

Equilibrium Project

Chapter One

“You will remain here with my driver. Regardless of what happens you do not leave the vehicle, the driver has their instructions in event of a mishap. Watch, listen and learn.” Silviculturist Joseph Thyme gave his three apprentices a cold stare and then decanted from the armoured vehicle. Taking a moment to straighten his old suit and then composed himself with a silent prayer. Whereupon he began an elaborate set of movements which included chanting in a low whisper which the trees before him appeared to slowly bow before. “I am here to seek a solution to the apparent attacks on my harvesting team.” Almost on cue four fighters slowly rumbled over head. “Have I not allowed saplings to grow on the planes? Do we not avoid the youngest and oldest of you? So pray tell me why these attacks have taken place?”

“Your machines trample the young.” Is the hesitant answer from the trees accompanied by much shuddering of smaller branches.

“You would show me, if true then those responsible will be punished appropriately.” There was no suggestion that Thyme doubted what had been said by the Great Stand. “Either show me or I will start at one end of the stand and not stop until there is a five kilometre wide road running through the middle of you.” Thyme’s tone had dipped only slightly but almost immediately a swath of trees moved apart revealing a metre wide track into the stand. “Very well.” Thyme walked slowly into the stand not looking back to see if the path was being closed behind him, it was however the days of panic were gone replaced aggressive understanding which Thyme at least hoped that his apprentices would follow up. “Are there any other issues which I should know about here, but might disappointedly hear elsewhere?” Asked

Thyme assuredly continuing to follow the path until he came across a large area of clear fell. "This is an authorised and agreed harvest. Is this a fool's errand?"

"On the far side, please be aware of the young saplings."

"I'll go round the long way. It is not my reason for being to harm The Great Stand." Thyme edged his way round to where a group of elderly trees had gathered. He knew that there had to be something serious to be seen if they had shown themselves. "Oh dear Lord." Thyme knelt down to look at five or six young trees, more than saplings which had been crushed under the wheel of a harvester or loader. "I'm going to regret asking this, but could you identify the vehicle or driver. I promise they will pay for this with either their life or life deeds. It's completely unforgiveable, unforgiveable. You know I will deal with this and by way of immediate recompense you may reseed this area immediately, or stretch out as you see fit." Thyme returned his small recording device to his jacket pocket, he rarely had need to carry a weapon and never in the Great Stand as all the animals sheltering in it knew him well enough to know he wasn't a threat to them as long as they weren't a threat to his beloved trees. "My condolences for all concerned." Thyme made a few magnificent gestures then returned to the edge of The Great Stand.

"The vehicle as you call it had the figures five and eight on it and as yellow as the sun." The old tree which had accompanied Thyme on his way now retreated into the stand once more.

"So, Mister Carlos has once again ignored his orders. Quite the rebel, quite the fool." With yet more elaborate gestures and chants Thyme returned to the vehicle ordered the driver to get them to where the harvesting was continuing at maximum speed. "To great trees my children, small matters count. Mister

Sebastian Carlos has been warned before about his behaviour and now stands to meet with my wrath.”

The vehicle was jilted forward and accelerated as an astonishing rate whilst Thyme typed in his report and discussed the difficulty of keeping a balance between efficiency and peace with The Great Stand. As he was about to go into a short story of how he came by one of the scars on his face when the driver announced there was a radio call for him, but failed to say who it was.

“Put it through please. Silviculturist Thyme reporting.” Thyme only glanced at the small screen and had to take a double take when he spotted his ultimate superior Doctor Morgan. “Doctor Morgan?”

“Don’t look so worried, I have glanced at your report and as always I find no faults in it which can’t be ironed out when rewritten for the file.” As was the way of Doctor Morgan. Thyme mumbled his humble thanks before his superior continued. “I am informed of an issue which I have been linked indirectly for some time. Once you have dealt with Mister Carlos report to Colonel Bryce of External Security. Keep me informed of what is said and agreed. I will be in session for most of today. Drop by tomorrow when it’s convenient to yourself. Morgan out.”

“Now that is curious, still we’ll deal with the matter at hand. As such do you have you an opinion on the case?” Thyme was very definitely distracted by the interruption to his day.

“I suggest the termination of the operator is unwise unless there is an equally trained replacement. Personally I would make him carry out community deeds. We have a significant deficit in the machine operating field.” Answered Apprentice One as Thyme had labelled her, her given was Victoria Keys from the Financial Keys; Victoria in her own way had broken with tradition as was the way the young seemed to go.

“A sensible answer, but the operators are a militant bunch at the best of times. A swift termination would send them a succinct message.” Dismissed Apprentice Three Derek Drysdale The Third.

Chapter Two

The vehicle came to a gentle halt within the clearfell safe area; no risk of young trees. Thyme ordered his driver to carry a sidearm when they approached Sebastian Carlos’s machine. The machine was brought to an abrupt halt and it’s operator dragged out of the battered cab by Thyme’s driver.

“Easy Sunshine I have to pay for my uniform.” Protested Carlos as he jumped down from the cab. His demeanour cooled slightly when he made contact with Thyme who had been admiring the work being carried out. “Inspector Thyme.” By the time Carlos had said those two words his gaze has fallen to the ground.

“I would like you to look at this please Carlos and then we can discuss it.” Stated Thyme almost friendly and pointedly produced the hand held recorder he’d used a few hours before. However he let the fuzzy recording do its own telling until it finished. “I was summoned to the other side of the stand to discuss this. I think your machine shows signs of an attack, which I think you failed to record, thankfully your Foreman did.”

“It was an accident and they over reacted.” Carlos stood back a step and got a scowl from Thyme’s driver. “It was an accident Inspector, twenty two years I’ve worked on The Grand Stand and not once, well maybe a couple of misdemeanours and that was a mountain made out of molehill. If you don’t mind me saying so Inspector.”

“We are all entitled to our opinions, apparently. Then you might think again. The trees are calling it murder I tend to agree. I looked at our satellite images and you were well outside the

exclusion zone. It's why we have them. However it's just as one of my apprentices pointed out skilled labour is hard to come by. You'll report to my planting squad when you finish for the day and then put in another six hours hand planting for the next six years."

"Thank you Inspector as always your kindness knows no bounds."

"Not so fast Carlos, you're on the very brink of being terminated. One more infringement and the trees will be right to ask for your death at their hands let alone ours. As for those repairs to your vehicle you'll pay for them and the down time. You may wish you were dead, but that is the whole point. Get on with it." Thyme shook his head slowly and led his party back to the car. "Questions? Two you have been very quiet throughout this ordeal. Your opinions or questions."

"He will re offend, but I assume you will already be planning on a replacement when we have to terminate him. In summary and with respect always, I would agree with your decision making process." Apprentice Two nodded to himself in a confirming manner.

"I am delighted you agree with me and with that in mind, would please go through the training files on the way back and select six possible replacements. I'll study them when I finish my other duties for the day. Samantha could we head back to the dome via the Pride Lands I can't get enough of those magnificent animals. Post haste however, drop me at the Security office and take these people back to our office to write up their reports. And we'll have some Dome News, people think it's of no interest to them out here, but the Dome is the hub of all..." Thyme screwed his eyes up as he stared out of the window. "Now that can't be right. They are well outside their boundaries. Contact the air patrols and give our position. Possible Freeman spotting in

the Pride Lands. Veronica Portland will have a complete meltdown when she hears of this.”

“Freeman are scum.” Uttered Apprentice One and then winced at her outburst.

“An emotional outburst One. Is there a reason behind it?” Thyme felt quite jolly given that one of his colleagues was having as much trouble as he was. “Don’t be shy.”

“I have never been accused of being shy Sir, to my downfall however I have always said what I think when I’m asked. To the point, it’s their arrogance; they insist that they are the only true humans and that we are the road to destruction again because of the way we deal with the animals and plants of the higher species.” One had completed her detailed attack on The Freeman as they started into the vast agricultural areas. Vast fields of cereal and fruit crops interrupted by equal vast herds of domesticated beast, sheep cattle and pigs with the odd goat and horse. These farming areas were patrolled by heavily armed soldiers and vehicles. Nothing was more important than food production to the common dome dweller and growing shanty town around the entrance of the dome which was periodically knocked down forcing the inhabitants back inside or flee to a friendly Freeman dwelling.

“Inspector Thyme to see Colonel Bryce.” Thyme may have been a little abrupt but the receptionist had chosen to ignore him over the arrival of two security officers. “She is expecting me.”

“You can go straight up, but use the mat to wipe your feet.”

“Of course.” Thyme considered the various ways he could easily dispose of the receptionist and in many ways it would be of benefit for the entire society inside the dome. However other matters soon overtook these thoughts as his nose once again clogged up quickly with the poor air quality inside the dome. The

taller buildings inside should have been in the prime position of not suffering the fumes and dust of the lower levels. Thyme remembered when he got his new quarters as an Inspector and thought he was among the gods as it were. Now he found it choking on a nightly basis and never without a reason, nothing short of life and death did he visit the lower levels or heaven forbid the ground level.

Chapter Three

“I appreciate your time Silviculturist Inspector Thyme, especially when you were made to wait twice, but this is a dangerous time. Matters which you do not need to know about have spilled out from the dome and we have a growing security breach. Please relax Inspector, you and I have known each other for a long time and above many others within my own service I trust you.” Colonel Bryce smiled warmly and closed the door tightly before returning to the small drinks stand. “Perhaps a small something hard to unwind to? Of course you are on duty, tea, coffee? Coffee it is, from the eastern fields. A friend of friend brought me some back from one of their expeditions to the Freeman’s town we are meant to call it now. There are people who would prefer you not to be involved and this might make your task more difficult.” The Colonel wafted the smell of the coffee towards Thyme who smiled broadly in anticipation. “It’s your general experience which wins your case with me. As a result you must act quickly, the night of the long knives is close and I’m high on their list. Find out why The Freeman are seeking to wind up the mammals into a war against us. You have free reign on this, cross all borders and use whoever you see fit. No stone unturned. And should you hear the unthinkable then, believe it, but act in the interest of the whole not yourself, ourselves.”

“It sounds well beyond my normal purview, nonetheless I will attend to it as best I can among my other duties, which sorrowfully are many.” Thyme savoured the coffee little by little remembering his first experience of it as a young cadet at his father’s retirement bash.

“I remember you in class being lost in your thoughts like that. Where do you go Joseph?” Colonel Bryce had a smile on her face which looked enviable in its warmth.

“I’m afraid I am getting old and memory replaces knowledge.”

“I need you to pass your normal duties to a subordinate and give all your skills to the matter I have passed to you.”

“I can and will, but I wish I knew what you really expected of me. Knowing half the story is worse than nothing. Now are there files I can read this evening and be better prepared in the morning? Of course not, but I apologise for my tone, it’s been a long day. May I leave?”

“Where do you call home? Out with your beloved trees or here in the Dome? Don’t answer in case I have to arrest you. I’ll have you driven home.”

Thyme took the lift to the tenth floor of his building and stepped slowly out of the lift with three other dwellers of the same floor. There would be no conversation as they walked along the dim corridors to their individual dwellings. With the swipe of their hand over the sensor they gained admittance and with that disappeared into a world of their own makings. Thyme was no different however there was little in the way of wood in his apartment. No carved pieces which decorated many dwellings or ornate furniture. His dwelling was furnished with simple functional furniture. A recovered desk sat at one end of the sitting area which faced the wall rather than the small window which looked straight out a neighbouring block not more than

jumping distance apart. Below the limited street lights were being turned on. Humans would be scuttling back and forth avoiding eye contact rarely looking upwards. This bothered Thyme who always took in the sky bright or dark.

The news reported nothing of another uprising and wouldn't unless there was a need for a call to arms. What Thyme had been asked to investigate was a pre-emptive act possibly to avoid such a call. Whilst it hurt to admit he was ultimately an acceptable loss. All he could do was his job and make it as quick as possible. Where to begin would be an issue, only his trees would know. He would seek their counsel.

A dream, he had experienced a dream and what's more he remembered it as he took one of his three showers allocated to him per week. He ignored the call of his communicator in the sitting room. But had no choice but to answer the door. The desk clerk had obviously been bullied into letting someone through without his permission, there would be hell to pay for that. With nothing more than a towel wrapped around his waist he buzzed the door open and immediately turned his back on his unwelcome guest. "I am still allowed a little down time it can only be..."

"Fourteen minutes after nine Sir." Stated the driver as she averted her eyes. "I know it's not my place to advise you of your responsibilities, but you should have been at the office over an hour ago. Your staff were worried about you given your normal punctuality."

"With good reason it seems, but we are always coming across firsts. Eh? Make yourself useful and make two cups of tea, I take milk and a single spoonful of sugar. I'll get dried off and dressed, you don't know it yet but we're set for a change of tune today." Thyme returned to his bedroom and quickly got dressed, then set about grooming his hair. Thankfully he wasn't a sufferer of heavy

chin growth, though there was a slight shadow to be seen. “Will I do Samantha?”

“Of course Sir. Tea?”

“Can’t function without it. Now tell me how you feel about working on something out of the ordinary?”

“I’m your driver and I do as you order Sir.”

“I hate programmed responses, but I know you well enough to know a bit of adventure is right up your street. Drink up Watson, I believe the game is a foot.”

“Sorry Sir?”

“Sherlock Holmes’ sidekick Watson?”