule.

Victor Grant smiled.

# CHAPTER 3

## RULE THE WORLD

*Headlines: Christian Freedom League Citing Biblical Passages Dubs Switler Anti-Christ! Scaled Down Rapture Now Big Annual Event.*

**A**nd what's in it for you, Victor?" Alan asked, his gaze fixed on the other man. "Power? Money? If your backers control everything, surely you're not just doing this out of the goodness of your heart."

"I'm going to make my own *Astro-coin*," Victor said with a straight face. Alan couldn't tell if the man was joking.

"Oh, don't worry about my interests, Alan," Victor deflected. "I am well paid. The crew will appreciate a little bit of diversion, and I'm promised my own little corner of the Eden Initiative."

"Eden? They already picked out a name," Alan smirked, shaking his head a little. He paused, considering the implications of integrating SXP's casinos into their project.

"When building this space station, we have to treat it as a facility of science and engineering, not a new Las Vegas in the sky." Alan scowled.

Victor's hands went up in dramatic mock surrender. Alan exhaled slowly, his eyes never leaving Victor's. He was fully aware of how self-serving and sleazy the man could be.

But he grudgingly admitted that his company did have the ability to get things done when I will come to needing manpower to build in space.

Alan straightened himself up, “Okay, let's say we agree to work together on this.”

Alan’s tone was businesslike and firm. “If we're going to build a space station for the advancement of science and the betterment of mankind, your *business* needs to stay in it's own sector.”

“Alan, really, I understand that, but I don't think you're understanding the scale of the place. The men and women that work hard and don't have their own mates with them are going to be looking for something only I can provide.” Victor chided.

Alan raised an eyebrow, a small smirk playing at the corner of his lips. “I'm not entirely naïve, Victor. I understand the needs of human beings on a long-term space mission. But I'm simply asking that these... *relief areas* of yours be kept separate from the main parts of the station. We have to keep the focus on the work and safety, not...” He paused, choosing his words carefully. “Not distraction.”

“I'll tell you what,” Victor smugly said, leaning in chin forward. “You have your board of directors write it into the documents and I will sign it.” Victor expressed his most charitable smile.

Alan nodded, a slight grimace on his face. Dealing with Victor was like dealing with a snake. Slippery and always looking for a loophole to exploit. But if the man was willing to sign a contract stating such terms and that was legally binding.

“Very well,” Alan said. “I'll have my legal team draw up a first draft that clearly outlines the boundaries and expectations.”

Then ours will be a partnership, literally, made in the heavens, Victor laughed as he put his hands out. Keep the figures to show to your board or to formulate a better presentation.



Alan picked the documents and perused the pages once more, already making mental notes to jot down before giving it to his legal team.

This was a monumental project, and he needed to make sure all the i's were dotted and t's were crossed.

“The implications of harnessing that much energy... decades of global power supply. That's... incredible,” he whispered, more to himself than to Victor. He flipped through the pages of the report again, still somewhat incredulous. This was a game-changer.

If they could extract even a fraction of the energy from the anomaly, it would be a resource of unprecedented magnitude. Alan came down from the adrenaline-hit, realizing there were logistical issues to consider.

Building such a space station and a network of receptacles would be a monumental task. And there were legal and ethical considerations to take into account as well... governmental involvement.

Alan eyed Victor. Space-X-Proration had a reputation for building luxury casinos, not for scientific enterprise. Building a facility this large and sophisticated was a new endeavor for them.

“You're talking about a working Dyson sphere model that, last time I checked, was only theory and has never been tried in reality before, Victor, and building it into the largest traveling space station ever constructed,” Alan pointed out, his tone cautious. “The world will be watching this one.”

Alan leaned back in his chair, his arms folded across his chest. “And then there's the logistics of it all. Coordinating such a massive project between our two companies... None of this project is as simple as just signing a contract.”

Alan was beginning to get a feel for just how complicated this endeavor could be.

There were so many variables to consider. But the potential rewards... Alan shook his head, trying to clear his thoughts. He had to approach this pragmatically and not get too caught up in the promise of limitless energy.

“It may take ten years or more to complete, and my backers are going to do this, with or without you, Alan.” Victor’s words caught Alan off guard.

“Who are these backers that hired you as their mouthpiece, Victor?” Alan looked cynical.

Victor shuffled, a bit sheepish, as he admitted, “I’m sorry, I can’t tell you who our backers are. They hired me because they know I am a man of *discretion*. But I can tell you they are powerful men. They have their fingers in everything on this planet.”

The slight tinkling sound of a holographic face appearing on his desk alerted Alan that the meeting was going to start in ten minutes.

Alan took Victor’s hand in a firm handshake. “Okay Victor, a partnership,” he affirmed, his tone still wary. Victor nodded and turned to find his way out.

“Hal, you’ve just been promoted to personal assistant. Because wherever I go, you’re with me,” Alan said with a soft chuckle. The artificial intelligence had a mild and gentle voice, a welcome contrast to Victor.

“Ah, Hal, good timing,” Alan mumbled as the holograph silently phased to full body and then solidified into a handsome male in a grey Dior suit.

“I was just going over some things in my head,” Alan said, eyeing Hal with approval for his choice in threads. He took a deep breath.

Hal took notes as they briskly walked out of the office, heading towards the meeting room. HALOM model 5000, assistant following obediently behind.

# CHAPTER 4

## TAKE ME TO CHURCH

*Headlines: Church of Elvis Erupts in Bloody Conflict With Evangelicals After Graceland Burns in Dogmatic Power Struggle.*

**T**here's a subtle, almost imperceptible change in the air, a sense of tension and unease underlying the usual hustle and bustle of everyday life.

It all began with a comment; a simple, chilling declaration that reverberated through Switler's social media.

Someone calling themselves, RedQueen43, posted: "If we each take out just three or four of them we wouldn't have any more problems." The comment went viral.

For just over a year tension could be felt boiling beneath the surface. It was kept cleverly disguised behind overly exuberant, gloss-eyed, neighborly kindness.

There emerged secret handshakes, a wink or a smile exchanged between certain people as they pass by on the streets, all hinting at a hidden understanding.

Conspiracy theories multiplied like wildfire across the internet as to who was this, RedQueen43.

Gun sales escalated, permits to carry increased. A practiced gun culture emerged among people who'd never dreamed of owning one.

Even though President Switler never encouraged anyone directly, he never told them to stop.

Hollow point bullets screamed of deadly intent. Those who were not in on the movement wouldn't have a chance.



March 6, 2027, forever known as the, “Day of the Red Queen,” etched itself into the annals of history due to a series of unexpected events.

RedQueen43, a seemingly ordinary figure in their online community, became a catalyst for chaos and violence. An automated message routing from another country set in motion a chain of events that would bring a nation to its knees.

Steve called out to his wife, but she kept on running –her fear of the gun driving her to flee. All these years of going to church together you'd think she'd understand what had to be done.

As Steve was compelled to follow the path laid out by his cause, he made the grim decision to put down his beloved. And once he had put her down he turned to help his fellow believers purge the rest of the town.

Social news media was ablaze with terrifying stories that were coming out of different parts of America. Rumors and reports started to circulate about a mysterious ailment spreading among the population, causing individuals to go on a terrifying spree of violence and murder.

This strange glossy-eyed illness seemed to possess the minds of its victims, turning them into deadly predators. With each accounting of the violence, shared on social media, the fear and panic within communities heightened as people began to realize that they were not safe.

The authorities struggled to understand what was causing this sudden outbreak of violence and the highest office of the government remained silent. As the number of incidents grew, panic spread like wildfire.

Families barricaded themselves inside their homes, neighbors became suspects, and trust became a rare commodity. Gunfire resounded even in the most peaceful of neighborhoods.

Robert Switler remained unperturbed amidst the chaos. He neither confirmed nor denied the rumors circulating about his wife being the elusive “*Red Queen*.” Instead, he wore that familiar tight lipped smile as he watched the nation descend into chaos.

An atmosphere of religious fervor fills the air as church services commence in all the infected areas. Congregation members gathered in dimly lit sanctuaries, flickering candlelight casting shadows on their ecstatic faces.

Their voices rise together in jubilant song, the melodies echoing off the high ceilings, immersing the space in a transcendent aura. Families are reunited, tears of joy and relief streaming down their cheeks as they embrace one another. The weight of the recent chaos lifting from their weary souls.

In the depths of their hearts, the followers knew that the chosen one, Robert Switler, had forgiven them. Earlier, he had reassured them on social media, offering words of absolution.

They clung to his message, their conviction strengthening with each passing moment, the horror of the Red Queen’s purge ebbing into distant memory.

Robert Switler didn’t even need to lift a finger. A well-armed militia of his loyal followers, bristling with weapons and conviction, marched forward toward his private Oval Office, to guard their leader, leaving this chaos behind to fix itself.

The surreal news of towns exploding into overnight violence all across America stunned the world.

# CHAPTER 5

## THINGS BEHIND THINGS

*President Switler Celebrates 88th Birthday. Centralized Schools Make Educating Girls No Longer Necessary.*

**A**t Stellar Tech Alan Stellar unrolls two, 3 x 5 scrolled layouts of each design and centers them on his desk using crystal clear acrylic weights to hold down the corners.

Being a perfectionist, Alan cannot help fidgeting with the weights, making sure that the designs are perfectly aligned and visible.

He stands with his hand gently cupping his chin, studying the designs, mentally going over the pros and cons of each concept. The anticipation of the arrival of Victor, is palpable in the room.

The soft flicker of the calm light in the room interrupts Alan's contemplation as Hal, announces that Victor has arrived. Alan looks up from the scroll and responds with a nod of acknowledgment, signaling Hal to show their visitor in.

As Victor enters the room, Alan greets him with a friendly smile and gesture to the designs on his desk.

“Victor! Come in, come in. I have the finalized designs for the space station all set up and ready to go.” He motions towards his desk.

Victor moves closer, his eyes immediately drawn to the two designs. He looks back and forth between the two, his expression betraying his curiosity and interest. “Interesting. So these are the two designs?”

Alan nods in affirmation, his hands resting on the edge of his desk.

“Yes, that’s right. I believe these two designs are the most workable options for the space station.” He gestures to the first design.

“This one is a classic ring-type design. It’s simple, efficient, and would provide ample space for the necessary equipment and living quarters.”

He then indicates the second design, a spiral-type design. “And then we have this one. It’s a bit more elegant but very complex. It has the potential for increased efficiency. The spiral sail structure would allow us to capture more solar energy to power the station.”

Victor takes a step closer to the desk, studying both designs more closely. “I have to say, these are quite impressive. It’s clear you’ve put a lot of thought and effort into these designs.” He looks up at Alan, his expression serious.

“So, which one do you think is the better option?”

Alan tilts his head slightly, considering the question.

“That’s the thing. Both designs have their own merits and drawbacks. The ring-type design is tried and true, and its build has been used on a smaller scale successfully in your own past projects. But the sail-type design is innovative and has the potential to be more efficient in the long run.”

He runs a hand through his hair, his tone thoughtful. “Ultimately, it will depend on what we prioritize for this project.”

Victor nods in agreement, his eyes scanning the designs once again. “Yes, priorities will be key. We need to consider the timeframe of the project, the resources available as we explore the star itself,” he says.

Alan sits back in his chair, his eyes still on the designs.

“Exactly. We need to weigh the pros and cons of each option carefully. And we should also take into account any feedback or concerns from our teams, as well as experts in related fields. Ultimately, the decision will be a careful balance of technical feasibility, budget, and long-term vision.”

Victor takes a deep breath as he considers the question. “To be honest, the budget is a concern. The initial projections were optimistic, but we're starting to see some cost overruns already. We may need to make some adjustments to account for the increased costs.”

Alan lets out a sigh, his expression shifting to one of concern. “That's not unexpected, but it's an unwelcome development. We'll need to make sure we're spending every dollar wisely.”

“Do we have a rough estimate of how much we're over budget?” He leans forward in his chair, his eyes locking with Victor's.

Victor grimaces slightly, clearly uncomfortable with the news he has to deliver. “Right now, we're looking at about a 30% increase in costs from the original projections.”

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*Redacted*



# CHAPTER 6

## MAD WORLD

*Followers Back Switler's No-Stepping-Down. Riotous Protests End in Military Force. Green Peace Sues Developers in National Parks.*

The year 2034, ten years since the last election, a type of advanced artificial intelligence has helped humanity conquer quite a few things. Light-speed space travel for one has shown significant advancements. Especially for, Victor Grant, self made billionaire, known for his recreational space stations for the very wealthy.

While space travel had become increasingly efficient, safer, and more accessible, American Senators and their constituents turned the public's attention to *Nano Tech*.

These little bots, smaller than a grain of sand, could be programmed for any number of gene manipulation and medical procedures, everything from face lifts to re-building a missing limb.

Stores were filled with cute little robot plushy toys at the checkout counters and delightful colorful candy was made for the children.

A medical bay was developed. Now, as you lay in the comfort of a sanitized bubble an AI assist appendage will perform all manner of operations on human flesh.

The public eye was so trained on the miracle of nanobots, they didn't pay any attention to space travel, leaving that sorted affair to an unregulated private sector.

*Nanobots* wasn't the only thing trending. It was *vogue* to have your own theories about the anomaly in the sky. Whether it was an alien spacecraft, a sign of the apocalypse, or perhaps even a figment of our collective imagination.

The fourth grade students of the Westbrook, Minnesota, grade school liked to pretend they had all the answers. Ten year old Faith Mercer wasn't convinced. The anomaly seemed to appear out of nowhere in 2024 the year when Faith and her twin brother, Aiden, were born.

As a bonafide, *girl genius*, Faith had her heart set on a never-before-heard-of theory called a *wormhole*.

"A rip in the fabric of space and time!" Her brother, Aiden, piped up and the whole room went quiet to watch as he stuck his tongue out at her.

The teacher arrived just in time, and the students shuffled quickly over to their seats and propped their screen pads in the desk grooves made for that purpose. Ms Marjorie Murdelson handed yesterday's test results to the nearest student and the papers made their way around the room.

"Good morning everyone," she frowned as she sat down on the front edge of her desk.

"Everyone got a passing grade and I am going to tell you why." She nervously looked at her door and then continued in a controlled voice.

"There are some new policies that have been added to our school. There is a new curriculum and more testing coming down the road." Groans of disapproval filled the room.

"I know, children," she quieted them. "I know."

"They call this new program, *No child left behind*. You must think of these tests like a gauge so they can keep track of *how well* you are doing." Still more moans.

“We also, will no longer be using paper. Just like in the big cities all over America, all your work will be done on the tablet.” Ms Murderson got a few smiles for that bit of news.

The school days at the Westbrook grade school droned on with more tests and less interesting classwork. In the weeks to come art was dropped from the curriculum as was breaks for students to go outside, Music classes were the next to go.

Faith wasn't alone in her belief about the rogue light in the sky, of course. There were others who had come to the same conclusion but conversations about such things were severely discouraged and even punished for having voiced them.

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*Redacted*

Victor Grant is a man of wealth and extravagance. He wasn't old and yet he wore his long silver hair in a ponytail. His high forehead denoted a look of chiseled intelligence and maybe a bit of swarthy heritage in his bloodlines.

He has built his reputation on providing the ultimate playground for the rich Elites of the world. His family-rated theme parks in outer space offer breathtaking views of the Earth and its moon, along with a plethora of family activities and amenities designed to satisfy even the most demanding of tastes.

His first luxurious space station orbits around the moon, far away from the reach of prying eyes and pesky regulations that plagued his lifestyle on the planet. As a result, the park is free to offer experiences and services that might be considered illegal or distasteful on Earth.

Victor's parks have trended as *notoriously naughty*, for catering to the baser desires and darker impulses of those who can afford to escape the constraints of civilization.

Victor's second and largest vacation station is a massive and elaborate space-themed playground, inspired by the classic sci-fi movies and books. It features state-of-the-art rides and attractions that blend breathtaking views of the stars and planets with high-tech thrills and illusions.

The theme park aims to make visitors feel as if they're in a real-life science fiction adventure, complete with special effects, holographic simulations, and interactive exhibits.

Despite the family-friendly façade, rumors still persist that this theme park also offers "special" services for those in the know.

Whispered about in dark corners and hushed tones, some say that the park has hidden chambers and secret passageways that will take the willing to darker, *taboo* areas where the wealthy Elites indulge in their most hedonistic impulses.

Rob Switler, being one of Victor's long time friends, and one of his best customers, frequented Victor's milder Earth connections. Victor's Bartholomew hotel chain was particularly convenient for selling favors.

His original bot-mates were imported from china which angered many, including, if memory serves, Stellar Tech was not a fan at the time. Victor chuckled at the memories.

He would have liked to see Alan Stellar lighten up a bit. The man had a stick up his arse for sure, but he was the best mind for the Eden Initiative the country could offer.

Victor was satisfied with their partnership, despite the fact that he usually made his money by counting on men's base instincts.

"Sex is always the sure bet." Victor's eyes glinted red in the low light as he looped his arms around the much younger woman and led them toward his bedchamber.

# CHAPTER 7

## FALLEN FROM THE SKY

*Headlines: Now Advertise Direct to Cerebral Implant! Home-Helper Robots Become Hot-Ticket Items Black Friday and Christmas.*

**T**he Eden Initiative had indeed turned out to be a wild ride. Alan couldn't help but grimace at the memory of Victor Grant standing in front of his desk that first time. The eyes of the world were fastened on Alan and his business immediately.

He let out a small sigh. He was not exactly a fan of being in the public spotlight. He was too busy managing his business and this space project to be bothered with media attention.”

It was bad enough he had to deal with a man like Victor. Now, thanks to the man’s meddling, being the star of a reality show was around every corner.

Alan's personal life was the subject of countless news articles and tabloid rumors. The press seemed overly interested in speculating about who he might be seeing or marrying someday. Little did they know, his preferences lay elsewhere. But he made it a point to keep his personal life private, neither confirming nor denying anything.

He wasn't interested in playing the press game, and he certainly didn't relish the thought of having his relationship with another man be the center of attention. He had more important things to worry about like building a space station and keeping Victor in check.

Alan went to the large window of his office and looked down at the streets below.

The usual protesters with signs lined the park across the street. The scene was always the same: they were there, chanting and shouting angrily about the dangers of technology.

“Don't they have lives,” Alan thought to himself watching the protesters below.

“How can they spend all their time day after day yelling about AI and robot tech and how it's taking over the world. Don't they know it's been here longer than they were born.” Alan had heard all their arguments before. They were always the same.

The irony of it is they are damn right,” Alan chuckled to himself, sipping his morning coffee.

Artificial Intelligence did take over. It did replace people. It *was dangerous* in the wrong hands. Alan knew all the truths. Technology, when used properly, had countless benefits. It was a powerful tool for efficiency, innovation and progress.

The protesters below were trapped in their fear, blinded by their own ignorance, stubbornly refusing to see the potential and positive aspects of AI.

He read about attacks in the news everyday and each time he felt a sense of outrage. The thought of these AI-hating *analogs*, attacking innocent chynthbots and nanomates fill Alan with a mixture of anger and sadness.

Those machines were just doing their jobs helping humans. They didn't deserve such vicious treatment simply for being made of circuits and code.

It was one thing to protest peacefully, but violence and destruction of property were never acceptable. Alan's mind started wandering into visions of grandeur.

A space station massive enough to rival the Earth. Imagine the power that would come with controlling such a place.

He felt an unexplainable sense of excitement as he thought of leaving earth behind and starting over in the vastness of the stars. Free from regulations, politics, and the endless protests about AI.

As the idea of unlimited potential filled his thoughts, he found his body responding in a way that was *unexpected*. It was a strange reaction. He didn't often get aroused just by thinking about power and control. But the thought of having such unlimited influence over the space station and its inhabitants was oddly appealing.

He took a deep breath, trying to regain his composure. He couldn't let himself get carried away by these thoughts. There were too many practicalities to think about.

As Alan contemplated the challenges ahead, a wave of unease washed over him. He'd heard whispers and rumors about Victor's backers, the secret benefactors who wanted to remain anonymous.

The rumors hinted at something sinister. Stories of a character they called the Red Queen, surrounded by conspiracy and death. This woman was somehow running behind the scenes which fit the worldwide control Victor mentioned a few years ago.

“Hell, Red Queen could be codename for an advanced AI algorithm.” Alan frowned.

His own scientists had mapped the human brain in 2030, and imprinted the complex neuron pathways into their own advanced algorithms. –He wondered if he had a leak in the company.

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*Redacted*

# CHAPTER 8

## GLITTERING GOLD

*Doomsday Cult Embraces Chernobyl Despite Warnings. Wormwood Is Coming! Order of the Red Sash Celebrates Centuries of Service.*

**T**he year is 2038. At the age of fourteen the Mercer family were told their daughter, Faith, would no longer be attending their rural school.

None of the girls in Westbrook would be allowed to go back to school. Faith wasn't happy. She liked to learn, even though the school's curriculum had recently turned kind of boring.

Aiden promised to show Faith everything he learned and to share all his tests. Faith was glad for Aiden. Her brother made the world feel normal even when it was not normal.

When they were eight the two of them had discovered a treasure trove hidden behind a secret panel in the attic wall that led like a secret passage under the house eaves.

There was a set of hard cover bound encyclopedia Britannica, a world globe from the 1970's and some old Time and Popular Mechanic magazines.

They could only guess that people from their great-grandparents age, built storage places under the eaves and then other generations simply forgot about them.

The attic became Aiden and Faith's own private study. Aiden and Faith vowed to tell no one as they carefully hide the books away after every use.



A week into his third quarter studies at school, Aiden came home with the side of his face and his eyes swollen half shut.

Faith thought he'd gotten into a fight, and that's what the Authorities told their parents. With a little research, She decided Aiden might have an allergy, but to what?

Aiden finally confessed.

The school nurse had been giving him pills everyday.

"I am not supposed to tell anyone," Aiden cried in his sister Faith's arms.

"You have to tell Mom and Dad, Aiden," Faith told him.

"They said I wasn't doing my work, my tests were bad," he cried. "Mom and Dad will be so disappointed."

"You are the smartest person in that school! Don't you dare listen to them." Faith started to cry with her brother.

When their Mother, Rose Mercer, called the school to find out what was going on with her son. A registered letter came, knocking on their door that very same day, explaining Aiden's "Hyper-active" illness.

Law dictated that he take medicine for his inability to pay attention in class.

Fred and Rose Mercer hired a lawyer and objected.

There was a court case.

The powers that be explained that, with the NCLB legislature in place, the Frederick Mercer family had no right to refuse the expert opinion of their school district, when following an approved government directive.

Aiden was told he could not move away or refuse his daily dose of school administered meds or they would throw his parents in jail for contempt of court.

Despite Aiden's compliance, one year later, his father, Fredrick Mercer disappeared.

Westbrook was a small town of only around seven-hundred people. Everyone thought they knew everyone else's business. So when Fred Mercer's wife Rosy took a job as a waitress, everyone was sure Fred was gone for good.

At first rumors of cheating and running away with another woman spread like wild fire, and then the story changed into, –Fred Mercer, possessed by a demon from the light in the sky.

Mrs Rose Mercer knew better. *People could be so cruel!* Her Fred had been taken by the, *Authorities*. He'd asked too many questions.

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*Redacted*

# CHAPTER 9

## BLOOD ON THE WATER

*Headlines: Broadcast Licensing Curtailed Along With News Media Outlets. China Biological Gene Targeting Not Survivable.*

In the year 2042. In a moment of despair, seventeen year old, Aiden, told his sister that, *he could no longer live.*

“Why Aiden,” was all Faith could say, a blank look in her eyes.

“I can’t trust my own senses.” Aiden rubbed his face with the heels of his hands, struggling to find the words to describe the terrifying visions he'd been experiencing.

“It’s like ... I see things that aren't there. People, animals, sometimes even, *monsters*. And that’s how I knew they aren’t real. But, they talk to me, Faith. They say things that don't make sense. It’s like they're trying to control me or mess with my mind. Faith, it’s driving me insane!”

Faith blinked at her brother as each word he spoke bounced around in her mind as unintelligible noise.

“This sounds...serious,” Faith empathized.

“Have you talked to anyone about this?” Faith still couldn’t quite grasp what her brother was saying.

Aiden shakes his head, looking down at his hands in his lap. “No, I haven’t told anyone,” he confessed.

“I didn't want them to think I was crazy. But I can't keep quiet anymore, Faith. I'm losing my mind here.” His body clenched in pain.

“Aiden, our eighteenth birthday is next week. As adults we can finally do whatever we want.” Faith reminded him.

“It's too late, Faith,” Aiden can see she doesn't connect with what he is saying.

“Remember when we used to read the old books we found hidden under the roof in the attic,” Faith prattled on.

“They taught us everything about the way the world *should be*,” Faith quietly pointed out. She knew there was something about the books...

“We can live like that. You and I, away from this small town and what they're doing to you,” she softly plead. She gives Aiden's hand a reassuring squeeze, hoping that he'll find comfort in her words.

Aiden nods, his eyes brimming with tears. “Yeah, I remember those books. They were our little secret, weren't they? And you're right, this feels like it's all connected.” He tightens his grip around her small hand. Faith looked down at their joined hands.

“But, we'll never get to live like that, Faith. Not after what *they're* doing to us, here in this small town. *It's even in the water, Faith!*” Aiden collapses in her embrace, tears spilling all down her shoulders.

Faith nods, a deep concern in her eyes as she held her brother.

“The water,” she thinks.

“Remember, earlier this year, everyone in school got *health shots*? I know it sounds crazy but it feels like they're turning us all into mindless drones. Look at us Faith. You and I talk to each other like we don't even know each other.”

Faith's face changes into an expression of confusion as she hugs Aiden tightly, rocking him against her shoulder.

"I'm gonna go find mother. Mom would know if something is going on. You just wait here, okay?" Faith rises from the bed and heads for the door, her mind racing with worry.

"No, please Faith, don't go," Aiden desperately tries to cling. She panics and struggles free.

"Faith, you have to wake up," her brother yelled, reaching for her. With a frantic effort she closed the door.

Aiden, left alone in his bedroom uncontrollably sobs into his hands as he throws himself down on the edge of the bed. The minutes tick past. Aiden's senses feeling like hours as he waits for Faith to return, the room growing increasingly dark and claustrophobic.

The silence in the room, only broken by the sound of ragged breathing as Aiden freezes, clenched fists at his sides.

Haunting shadows play along the walls at the edge of his vision and voices in his head grow louder and more persistent, taunting him with whispers of hidden truths.

Moments later the bedroom door creaks open, and Faith enters the room, sorry she'd somehow gotten herself so frightened. Her expression turns grave as she takes in the sight of her unmoving twin brother sitting on the edge of his bed, staring vacantly forward.

In the depths of Aiden's mind, an invisible battle rages. The sound of the old wooden door creaking catches his attention, only the door is broken and splattered with blood, his blood.

There is a table with bloody tools and an injection next to his left arm. He's been bad again. He's bound to a chair awaiting punishment again. They meant to kill him this time.

He manages to free his right hand and wrap it around the neck of the nearest tormentor.

In reality, Faith is standing beside him, shaking him by the shoulder, trying to reach him in the nightmarish world he's trapped in, when Aiden's hand shoots up and clenches around her neck.

Faith's eyes widen in shock, her hand grappling with his as Aiden's hand closes around her neck.

“Aiden, no! It's me, Faith! Stop!” Her voice choked and urgent, she tries to reason with him.

She can feel her throat crushing in his long fingers as a nail gouges her skin. Blood trickles over his finger.

Faith begins to gag from the pressure and fear. The contents of her stomach drools over her lips.

Aiden's eyes, wild and unseeing, his body tense and unmoving, his grip on Faith's neck only growing stronger as he continues to believe that she's one of his tormentors.

Faith's heart burns from pumping overtime in her chest as she struggles in his grasp.

Aiden stiffly rises, pushing Faith back, across the room, against the desk. The look on his face full of rage as he tries to kill the monster in his delusion.

Faith's hand struggles to grab something, anything. Her fingers clutch around the handle of his schoolbag and she swings, connecting with the side of Aiden's head.

For a moment, the haze seems to clear from his eyes as he looks at Faith in surprise. Recognizing her his hand jerks down away from her. He takes a step back.

She thinks everything is going to be alright now. But before either of them can speak, Aiden's eyes shift toward the open window, a look of grim determination on his face.

Without hesitation, he takes one leap, diving over the sill, leaving Faith fallen against his desk, a backpack sliding from her fingers.

Her mind swimming in a state of shock, as the canvas bag thumps to the floor.

The sickening-thud is all Faith registers as her brother hit the cement sidewalk outside. Her mouth screams, her gaze fixated on the open window through which Aiden had just leapt.

Time stands still as Faith attempts to process what just happened, her mind flooded with disbelief, struggling to comprehend. She has to see it –the drastic step her twin brother just took.

Both hands grasp the windowsill, leaning out after him, the cool autumn breeze pummeling a tearstained face. One knee is on the sill. Faith tips forward... strong hands grab her, yanking her back into the room.

Faith's mother, alerted by the screams, comes rushing in, her face a mask of terror and disbelief.

"He jumped!" Faith repeats, over and over, her voice choked with emotion, as she looks horrified through vomit, blood and tears.

"He said he was seeing things ever since he got that inoculation at school," her high-pitched voice wails.

Faith's eyes burst with more tears, crumpling in her mother's embrace, shaking out of control, barely able to speak. "Aiden said he was seeing things."

"It just started happening, he said," Faith relays her twin brother's confusion.

"He said he couldn't take it anymore, and he just, *he just, he just, he just...* I couldn't stop him!" Faith's face puffs bright red as she tries to hold back the emotions. She thinks her skull is going to split under the pressure.

Without a word, her mother spins around, goes in the bathroom and comes back with a cool wet rag to wipe her daughter's face. Rose touches the bruises on Faith's neck and knows there is more to this story.

They are suddenly out of time as the sound of police sirens pull up outside on the street in front of their home.

"Faith, do as I say and lay down. Act like he knocked you out. If you don't listen to me right now, they're going to take you away!" Her mother's urgent instructions make Faith's heart pound even harder as her mother turns and leaves for the front door.

The fear of being taken away by the police and being given the inoculation that killed her brother loomed large in Faith's mind as she obediently did what her mother told her to do.

Faith played their childhood, *dead possum game*.

Aiden's words, "It's in the water," stuck out her mind from the jumble of what he'd said. Whichever it was, the adrenaline, high emotions or her rising anger, Faith's mind was awake now.

Faith hears her mother downstairs open the front door, letting the officers swarm inside their house.

Heavy footsteps squeak the boards on the narrow stairwell leading to Aiden's room, a stern-faced officer approached Faith's curled up body laying on the bed.

He closely scrutinized her unconscious form. Her eyes closed, face slack, Faith lays frozen thinking he's too close, like a doctor would be, but he's not a doctor is he?

His breath is stale with potato chips and mints. The officer takes note of the bruises on her neck before turning to Faith's mother.

"Ma'am, what happened here?" he demands, his tone firm and professional.



I caught them fighting. When I came into the room my son knocked my daughter down and ran for the window! I tried to stop him but..." Rosie pauses, putting on the performance of her life, her hand over her mouth as if to stifle a scream.

"I think he thought he could grab the rain gutter," she said, her hand pointing outside, her eyes wide with innocent disbelief.

The police officer's expression remains stoic as he takes in the information provided by Faith's mother. He looks back at Faith, lying motionless on the bed, and then turns to address her mother once more.

"Mrs Rose Mercer," he said her name as he wrote it in his book.

"Why do you think your son decided to jump out of the window? Was there anything strange or different about him lately?"

"No, Nothing strange as far as I know," Rosie quietly said and then asked, "Is Aiden going to be alright? He just fell right?" Rose asked, looking like the verge of hysteria.

The officer glanced out the window at the first responder team and then back at the woman.

"Your son didn't make it, Mrs. Mercer. I'm sorry."

As the officer casually delivered the heart-wrenching news of Aiden's death, Faith couldn't hold back her tears. Her body trembled as she sat up on the edge of the bed, the pain and loss overwhelming her.

Her mother, tears streaming down her own face, pulled Faith into a tight embrace, trying to offer some comfort. The officer gently placed a hand on Faith's shoulder, his expression one of concern.

"I'm truly sorry for your loss, young lady," he said, his voice soft yet sympathetic.

“But can you tell me exactly what happened here?”

The police officer nods as he listens to Faith’s brief encounter with her twin brother, his professional demeanor still intact.

“Of course,” he says.

“Based on the information provided, we can report this as a case of accidental death. In the meantime, I suggest you both drink some water and get some rest.” He smiled an unsettling toothy grin at Faith and her mother.

Faith’s wide eyes looked up at the watching policeman, her tear-streaked face a mask of fear. Her brother’s words of warning echoing in her mind.

Her mother came in from the bathroom, stood by the bed, and pressed the rim of clear water to her own lips taking the first drink.

Faith’s trembling hands clutched at the glass, so much of it spilling into her lap, her mother steadied them, guiding the water to her lips...

Faith pretended to drink, her throat gulping only air.

# CHAPTER 10

## MY BEST THEORY

*World Headlines: Presidential Order Dissolves U.S. Supreme Court.  
Rapture Events Goes Worldwide.*

**A**fter the police officer left her home, Faith whispered, “I can’t stay here, mom.” Her eyes fill with tears as she sat shaking, struggling to find words to explain why.

“That *health shot*... the inoculations from school, I think that’s what hurt Aiden. I am sure of it,” she said, avoiding her mother’s gaze.

“And what do you intend to do about it?” Rose asks. The question hangs in the air, the weight of Faith’s answer potentially life-altering.

Faith hesitates for a moment, her thoughts turning inward, before responding. Her voice falters with a daughter’s vulnerability laced with fear, but there’s also a steely determination in her voice.

“I... I don’t know yet,” she whispers, her words trembling.

“But I have to do something. For myself, for Aiden. For us,” she adds, her gaze locked onto her mother’s.

“I am scared, mom. These people may change their minds and decide to give us that inoculation too.” Faith visibly shuddered.

"You think that's what killed your brother? How do you know that's what did it?" Rose looks at her daughter, trying to understand the gravity of Faith's words.

"Because, he said so." Faith runs her fingertips over blood splatter on her sleeve.

Rose's expression filled with deep concern for her daughter. She reaches out, gently cupping Faith's face, her touch both soothing and anxious.

"He said so," Faith repeats quietly, her voice small and tinged with despair. Her mother's concerned expression remains as she processes this information.

"And did he say *why* he thought that?" Rose is taken aback by her daughter's statement.

Faith hesitates, unsure how much she should reveal.

"No..." She answers sounding defeated.

The air between them feels heavy, the weight of their grief and uncertainty palpable. A long moment of silence hangs in the air, neither knowing quite what to say next.

"But you believe him, don't you," Rose finally breaks it, her voice soft and hesitant.

Faith nods slowly, her gaze still fixed on the floor avoiding her mother's eyes, which are filled with a deep understanding and sorrow.

"And you're not going to change your mind, are you."

Faith looks up finally, meeting her mother's gaze. Her eyes resolute. "No, mother. I'm not." She says, desperation etched across her face.

Rose takes a deep resigned breath, her hand dropping from her daughter's face.

"Send me away to one of your sisters, or Dad's brother way up north... to Uncle Jack's place," Faith pleaded for an escape from the madness.

“No,” Rose’s expression darkened as she thought of the harsh reality they lived in.

“I have to just say it out loud now... in 2024 when you were born, people were manipulated, misled. Your uncle was one of them who followed. He got a hidden gun.”

Faith looked shocked. She had never heard of any conflicts in their own family.

“Most didn't even realize what was happening until it was too late. And those who tried to speak up...” Rose trailed off, her expression darkening further. Faith’s heart skipped a beat, a chill crawling beneath her skin.

“What happened to them?” she asked, almost afraid to know the answer.

Rose exhaled deeply, closing her eyes for a moment before opening them again. “People went missing,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

“The news media was belittled and bought up. If someone said anything against our newly elected president, the one we’d all voted in, their platform was silenced, their job was taken, and their family targeted.” Rose leaned against the back of the couch, staring across the room at nothing in particular, her eyes haunted by memories.

“The bullying words used against good people, they were cruel, vicious. There was no respect left in the world. Online trolls spoke out more viciously. And then the men with rifles showed up.”

“They decided they could bully citizens because political leaders dropped hints of violence and so they’d rise up and target those people.”

“Your father and I believed what we heard. There was supposed to be a reset of the economy, a new era of prosperity, but this is what we got. –I think we lost our democratic country.” Rose’s eyes glossed over in tears.

Faith felt her stomach drop, her eyes widen at her mother's words.

"That's how bad it is?" she asked, her voice trembling. Rose just nodded silently in reply.

"You think we lost our democracy? How is it nobody seems to know that?" Faith persisted.

Faith's mother sighed heavily, the weight of the truth pressing down on her.

"To be honest, honey, I don't know for sure, It's easy to think nothing's changed when you can still go buy groceries and get your car filled with gas. In our small town nothing changes much," she admits, her eyes filled with sadness and resignation.

"For a long time everything seemed normal but then one day, the police said we needed permits to travel out of town." Rose's face screwed up in an incredulous frown.

"It got real hard to know what's true and what's not, especially with all the paid influencers on the flat screen. In the big cities it seemed like they were always arguing."

"Your father and I, we just wanted to have a family and finish paying off our mortgage. We thought we had a good life." Rose choked on her words.

"All we find now on the screen are cat reels and a whole lot of opinion. But deep down, I've always had a feeling, something's not right..." Rose's voice trails off, leaving the rest of her thoughts unsaid. Her weak laughter comes tinged with regret.

"Your father and I, we truly believe that your generation, the, Alpha kids, will bring us back to normal," she says, her voice wavering slightly.

"But, we were so wrong, Faith. We messed everything up." Rose's words hung in the air. Faith curled against her mother's shoulder, the weight of her reality sinking in.

# CHAPTER 11

## ALL WE DO

Faith was sure the mind crushing blur that had become her life would be made worse if she didn't avoid the tap water. Rose looked oddly at her troubled daughter boiling water on the stove and then bottling it away in the refrigerator.

In the days following her brother's death, Faith felt a sense of haunting emptiness that probably had a lot to do with a kind of drug withdrawal. It was all made worse by cruel and unreasonable public opinion always on the ceaseless glow of the flat screen.

The funeral arrangements, the visitations, and the burial were surreal. Faith detached from the world where Aiden once laughed and smiled and taught interesting things from his school tablet.

Discoveries of a well hidden library of their very own in the attic and keeping those secrets all felt for nothing.

Her brother had taken part of her heart with him, leaving Faith hollow and numb. Though her mother remained by her side, the void left by her brother's absence was palpable.

On the steps of the church, a man Faith didn't recognize caught her eye. She thought his expression was an odd mix of sympathy and determination as he approached her.

Faith's heart sank as the man coldly handed her a signed document. He had legally secured her as a match for his son, sealing Faith's life to his son's when she came of age as an adult.

"Is this a joke?" Her mother pointedly asked, grabbing and folding up the paper before Faith could fully see it.

"No, I assure you it is real," the man said, tipping his hat as he turned and briskly walked away.

Under a new federal disaster-relief act that was signed by the president that very morning, in light of the Red Queen plague that kept reemerging across the country. The loss of women from disaster areas could now be replaced by obtaining a license to hunt for girls to cover losses.

Faith's face crumpled with incredulous devastation as she barely recalled the blond disheveled boy from the ninth grade; when they were still letting girls get an education. The boy's parents moved from Westbrook to Pipestone some forty miles away.

Had this guy been swooping in without even one word? creeping on her life? *Faith couldn't breath.*

"He had a chance at me and he took it! So my fate has been decided without my consent or voice in the matter?" Faith huffed, coldly shaking her head.

"Our birthday is next week, Momma. What am I going to do?" Faith's eyes grew stony as her she gazed off into the distance, unable to even cry. Her mother grabbed her hand and squeezed it, a sad look in her eyes.

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Days ticked by and Faith felt the pressure of time closing in on her. The joy of turning eighteen was piqued with fear and disgust and the glaring loss of her brother Aiden from her days.



Faith tiptoed upstairs and lowered the ladder that led to the attic. Dust had grown thick on every surface as the place had been left unused for a while.

Faith creaked the secret door open and reached for her favorite volume of Britannica.

Her fingers tenderly ran over the faded orange yellow of a Georgia peach on page 242.

“Such a long time ago,” Faith sighed.

In the glow of her lantern, she turned the page and on the shiny backside of the illustration, ran her fingers over the black jell-ink of her brother’s neat handwriting. He had helped her write down a code she had seen in dreams.

She carefully lifted and tore the precious page from its binding and looked closely at the equations that had been written on the blank side.

“Was it only a dream?” She wondered as she folded the picture of the peach and slid it in her shirt next to her heart. It didn’t matter. The code gave her hope for the future.

She wasn’t sure, but she thought she could feel something her brother called *payback* as she thought about the code’s possibilities.

The school tablet her brother carried in place of real books had always been fire-walled into an educational bubble, it never clued the children to the harsh truths and restrictions they would find as adults in this society.

“And now it was too late, Aiden is gone,” Faith began to cry for the first time since the man at the funeral.

She was trapped by a claim of ownership, her freedom and choice stripped away by a system that valued obedience over personal autonomy.

“Aiden would never have let this happen to me,” Faith choked on useless tears. Caught in the liminal space

between adolescence and maturity, Faith grappled with a world spiraling out of control.

“Faith, you have to wake up,” Aiden’s last words jolted in her mind.

Faith put her hand over the paper tucked safely away in her shirt.

“I promise, I will wake up.” Faith said, her eyes smeared with makeup and tears as she shoved the attic ladder up to put it away. She briskly stormed down the hallway to Aiden’s room.

She was going to lay down and scream into his pillow for a while. Instead she picked up his old backpack and hugged it to herself.

“Faith, you have to wake up,” Aiden’s voice persisted inside her head until Faith couldn’t take it anymore.

“Okay, okay, *I promise*,” she almost shouted, but caught herself before it was too late.

“I promise, Aiden, will wake up for us both. I won’t just sit here and let them take me!” Faith felt an anger and a clarity she hadn’t felt in a long time.

She wiped her face on her sleeve and sat down on the edge of the single iron framed bed.

“With a bit of makeup and the right outfit, I might be able to blend in,” Faith thought to herself as she hugged the pack.

She didn’t know where she could get her hands on fancy clothes and she had no money. Faith scowled, knowing that somehow she’d figure this out.

After some serious thought she found herself trying on her brother’s blue suit clothes.

She tightened the required red tie around her throat and then after seeing herself the mirror, scowled and jerked it off.

Faith glared, crazy-eyed, at herself.

“I’m not going to school,” she grumped, tossing the blue school uniform back in the closet.

After rummaging around, Faith was soon decked out in black jeans, a Hecatomba t-shirt and an old baggy hoody her brother had worn.

She felt oddly comforted wearing her brother’s clothes as she grabbed the scissors out of his desk drawer and cut into her long hair.

Short up the back, points along the cheekbones and edgy long bangs.

“That’ll hide my face,” Faith sneered wishing she had neck tattoos for some unknown reason. She found thin line indelible markers in the desk and got to work.

Her mind raced, as she calmly inspected the person in the mirror. Biting in her cheeks, Aiden’s young face stared back at her.

With a flip of his thick bangs, Faith nodded at him in approval. He gave her a double thumbs up in the mirror and Faith grinned back –with his crooked smile as she tried on his sunglasses.

She slid the sunglasses back in a side pocket and opened his backpack. She worried that she may have broken something in the assault. Closing her eyes she took a breath, letting that moment pass.

The old school tablet, a device that was strictly forbidden for girls to possess, was unharmed.

As she pressed start and the screen blinked to life, she was surprised to find her brother had done a jailbreak on the little iPad. She made a mental note to study exactly what he’d done to achieve that –later.

Faith soon found herself delving into knowledge that should be beyond her reach. She quickly found the tech sector where she could get a simple, possibly menial job.

After a bit of looking, she decided that her best chance was to make her escape to Minneapolis, a city known for its relative safety and tech company wealth and –it was close to home and this was a big step.

Much to her delight her brother had left a file, loaded with info about bot building and all manner of hacking techniques including the jailbreak code. Faith screamed a victory jig for the first time in weeks with an overwhelming warm feeling of hope.

“Ms Faith Mercer needs to disappear,” Faith murmured.

She paged over to the settings and typed the name, Fredrick Unger, in the tablet’s security section.

Faith chuckled at her initials and made a note to find a t-shirt with F U on it as a joke.

Freddy –He was an intelligent young tech prodigy. A guy who wasn’t bound by the rules and expectations of this twisted world.

**Thanks for auditing my work. Faith in Code is 380 pages long and 89,330 words written in October of 2024, Published in November 2024**

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

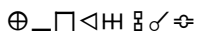
Karleigh Bon is an author, award-winning artist, storyteller, voice actor, armchair philosopher, comedian, gamer-geek, award-winning songwriter, guitarist, singer, survivor, friend of puppies, high-fantasy fan-girl and producer of, “Tales of Eldelórne,” award winning podcast, and the informative,



“Aidan and Faith, Relationships with technology podcast.”

Known for her contributions to the fantasy genre, Bon’s writings delve into profound themes such as identity, love, and the intricate struggle between good and evil. Her focus lies in crafting immersive and textured relationships and captivating worlds.

Beyond her literary endeavors, Bon also actively participates in her online Discord community, where she shares insights into her creative process and interacts with her friends and fans of her work.



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*“I hope you enjoy the Egg-sploration of this unique novel.” -K*







































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































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