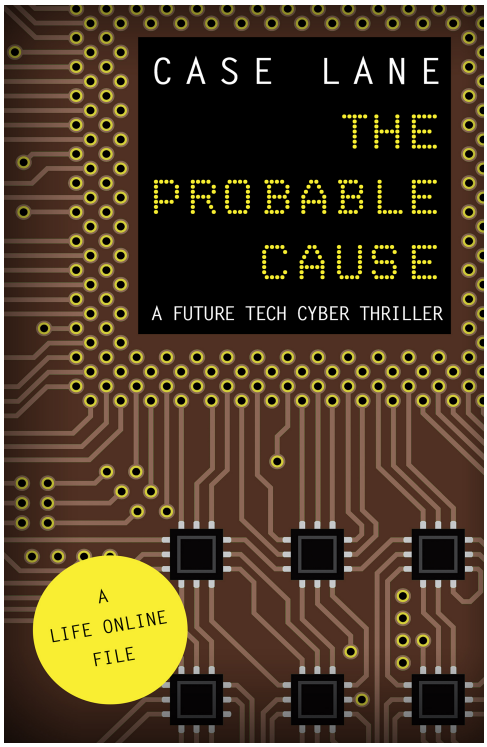

MEDIA KIT for CASE LANE and the book
THE PROBABLE CAUSE: A FUTURE TECH CYBER THRILLER

CONTENT:

Author Bios
Press Release for The Probable Cause
Book Synopsis
Sample Chapter One from The Probable Cause
Book Excerpts
Questions and Answers with Case Lane
Bonus Cheat Sheet: 10 Things to Do Before the Future Arrives
Speaker One Sheet
Contact Information

All material is available for individual download at:
Case Lane's website: www.claneworld.com

CASE LANE BIOS (various word lengths), SPEAKER INTRODUCTION AND 5 FUN FACTS

Bio - 140 characters (with spaces)

Speculative fiction writer Case Lane's thought-provoking books envision dangerous and complex future tech challenges in the coming world.

Bio - Short - 50 words

Case Lane is a global writer, traveler and observer to the future. Building from her interests in international relations and technology, Case's thought-provoking Life Online book series envisions a next century world where the essential battle is between the advancement of technology and the instincts of our basic humanity.

Bio - Medium - 100 words

Case Lane is a global writer, traveler and observer to the future. Educated in communications, political science, business, law and economics, she has lived and worked all over the world as a reporter, diplomat and digital media corporate executive. Building from her interests in international relations and technology, Case envisions a next century world where the essential battle is between the advancement of technology and the instincts of our basic humanity. In her thought-provoking Life Online book series, the majority of people are non-technologists who have to learn to live and manage in a technology-controlled world they do not understand.

Bio - Long - 500 words

Speculative science fiction writer Case Lane's Life Online book series has introduced a thought-provoking vision for the next century, which goes beyond the challenges of dealing with complex technology and incorporates the struggles to maintain our human souls.

Case was born in England and grew up in Canada. Beginning her career as a reporter, she worked in the small towns of northern Manitoba before returning to university to complete an undergraduate degree in political science. Joining the Canadian Foreign Service, she traveled the world as a diplomat and served at the Canadian embassies in The Philippines, Colombia, and Chile. After focusing on global trade policy issues, she became interested in business and left the Foreign Service to earn an MBA at UCLA. Never far away from augmenting her international experience with real-world skill, her time in business school included two semesters abroad in Guadalajara and Mexico City, Mexico. After graduation, she joined the corporate world working first as a management consultant before moving over to the entertainment industry in time for the transition from physical to digital media.

Over the next decade, Case developed her expertise in digital media operations, and worked with colleagues in adapting new technologies to the business challenges faced by media companies as the industry scrambled to catch-up with game-changing developments. After taking on the role of leading employee training in the new applications, she was particularly intrigued by the business' need to assist a variety of people of all ages and backgrounds learn to function with completely online processes. As the adaptation evolved, she also became fascinated by the role the legal team was playing in attempting to keep up with the business operations. The lawyers had to determine where old laws still applied to new electronic processes, and where new rules were required. Re-igniting a lifelong dream to become a lawyer, she decided to leave her career and attend law school. Case earned her JD at Georgetown University Law Center, and at the same time completed a Masters in Professional Studies in Applied Economics at the University of Maryland. During her second post-graduate years, she completed a legal internship in Tanzania, and a semester abroad in Singapore. After passing the California bar, she decided to focus her attention on a publishing career aimed at illustrating the current and upcoming conflicts society will face with the advancement of technology.

Building from her interests in international relations and technology, Case's Life Online books envision a next century world where the essential battle is between the advancement of technology and the instincts of our basic humanity. Today and in the near future, the majority of people are non-technologists who have to learn to live and manage in a technology-controlled world they do not understand. A situation creating both wonderful opportunities and terrifying challenges for an unsuspecting world.

Case has also written Angle of Deception, book one in The Consul series of contemporary political thrillers based on her years in the Foreign Service. Although she continues to travel widely around the world, she makes her home in Los Angeles, California.

Speaker Introduction - 300 words

Speculative science fiction writer Case Lane is the author of the Life Online book series. The books envision both the technological and human challenges of our next century world in adventure-packed stories taking place all over the globe. Case brings a wealth of experience to these topics. She holds a diploma in communications, BA in political science, MBA, JD and masters in economics. She has been a reporter, diplomat, management consultant, and digital media corporate executive; living, working and studying in Trinidad and Tobago, The Philippines, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Tanzania, Singapore, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Now she has aggregated these experiences into a global self-publishing media and information business aimed at empowering all people to take advantage of new technologies to improve their lives.

Case dramatically illustrates her philosophies as she transforms her broad experience in international relations and technology into the plots and location settings in the Life Online series. In the books, the essential conflict for the characters is between the advancement of technology and the instincts of our basic humanity. Just like today, the majority of people are non-technologists who have to learn to live and manage in a technology-controlled world they do not understand. The fact that we all face these challenges right now makes the stories relevant to any audience.

Case is working to bridge the next century issues with action-oriented, diplomatic solutions grounded in business, law, economics and entertainment principles. She hopes to stimulate your creative thinking on these issues, as she draws from her knowledge and experience to speak with you today.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Case Lane....

Five Fun Facts You Did Not Know about Case Lane

1. Case considers there is a distinct difference between your favorite 'ice-cream' and your favorite 'ice-cream flavor.' This is very important. Her favorite ice-cream is Ben and Jerry's Phish Food, but her favorite ice-cream flavor is mint chocolate chip.
2. Case loves pure ice hill sliding (sledding) with a launch at the bottom to send your 'crazy carpet' (do those still exist) flying into the air. It's probably quite dangerous but as a child growing up in Winnipeg, it was an exhilarating moment of fun.
3. Case loves naturally squeezed sugarcane juice and is trying to figure out how the product could be imported for consumption in North America.
4. Although Case gets up at 5 am most days, she really does see the joy in lying in bed and staring out the window at the emerging day.
5. Case loves trains - all kinds - vintage, high speed, monorails, maglevs - she tries to ride a train in every country she visits.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Podcast from 'the Future' launches new spec sci fi thriller
Self-published author may have set new first in book releases

DATELINE: November 2, 2016
Los Angeles, California, USA

A newly released future tech cyber thriller has likely set a first for the publishing world. Case Lane's book 'The Probable Cause,' is believed to be the first ever fiction novel to begin with a podcast. The unique idea for the speculative science fiction story was sparked by Lane's own curiosity about the potential for life imitating art in her future world series. "Incorporating the real world use of new technology into my fiction story brings the events directly into readers' ears as if the story were taking place now," Case Lane said on the unusual approach to a book release. "My books are about how we live with all the new technologies and I thought it would be innovative to have today's readers get a sense of what that world may be like."

The Probable Cause is the third book in Lane's speculative technothriller Life Online book series, which previously tackled undetectable weaponized drones and decision-making holograms threatening to destabilize the world. This time, the story focuses on the frightening tale of a mass killer who escapes custody and co-opts next century technologies to seek his revenge on law enforcement and his adversaries. The prologue podcast is a news report from the future, narrated by Lane, which provides additional background material about the killer. Listening to the prologue is not necessary for understanding the book but it does add an unusual, and never before tried dimension to the story.

"The main antagonist, Rafer Acton is a complex character with deeply emotional reasons for launching his crime wave," Lane explained. "More of his motivations come out in the prologue. Future tech is unlikely to help us deal with crazed criminals. The podcast could be a report about events happening today. But the technology in the main story is all next century. So I thought it would be interesting to separate the two ideas using existing technology to draw the whole story together."

Fans of speculative science fiction or technothrillers as well as those interested in how emerging future tech products like civilian drones and flying cars may some day be used against us will appreciate the drama in this future world story. The novel not only highlights the technology but more importantly the emotional challenges the characters face when trying to determine how best to react to situations they do not really understand. Lane developed the theme for her novels from her own experience with the entertainment industry's transition from physical to digital media. For over a decade she worked in Hollywood on the transformation to new technologies and directed the training necessary to help a diverse group of people adapt to their new world of work. "The experience I lived through is very much front of mind when I'm writing the Life Online books," Lane said. "I understand the upheaval inherent in adapting to new tech, but the

changes are crucial for progress and efficiency. Humans will have to learn how to make the changes work in our favor. This is one of the key challenges facing my characters in all of the Life Online stories."

The prologue podcast is available for free at a variety of sources including Lane's website: www.claneworld.com.

The book The Probable Cause: A Future Tech Cyber Thriller by Case Lane is available for sale and download at all major ebook retailer websites including Amazon, Apple ibookstore, Barnes and Noble, Kobo and Smashwords.

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About the Author

Case Lane is a global writer, traveler and observer to the future. Educated in communications, political science, business, law and economics, she has lived and worked all over the world as a reporter, diplomat and digital media corporate executive. Building from her interests in international relations and technology, Case envisions a next century world where the essential battle is between the advancement of technology and the instincts of our basic humanity. In her thought-provoking Life Online book series, the majority of people are non-technologists who have to learn to live and manage in a technology-controlled world they do not understand. Contact Case at case@claneworld.com.

About the book

In a time when an omnipresent cyber Network is expected to find and identify every human on earth, the world's most hated man walks out of a U.S. federal prison and sets off a global hunt with startling implications. In The Probable Cause, a future tech cyber thriller, Rafer Acton is on trial for a horrific massacre and facing a verdict delivered by an auto-jury computer application designed to provide impartial decisions to all accused suspects. But when he disappears, global law enforcement is forced to retreat to last century tactics to find a prisoner eluding every form of Network control.

Global CyberSecurity diplomat Kadie Laltanca and her experienced team at Special Command are in the unfamiliar position of joining a global search team run by another organization. But when the humans clash over tactics and approaches, Kadie prompts her group to lead the search on their own. Chasing clues from the U.S. east cost to exotic Morocco to southern Italy to the shores of the Black Sea, the team confronts uncooperative colleagues, hostile locals and rogue technologists aligning on either side of the war for humanity's soul. Will they discover Acton's victims before he can unleash his plan, or this time, will the technology solution come too late?

The Probable Cause is Book Three in the Life Online Files book series of speculative science fiction thrillers. Challenge your convictions about the parameters for right and wrong with this story of how one man galvanizes thousands to join his hate movement while using the most advanced technology tools of the next century to execute an ancient revenge.

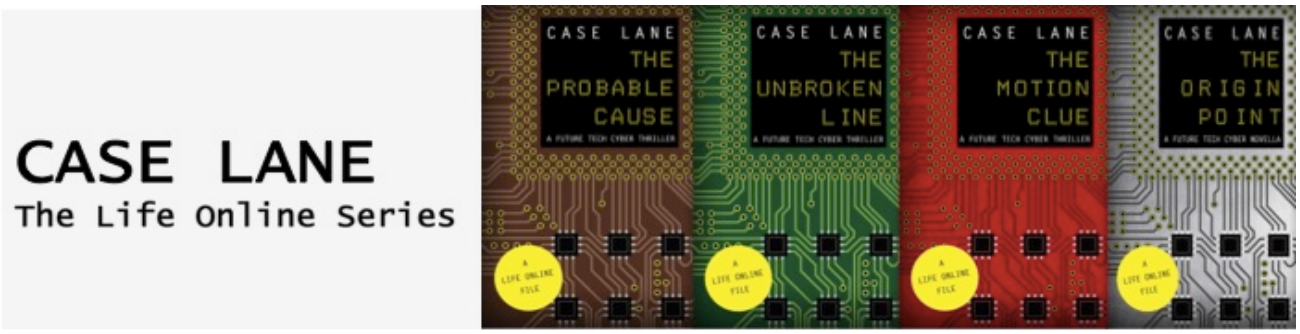
Learn more at Case Lane's Spinning World, www.claneworld.com.

Review copies
To obtain review copies of: The Probable Cause: A Future Tech Cyber Thriller by Case Lane, please send an e-mail to: case@claneworld.com and state your credentials, desired ebook format: Kindle (.mobi), Apple, Nook and most others (.epub) or PDF.

Interviews
To interview Case Lane, please send an e-mail request to: case@claneworld.com

Contact info
Case Lane can be reached by email at: case@claneworld.com

Find more information
At Case Lane's Spinning World www.claneworld.com



THE PROBABLE CAUSE: A FUTURE TECH CYBER THRILLER
by Case Lane
BOOK SYNOPSES - Various word counts

Five Key Details

1. The prologue is a podcast available for free download at http://www.claneworld.com/life-online/the-probable-cause/prologue-podcast/. All of the information in the prologue is also in the book, and the book and podcast content can be independently consumed in any order.
2. In this adventure, Global Cyber Security must work both off and online to manage the situation created by a global terrorist.
3. The book is a globetrotting thriller, events take place in 26 different locations around the world, beginning on the U.S. east coast and reaching to Morocco, southern Italy and beyond.
4. Flying transports (cars), the essential self-driving transportation vehicle used all over the world becomes a weapon in the hands of the criminal operatives.
5. This book introduces a little humor with a new character challenging the government officials.

Twitter Synopsis (140 characters)

A criminal faces a non-human jury then disappears from the cyber Network expected to locate every human on earth. Who opened the door?

Short Synopsis (approx. 50 words)

A dangerous criminal eludes future tech surveillance and the intensive global hunt to track him down. From the U.S. east coast to the Black Sea, persistent Intelligence agents and deceptive rogue technologists fight to stop a determined man from unleashing the next level of online terrorism against the world.

Medium Synopsis (approx. 100 words)

In a time when an omnipresent cyber Network reliably finds and identifies every human on earth, the world's most hated man walks out of prison and sets off a global hunt with startling implications. In an earth crossing investigation from the U.S. Atlantic coast to the banks of the Black Sea, persistent global Intelligence agents and a cohort of deceptive rogue technologists fight to find common ground in the deadly chase to stop a determined man from unleashing the next level of cyber terrorism against a paralyzed world. The Probable Cause is Book Three in the Life Online book series of speculative technothrillers.

Long Synopsis (approx. 500 words)

In a time when an omnipresent cyber Network is expected to find and identify every human on earth, the world's most hated man walks out of a U.S. federal prison and sets off a global hunt with startling implications. In The Probable Cause: A Future Tech Cyber Thriller, Rafer Acton is on trial for a horrific massacre. And in a future where humans make few independent decisions, Acton is facing a verdict delivered by an auto-jury computer application designed to pass impartial judgment on accused suspects. When he disappears from all surveillance, global law enforcement is forced to retreat to last century tactics to find a prisoner eluding every form of Network control.

Recapturing Acton is no ordinary challenge for the law. He represents a revitalized movement of danger in the physical world, which has the resources and brainpower to design virtual world weapons to unleash against his enemies. In the near future, ethnic tensions have not capitulated to reason, and the ability of singular hate movements to destroy millions of lives is enjoying a renaissance under Acton's misguided leadership. Not only are hundreds, perhaps thousands of people helping him in his crusade, but also his very victims are falling prey to his trap.

Global CyberSecurity diplomat Kadie Laltanca and her experienced team at Special Command are in the unfamiliar position of joining an international search team run by another organization. But when the humans clash over tactics and approaches, Kadie leads her group to conduct the search on their own. Special Command aligns with an aging soldier using ancient military strategies, and rogue tech adversaries analyzing the most advanced high tech pattern matching sequences to dissect Rafer's cyber terrorism capabilities and find a process for stopping him.

Official and clandestine resources merge in the team's global search efforts. Chasing clues from the U.S. Atlantic coast to exotic Morocco to southern Italy to the shores of the Black Sea, the team confronts uncooperative colleagues, hostile locals and rogue technologists aligning on both sides of the war for humanity's soul. Will they discover Rafer's victims before he can unleash his plan, or this time, will the technology solution come too late?

The Probable Cause is Book Three in the Life Online Files book series of speculative science fiction thrillers. Challenge your convictions about the parameters for right and wrong with this story of how one man galvanizes thousands to join his hate movement while using the most advanced technology tools of the next century to execute an ancient revenge.

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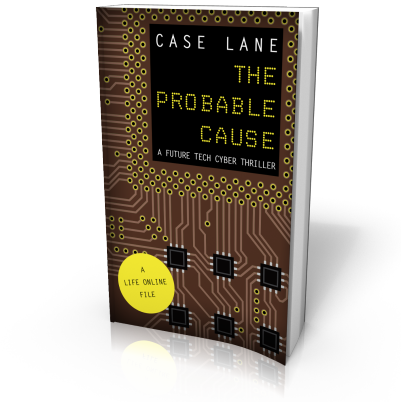

BOOK EXCERPTS

The Probable Cause: A Future Tech Cyber Thriller by Case Lane

Book Description**:**

Who opened the door? While evils are sufferable, justice must be served. But what if the jury is not human?

In a time when an omnipresent cyber Network is expected to find and identify every human on earth, the world's most hated man walks out of a U.S. federal prison. But can global law enforcement investigate who or what opened the door when The Network designed to imprison the accused, also thinks he is free?

The Probable Cause is a future tech cyber thriller taking you into a world where interference with an automatic jury verdict application has devastating consequences for humankind. A wanted criminal eludes future tech surveillance and sets off a global search forced to use reconnaissance tactics from another age. In an earth crossing investigation from the eastern shores of the U.S. to the banks of the Black Sea, diligent global intelligence agents and a cohort of rogue technologists struggle to find common ground in the deadly chase to stop a determined man from unleashing the next level of cyber terrorism against a shocked and paralyzed world.

Excerpts from The Probable Cause:

The opening lines:

"You will not have a human jury, you understand right?" Danika Caryle directly asked Rafer Acton as she stared at his drooping head. "You understand, Mr. Acton?" She tried repeating the question. "You will not have a human jury. This is America. The justice system does not provide for human decision-making unless there are extraordinary circumstances."

The auto-jury verdict process:

A prisoner awaiting trial had no release date until the day of the auto-jury verdict. If the verdict was 'guilty', a judge certified the sentence and the prisoner's identification tag automatically recorded the end of the sentence as the future release date. If the sentence was the death penalty, The Network set the release date to two hundred years in the future. If the verdict was 'not guilty', the release date was automatically set to the time and date of the verdict. Normally, the prisoner would be released from the courtroom at the reading of a 'not guilty' verdict. But technically, if a prisoner were in jail and knew the 'not guilty' verdict had been determined, he could leave. Human rights advocates had demanded technology be utilized to automatically recognize the accused as free when a 'not guilty' verdict was delivered. The prison system would stop recording the acquitted as a prisoner, stop internal surveillance of his movements, stop providing updates of his whereabouts, and unlock the prison doors in his presence.

The internal Global Intelligence battle in the chase for Rafer Acton:

We are not asking for, nor expect, nor allow..." she turned to Slater, "...any other action involving U.S. controlled cyber resources. U.S. Cyber Security will conduct an investigation into the jailbreak. U.S. Intelligence will lead the physical hunt for Acton, and cooperate with all other global law enforcement organizations involved in the search. We will keep British Intelligence and U.N. Special Command informed on a need to know basis."
"One moment," Slater slowly stated as he struggled to control his reaction. "Are we operating under similar instructions presumably handed to us by our cooperating governments?"

Annoyed, Gillian stared at him as if forced to repeat a command to an indifferent child. "This group..." she gestured around the room to her global colleagues, "...does not represent the official search for Acton. Only U.S. resources do. He is our prisoner and we will find him. Of course, we welcome global cooperation. But not global interference."

The refugee disappearances:

Suddenly a cry rose up as people continued to point from the board to the sky, the message changed to "Transport for Everyone. Be Patient." The words appeared before them as a beacon, and in unison the sky above darkened with the arrival of the transports. Each vehicle was an auto-flying circular pod with room for ten people sitting on flat-backed benches and covered in a clear, plexiglass bubble. Although the average personal transport could hover over mixed terrain from sand to ice to gravel, the machines seldom traveled long distances. The Network controlled all transports, and personal transports were prohibited from crossing international boundaries through the air without pre-authorized clearances. No camp administrator was aware of an international transport process to take thousands of refugees from the U.N. camp to a European country. Neither a resettlement nor a rescue of this scale had ever been attempted. No official had been advised of an expected airlift to England. But for those who had been in the camp for months, even years, the impossibility of the situation was not a realistic deterrence. Once again the board displayed 'Transport to England. You are Free,' before changing to 'Transport for Everyone. Be Patient,' and back again. To the extent each desperate individual could assess his own future, the message meant an opportunity existed to leave.

The conflict between using physical and digital resources:

"Yes but when they said our mandate was to catch Rafer Acton, they expected we would use The Network."

"They would expect every law enforcement organization to use The Network. People really only go into the field when they're ready to arrest a criminal."

"Where would we start?"

"He has a tremendous jump on us. We have to find people connected to him who hopefully we can confront for another reason. We can try and basically triangulate around him. Find enough connections he may contact, isolate his position and move in."

"Using humans?"

"Yes Commander, using humans."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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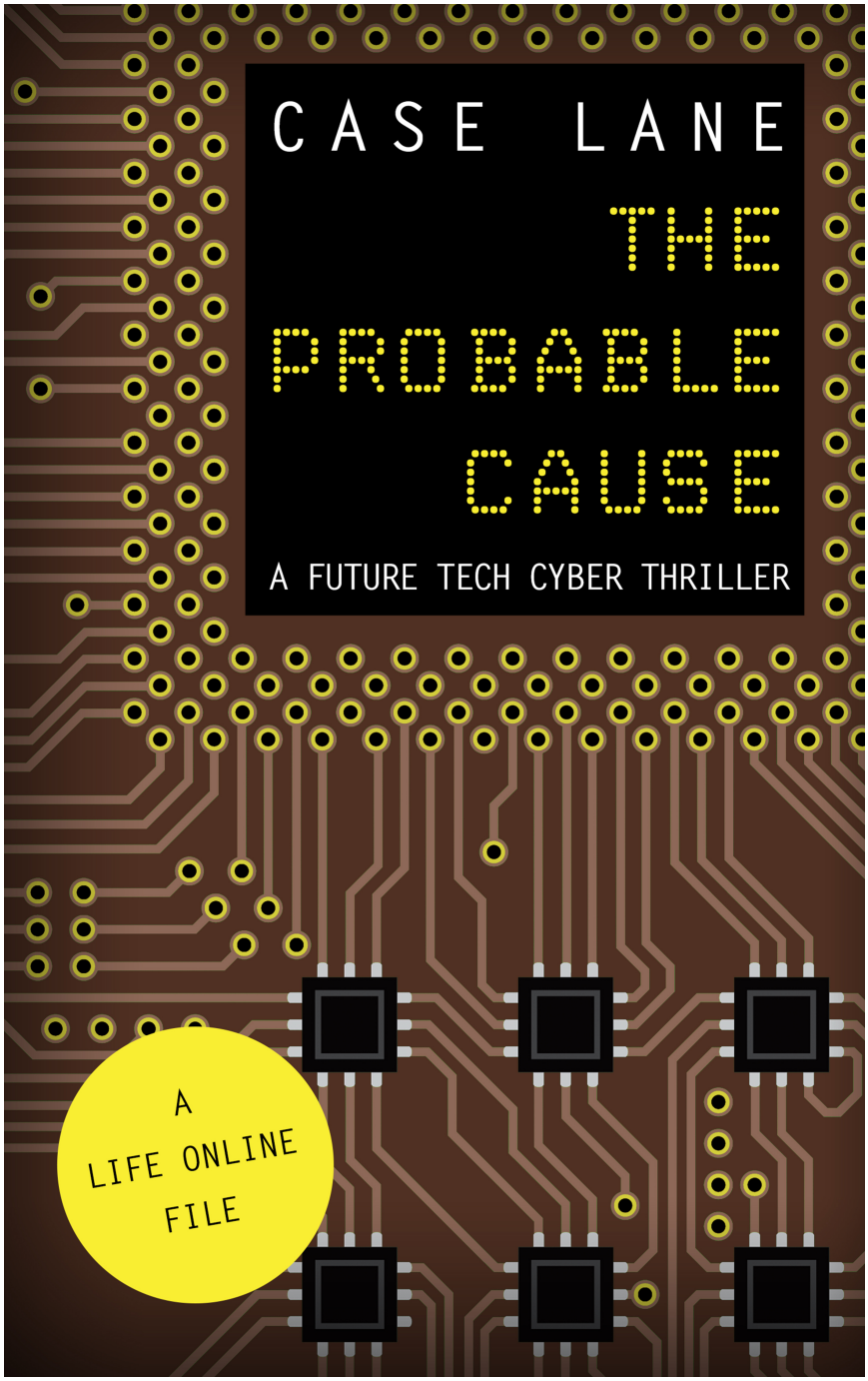
Visit Case's website: www.claneworld.com

SAMPLE CHAPTER:
Chapter One from
THE PROBABLE CAUSE: A Future Tech Cyber Thriller
by Case Lane



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BOOK DESCRIPTION
The Probable Cause: A Future Tech Cyber Thriller

Who opened the door?

WHILE EVILS ARE SUFFERABLE, justice must be served. But what if the jury is not human?

In a time when an omnipresent cyber Network is expected to find and identify every human on earth, the world's most hated man walks out of a U.S. federal prison. But can global law enforcement investigate who or what opened the door when The Network designed to imprison the accused, also thinks he is free?

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PREVIEW: Chapter One from
THE PROBABLE CAUSE: A Future Tech Cyber Thriller
by Case Lane

CHAPTER ONE - THE BREAK

"You will not have a human jury, you understand right?" Danika Caryle directly asked Rafer Acton as she stared at his drooping head. "You understand, Mr. Acton?" She tried repeating the question. "You will not have a human jury. This is America. The justice system does not provide for human decision-making unless there are extraordinary circumstances."

Holding his back slumped in weakness over the table, Rafer slowly raised his head. His curly black hair loosely framed an oval, expressionless face, weather-beaten by sharp sunrays despite having spent eleven months incarcerated within the confines of a United States Federal Prison. His clear brown eyes fixed on Danika's anxious wait for a response, but his mouth remained a flat straight line, as if drawn by pencil and ruler by a careful ten-year old.

"Mr. Acton?" Danika firmly stated, holding back the temptation to betray unwarranted concern. Tall, controlled and expressionless, she had taken her top-of-the-class legal skills to a high flyers' law firm with a long history of controversial criminal defense. Rising quickly with a reputation for turning incontrovertible facts into softened doubt, she had succeeded in preventing half a dozen open-and-shut convictions from evolving as the media and her colleagues had predicted. Instead she would discover an ambiguity, part procedure, part conjecture, leading time and again to a reduced sentence or even outright acquittal. But when Rafer contacted her to launch his defense to one of the most horrific crimes the world had ever seen, she sensed her superior reputation under siege.

Tightening her restraint, she continued, "I must have an affirmative answer." Rafer continued to stare until Danika thought she caught the slight rise of a smile from his closed lips. She hesitated over her next words. "Please answer aloud," she softly pleaded. "I need to hear you say you understand."

This time as she spoke, Rafer sat up straight, pulling the full length of his six foot, four inch muscular frame visible to Danika. The move prompted her to involuntarily retreat from her initial lean towards him, and unbend into her own upright sitting position. A pile of papers lay before them on a table, which along with their chairs was the only furniture in the gray, windowless interrogation room. Danika subconsciously moved her hand to the end of her skirt, and nervously grasped the edge. Rafer looked down, and again she thought she could see a faint smile break the flat crack of his mouth.

Leaning back, Rafer continued to observe her as if they had recently been introduced, and not as if they were entwined in the mandated confidentiality of an attorney-client relationship. Rafer was a prisoner of the United States federal government, Danika his recently hired attorney, and both were the subjects of universal scorn. Exhausting the list of public defenders the U.S. government had initially offered, Rafer personally researched

the names of America's superior criminal defense lawyers and selected Danika on the advice of random reviewers. The government fumed over the source of his funds to pay her fees, but eventually relented when prominent and respected businesspeople insisted they would pay to ensure America conducted a fair trial. Before Danika accepted the case, the drama over the choice of attorney had ignited an intense media fury, every word of Rafer's story was viewed and reviewed with constant merciless scrutiny.

Deciding with limited drama to end her agony of waiting, not his, Rafer finally replied, "Yes, I understand," in his British-accented English.

"Thank you." Danika almost sighed with relief. "You can appeal the auto-jury verdict generation decision to the United States Supreme Court. Technically, you can request a human jury, twelve people. You're a foreigner, and there is relevant precedence. Acceptance is not certain, but the Court is likely to hear the case, and your..." Danika hovered over her words, "...your situation is unique. They can apply the U.S. government's—"

"No," Rafer gruffly interrupted, his rejection thrown towards her with the abruptness of a slap. "I do not need special treatment."

"Your rights are not special treatment. Having a human jury may be a good strategy for you. The only problem is appealing will delay the start of your trial and—"

"No, no delay. I'll take the robot jury."

"The verdict generation application is not a robot jury, Mr. Acton. You are not going to have the precision of machines programmed to be human."

"Whatever."

"You have to understand the consequences of your choice. You will receive an auto-jury verdict, an outcome using the facts of your case, but the analysis from all other previous criminal trials with similar circumstances. The auto-jury application aggregates the data from the other cases, all of the evidence, photos, testimonies, court records, everything...and reaches a verdict based on previous human jury findings. You will not have the luxury of programmed robots analyzing facts, or thinking humans listening to the events surrounding your specific situation. The decision will come only from the vagaries of previously granted conclusions." With every word she spoke, Danika's discomfort rose. The Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution stated all citizens had the right to 'an impartial jury of the state and district wherein the crime shall have been committed.' And although the word 'jury' had always previously been determined to mean a body of people, no governing law officially declared the requirement to utilize human beings for the process. Decades earlier, the practical inability of enforcing the Sixth Amendment had tipped America's judicial system onto a plea-bargain train, where 99% of cases never saw a day in court. Only the local prosecutor in collusion with arresting police judged alleged criminals. The narrowness of the decision-making coupled with the ethnic imbalance in arrests, charges, sentencing, and incarceration as more than a factor of poverty, indifference and ignorance, ignited a seething backlash. To many Americans the so-called justice system was constructed, funded and designed to ensure the trampling of non-white civil rights, in the name of maintaining the power of the white majority. In retaliation, more and more people refused to cooperate with the expedient process, and began to demand their constitutional right to be judged by a panel of capable citizens. As the wait for a trial grew longer and longer, angry taxpayers rejected politicians' demands for more

jails, and the existing facilities were forced to release non-violent, borderline criminals to provide room for threatening newcomers.

Criminals, police and lawyers alike began advocating for a replacement to the broken system. For forty years, legislators, jurists, pundits, futurists and the general public debated the possibility of mandating an impartial jury using technology. Supporters argued the Constitution could uphold the principal of impartiality in any form in which the concept could be executed. And the only guaranteed impartiality would come from authorizing a programmed digital application to assess all information humans had ever known about similar cases, and render a verdict without the influence of individual bias. Opponents decried the idea as an affront to humankind's basic role on earth to uphold justice, and an abdication of responsibility to fellow human beings. 'Every case is different' they stated, 'an accused must have humans decide.' But most Americans also knew the justice system had never been impartial, and was no longer a practical option for an advanced but volatile society.

A similar sentiment had previously prevailed in the public school education system, where in an effort to end bias and discrimination by teachers, and to allow focused students to thrive at their own pace, physical school buildings had been replaced by online-only study halls. The average child learned from lectures, videos, presentations, exercises and tests emanating from a computer terminal with no information about the student's gender, ethnicity or age. No compromised teachers interfered with the child's progress, and instead of being isolated as one having trouble in a classroom of many, the child worked at her exact speed of comfort and managed her progress in every subject. A child could be passing at a tenth grade level in math and a fourth grade level in reading, and be joyously content with her ability to learn. With the exception of behavioral specialists, for both the geniuses and the struggling, and the exclusive legacy of private school environments, schoolteachers had effectively disappeared, and the result was a surge in academic accomplishment among non-white and once-indifferent students. Technology had accomplished the objectives humans only claimed to uphold, by providing a neutral level playing field from which each student could ascend on the basis of his or her actual individual ability.

Eventually the successful outcome in education was too obvious to be ignored by other fields. If computers could replace trained professionals to accomplish the extraordinary task of academically preparing tens of millions of American children for competition in the global employment world, then the machines could certainly replace random selections of twelve citizens to sift through evidence, documented reasoning and the law, to render competent verdicts.

The example set by the public education system argument, more than any other, prevailed over the Supreme Court decision granting all levels of government the power to approve the auto-jury application, and effectively end the judicial system's human decision-making over the lives of others. In most jurisdictions, including the federal government, an opportunity remained for the accused to request a human jury. All prisoners had to be informed of the possibility, but the privilege was granted to a limited few.

After listening once more to Danika's insistent pleas, Rafer firmly pronounced an emphatic, "Fine," to her analysis of the risk in accepting the auto-jury.

"I prefer to pursue all of your options for demanding a human jury. I think we could do well with humans—"

"No, I'll take the verdict process they've ordered for me."
"The auto-jury application provides no room for flexibility. A computer application does not review special circumstances. Once you receive a verdict, you must accept. There is no reversal of the decision, no going back."
"Okay."
"Rafer, we are talking about your life. My firm has run a simulation based on all relevant, similar cases. Simulations are 99% accurate. And the one we ran...well, you know Rafer, the results indicate you will be found guilty."
"I understand."
"What do you understand? If you are found guilty, the U.S. could execute you. They will not extradite you to Egypt or the UK. The International Criminal Court wants to put you on trial, but they are still negotiating with the U.S. over sending you there. You may not have an opportunity to face international judges. Your case will end here, with a non-human decision."
"Okay."
"Rafer, the auto-jury is not considered the best option for a defendant in your situation. You should really let me take you right through the justice process you are entitled to have."
"Miss Caryle, I know you're an excellent lawyer and I'm sure you're telling me all the right information you are supposed to tell me. But I know better options than you for dealing with a robot...auto-jury."
Danika frowned. "Better options? What are you talking about?"
The smile slowly began to clearly emerge as Rafer softened his flat mouth into an obvious semi-circle of upturned lips. "I know the auto-jury functions and limitations. I'm sure your simulation was correct, but mine is better."
"Your simulation? What do you mean?"
"Do not worry about the details, Danika. I understand your explanation of my choices. I understand my decision and I want you to follow my wishes."
"Rafer, please tell me what you are talking about? Why are you certain?"
"The auto-jury application is on The Network, correct?"
"Yes of course, all data applications are on The Network."
"Yes, exactly. Do not worry about my decision."
"I don't understand."
"That's okay, I do. I understand."

*

Danika stepped from the air-conditioned halls of the prison, directly into the muggy outside air grasping at her throat. 'Ahh, Southern heat,' she moaned as she selected an icon to summon a transport to where she stood in front of the fortified building on the outskirts of the city of Roanoke in southwest Virginia. The driverless hovering vehicle appeared in front of her within two minutes, and immediately descended to the pavement while automatically opening its fiberglass door. Danika slipped in and ordered, "cool down," to the empty enclosure. As the door closed, the air conditioning turned on. Gratefully, she leaned back to accept the blowing cold air as her mind churned through Rafer's words. While she stretched her legs forward, the transport chair automatically moved back and reclined to her pre-selected position. Danika was also six feet tall, shorter than Rafer but

not by much. She was also much slimmer, although toned she did not have his dense muscular features. Her long hair flew off her face with the direction of the air, and she opened a button on her blouse, which she had maintained tightly closed while meeting with her client.

"Home," she commanded to the transport. The vehicle wirelessly read the 'home' data from her com, a paper-thin plastic rectangle the size of an old credit card providing connectivity directly to The Network. Checking her address and preferred method of travel for specific distances and terrains, the com sent an instruction to the transport, which automatically rose in response and pointed towards Roanoke's airport.

Com functionality had once existed in multiple appliances like the telephone, radio, television, camera, notepad and computer. The devices could be any size or shape, made from a variety of materiel, and carried in hand-held sizes, embedded into clothes or accessories or overlain on skin. Once given the names of colors, fruits and parts of the body, most people switched to using the generic name, com, for wireless communication to one constant point of contact, The Network, and its uncountable electronic tentacles into the entire world. Only The Network contained the functionality to access all data an individual human needed to operate in everyday life. Fed without limitation from automatically updating operations in globally-connected servers, Internet websites, cameras, sensors and satellites, and many other exposed digital data streams in existence around the world, the unseen, omnipresent Network maintained order for a functioning human. The system aggregated, analyzed, cross-referenced, and integrated the information to provide up-to-the-second instructions for humans and machines. Every human living, working, and studying within the organized global infrastructure, which was nearly every individual on earth and in outer space, was connected to The Network, and could be reached directly if one had a private number, or indirectly through a satellite locator. Rarely would the reach be impossible.

Danika leaned into her chair, projected her com screen and selected a contact icon. When she was not defending the world's most vilified prisoner, Danika was one of New York City's celebrated criminal defense attorneys. Her pre-law school plans had always tilted towards human rights, especially in America, where the criminal justice system had collapsed and split under the weight of its prejudices. Post-law school, she drifted towards the wrongfully accused, but she was too successful to be ignored by genuine criminals. They were willing to pay and she was willing to accept. New York was among the world's most expensive places to live, but the city was a dazzling attraction for an achingly ambitious individual. Danika had risen from working in the service industry at the age of twelve, to using her brainpower to win scholarships to attend university and law school. The opportunity to join the wealthy was too tempting to ignore. When her success continued, the notoriety made her even richer, a development she comfortably accepted until she was faced with Rafer Acton. Now she wondered, if her decade-long professional rise was worth the money they had handed her to end up with his blood soaked case in her hands.

As Danika waited the second for the coms to connect, she thought about how she would phrase her concern without compromising her client's rights. Her contact request was directed to Kadie Laltanca, the Commander of the United Nations Security Council Special Command for Cyber Security, the organization charged with protecting the world’s digital borders. In lieu of snipers and spies, Kadie's team consisted of computer engineers and

programmers virtually engaging rogue technologists and anarchist hackers with code, encryptions, and firewalls. Special Command balanced the demands of a world open for trade and communication with the subversive activities of organized criminals in a delicate game emphasizing computer-coding skills. The role called for a diplomat who could understand the conflicting views of nation-states and negotiate for common ground. But Kadie had been a lawyer first, sharing an office with Danika during a frantic summer in the city of The Hague in The Netherlands where they interned together at the International Criminal Court.

"To what do I owe the pleasure of a contact request just before the biggest trial in the world," Kadie answered Danika's com request with obvious delight.

"Hello Kadie, I can't believe I caught you live," Danika responded with equal enthusiasm.

"Are you kidding? I could be briefing the Secretary-General and I'd step out to answer. I can't believe you even have the time to speak to me. You're defending Rafer Acton, the whole world wants you locked up with him, and you're calling me. I'm flattered."

"I have a very short list of friends these days."

"And I am definitely one of them, you can count on me. You are about to achieve legendary status regardless of how this turns out."

"Yes maybe, but listen—"

"I never imagined this type of case for you, Dani. I know you are all for justice for any accused and all, but Rafer Acton?"

"He's human too."

"Barely. He's on captured video at every step from carrying the bomb to firing on hundreds of people...all those kids...I mean..."

"Look Kadie, I need to ask you—"

"I'm sure your arguments on the auto-jury are going to be—"

"Kadie, listen," Danika abruptly interrupted with sharpness. "I need to speak to you about the auto-jury functionality."

"Oh okay sure, why?" Kadie asked, immediately switching her light-hearted banter to even-voiced concern.

"Acton is human, but the jury will not be."

"Well maybe. Based on the circumstances, you have a chance to challenge the U.S. law. The auto-jury was the solution for removing the human element to obtain fair and impartial results devoid of racist or sexist bias from Americans. But you can fight the assignment of a generated verdict, Acton is a foreigner."

"If my able-minded client does not want to accept my advice, if he wants to go forward with an auto-jury trial, I have no scope to fight the decision."

"If he wants to go forward with an auto-jury trial?"

"Yes. Listen Kadie, an auto-jury means the jury decision is generated by The Network."

"Yes, sort of. In general, The Network generates all application decisions. But of course, certain parts of the physical infrastructure are walled servers, the application runs independently, and the courts can control how the process is managed."

"But can they really. I mean the whole point of The Network is to make sure all datapoints about all humans are inter-connected with individual profiles on all of the world's ten billion people. The court cannot cut off information. They have to allow updates about the trial, who's involved, even the weather forecast outside the courthouse, right?"

Kadie hesitated. "Yes, but between you and I, the government's official definitions of certain activities related to 'private' records or 'walled' servers, do not really function as defined. But I cannot give you the details."
"That's okay, I know the conspiracy theories. The government can see all data regardless of where it's located and the range of security surrounding the server. The only wall is between the government's view and the view given to you and I. Basically the public Internet is the censored access to data already permitted to be dispersed."
"No comment."
"Okay Commander, but suppose theoretically, since technically the entire Network can be accessed from anywhere by anyone, the auto-jury app is exposed to the world."
"No, technically no Network apps are exposed. All are behind a significant security firewall."
"Fine, but technically a visible firewall is exposure for those who have the means to break through firewalls."
"What are you getting at?"
"Between you and I, suppose hypothetically, a certain prisoner is not the least bit concerned about the assignment of an auto-jury. Say his confidence is overwhelming to the point where one can smell the suspicious behavior. I have no details, but do you think his counsel would be a little uncomfortable with the words he's been saying."
"Confidence?"
"Yes, a lot of confidence for a man with a 99.9% chance of being executed by the U.S. government."
"And you're telling me this because..."
"My conscience...and the law say I can. I'm flagging this concern for you because The Network is your jurisdiction."
"Yes but only for cross-border cyber crime. We cover external cyber attacks on our member states."
"As I said."
"Clarify for me, Danika."
"A condemned man with no worries about an auto-jury verdict."
"Because...because...of the potential for a hack?"
"No comment."
"From outside the U.S.?"
"No comment."
"If one were to guess, theoretically, based on a certain defendant's reported behavior, could he be planning an attack on The Network?"
"Officially I'm required to advise the appropriate authority if I believe my client may commit a crime causing harm to others. Consider yourself advised."
"Are you serious?"
"Very."
"Okay we'll look into security issues with the justice system app."
"But remember who he is Kadie, and who his friends are."
"Yes I'm aware."
"The plan might have intentions you cannot detect."
"Yes, I'm certain that's exactly what it will have."

*

"We checked all of the virtual entry points, firewalls, back-ups, there are no breaches," Roman Francon, Kadie's boyfriend told her over wine in their New York City apartment. Their children, her sons and their daughter had been noisily put to bed over baths and multiple stories, and the two parents had collapsed together on a chaise lounge on their terrace with glasses of pinot noir on a table beside them, and the city's incessant whirl rising up from the streets below. Officially, Roman was a British Intelligence cyber security agent, but he lived in New York with Kadie working as the agency's point person at Special Command's U.N. headquarters. "But the U.S. will only allow our analysis to proceed to a limited security level," he continued. "The federal justice system is strictly an internal operation, linked to The Network only for the collection of domestic data points, and if necessary, international connections."

Kadie and Roman were partners in the battle against cyber criminals and rogue techs before they became partners sharing bedtime stories and teddy bears, and despite coming from opposite worlds each considered the other their most important confidante on every issue they confronted. Kadie had been raised on flat, dry Midwestern prairie land where Protestant grit defined a working class effort against poverty tied to no known form of advancement. Alone she pursued increasing levels of education with a brain set on escaping the daunting complacency inherent in the many who had succumbed to the commands of The Network. Independently minded from her earliest days, Kadie sought indomitable challenges in work experiences and learning, flagging her to all she encountered as a self-starter who could be trusted with increasing responsibility. Roman, on the other hand, would have been lazy if his parents had allowed idle time into his schedule. He was born a child of privilege, both parents were global financers who considered the entire world their neighborhood. Living for only a few months at a time in the bustling capitals of Europe, Asia and South America, Roman and his siblings were tasked to naturally learn multiple languages, decipher mathematical equations with a pencil and paper, and construct houses and model airplanes with their own hands. The Francons were original thinkers from another era insisting on the formation of young brains through thought, practice and application, the very skills replaced decades ago by the technology they were also expected to conquer.

Yet despite emerging from two divergent roads, Kadie and Roman reached the same conclusion. A separation had come over the world between those who paid attention to the impact of technological advances and those who did not. Diligent effort was required to stay among the thinkers, to force the use of individual human brainpower in a world where the majority answered questions only by first looking at their coms. They operated in an insular society of like-minded individuals who fought day and night to maintain the role of human participation and decision-making, among those whose indifference was silently absorbing the last vestiges of functioning humanity.

The U.S. justice system's transition to auto-juries was a practical but frightening development in the crusade to maintain human control of critical decision-making. Kadie knew that if Special Command had an opportunity to weigh in on the consequences of the auto-jury operation, she would take her political chance by intervening. "Apparently there is an international connection," Kadie stated. "But we do not have enough information on the scope and extent of the possibilities."

"The Americans are not going to accept your word about a connection without evidence you have really uncovered an issue. They are leery about U.N. activities on their soil and even more about Special Command's capabilities. You have become too powerful for their independent tastes."
"We are not powerful. We are responsible for using The Network the entire world agreed to establish to fight external cyber attacks. Our mandate is limited."
"Limited to the most extensive information gathering system the world has ever known. You are the only organization with a complete view of The Network. Technically all other systems connect to you. Your access allows you to see data and obtain information about the broadest range of people and organizations."
"That's only partially true. Every intelligence agency can see the same data we can see."
"Not really. British Intelligence cannot access even the part of the U.S. justice system you were allowed to see. The official government cyber world is pretty much all yours, Commander. You are the great mothe—"
"Okay enough."
"I struck a nerve?" Roman was genuinely puzzled.
"Yes."
"Why?"
"Because don't you realize Roman, if a hacker is in the U.S. federal justice system we have been outsmarted once again. Better than outsmarted. The hackers know Special Command has no direct jurisdiction over internal U.S. systems, and the U.S. government is unlikely to grant us a waiver. But the justice apps are on The Network. Rogue techs can use this infiltration of the justice system network to disrupt us. Linking to The Network without actually being connected is a backdoor."
"No way, Kadie. Our systems are locked down tight. The hackers won't find a way in."
"The U.S. justice system is locked down tight too. But I'm telling you if the information I have is viable, they may have found a gap."
Roman mulled over her concern. "Well okay, but now you're on alert."
"But a superficial alert? We have not determined the breach we need to uncover."
"Okay calm down, you won't know until you see it. Keep everyone ready for surprise attacks and do not let your guard down."
"We've taken that approach for years and every time, we have been caught short."
"But you learn from each incident. C'mon Kadie, you are never defeated before you even know who the enemy is. If there is a program...or person looking to disrupt Special Command, you will find him and bring him down. Right?"
She smiled at him. "Yes."
"You'll be ready for the complete range of possibilities, right?"
"Yes."
"Okay perfect, the bad guys have no idea what they are in for."

*

The trial of Rafer Acton began on a quiet, brisk day in November. The British-Egyptian national walked into the courtroom to face 172 counts of first degree murder, 139 counts of attempted murder, and all of the related anti-terrorism and national security violations the U.S. government could produce. The International Criminal Court waited on the sidelines with a similar list, based on international law focusing on crimes against

humanity. The government's prosecutor, Ashley Callahan stood her nearly six feet, and faced a judge, press and public who were waiting with anticipation for the definitive destruction of a hated man.

She spoke slowly, emphasizing each word, each fatal step in Rafer's attack. "This man..." she said pointing to Rafer, "...opened fire on innocent desperate people, and blew up their temporary home...a refugee transition center for people fleeing anti-Hittite uprisings in the Mediterranean region...a historic plantation house in Natchez, Mississippi."

The courtroom and the world's collective indignation rose.

Innocents...desperate...home...refugees...historic...Mississippi. The entire setting and circumstances evoked distinctive, entrenched memories. 'How much bloodshed can Mississippi be remembered for?' she heard infuriated locals screaming. 'This is the problem with letting foreigners in,' unsatisfied natives echoed. 'This is an affront to our beliefs, our sense of helping our fellow human beings,' the non-government Global Christian Coalition bellowed as they reset their security measures with law enforcement assistance. The voices were deafening, embittered, soaking in fury, and the only option for quieting all was to convict Rafer Acton.

Callahan continued. Her opening statement presented a brief outline of the government's evidence. Traffic cameras recorded Rafer driving along the coastal highway from Alabama into Mississippi, and arriving at a bed and breakfast house located on the road leading to Miss Decker's plantation mansion in Natchez. In one form or another, a Decker home had stood on the same Natchez land for more than three centuries. Answering a global appeal to provide temporary shelter for refugees, the last living Decker descendent, prosperous, unmarried, childless Veronica Decker converted her family home into a boarding house, and willed the last four acres of the plantation grounds to the Global Christian Coalition to advance their cause. In her mind, the contribution was Decker's grand gesture to God before she was called on to the heavens. A grateful GCC extended the renovations by expanding the kitchen and dining areas and adding to the sleeping quarters, transforming a family home into a transition residence with room for 400 people.

But Natchez was a tourist town, a drained, quiet, first or last stop along the Mississippi River, 176 miles north of New Orleans. The aging nineteenth century mansions, riverboat cruises, filling food, and pounding echoes of history were not prepared to be awakened from their tranquility by the anxious eyes of hundreds of foreigners. The locals vehemently protested the plans to have a shelter for victims of ethnic trouble rolling across distant countries they could not place on a map. To quiet the fear, Miss Decker stretched her legacy over the angry voices. The dusty old money generously fell upon the town to repave roads, modernize public recreational facilities and invest in local businesses. By the time the GCC was ready for the first group of Hittites to arrive from overseas, the opposition noise had faded. The refugees moved in, and Rafer followed.

The man America and the world put on trial was born in London, England to a British father and an Egyptian mother. Initially raised in England, Rafer instinctively disparaged formal British society and all the traditional rites the populace followed and celebrated. When he was old enough to make demands, he insisted his parents send him to Egypt, 'to learn who I really am,' he had told them at the time. At 15, he refused to return to Europe from his vacation. 'I'm staying with our family,' he told his parents. After the initial defiance, he was rarely heard from again. As each year passed, communications grew further apart. His parents could not define his current life, until the day U.S. law

enforcement identified the Natchez plantation killer by his real name. For the investigation, Rafer's parents could provide no information about their son. They did not know his address, profession, aliases, or life plans. They had little to say, no details to add, to the profile built by active agents gathering evidence against a foreign terrorist.

The prosecution rested its case, and Danika rose to a defense standing on sandy ground. More than thirty witnesses, ranging from those who identified Rafer as the man who aimed two automatic assault rifles at men, women and children, to those who detailed his purchase of bomb making equipment, had convincingly outlined the planning and execution of a horrific crime. Danika attempted to raise reasonable doubt. The Decker plantation had no indoor surveillance cameras, the last security video of Rafer on the day in question showed him standing on the house veranda wearing a bulging sweater and carrying a backpack. All other video came from a variety of personal coms, many providing blurred or blood spattered images. Since the anti-Hittite uprising was started by an overseas terrorist group, Danika stressed the number of men with similar characteristics who could have actually committed the crime. Testimony from those who saw Rafer outside the mansion with guns was buttressed by Danika's insistence, that although the defendant was in Natchez at the time, he was a confused product of a cross-cultural mind, destabilized by years of living between two worlds, unsure of himself and his place in society, and taught to hate a people, he had never wanted to target. Danika strove towards compassion. Citing advanced age, Rafer's parents refused to travel to the U.S. to testify, but his siblings confirmed he had always been uncertain of his identity. Sent to boarding schools, he was forced to confront classmates who immediately told him he was out of place, too dark to be a genuine Englishman, but too well spoken to be a hopeless immigrant.

The prosecution played videos of people screaming and running from the plantation house, children calling for their parents, parents for their children. Emergency response teams explained the condition of bodies beyond recovery. The presiding judge, Josephine Marvin permitted Callahan to introduce a selection of drone footage showing scattered body parts and burning flesh. Spectators in the courthouse relived the scenes they had watched on news programs from the days when the story was first reported.

Danika reiterated Rafer's lack of a criminal record or prior contact with law enforcement anywhere in the world. Nor was he on a watchlist, suspected of terrorist activities, or even linked to destabilizing groups. His limited radicalization had come at the hands of others, she told the court. His cousins had brainwashed him into championing an ancient feud. "He did not understand his participation in their meetings," an eminent psychiatrist for the defense explained. "He was a victim."

During witness testimony, Judge Marvin allowed survivors to embellish their statements with a reference to their pain and suffering, nightmares and struggles to move on. Danika objected, victims' statements were expected only at sentencing, Rafer was still technically innocent. But Judge Marvin felt the weight of a town, state, federal government and international law enforcement hovering above her courthouse with the specific intention of ensuring Rafer's guilt. Balancing the fear of a prejudicial sentence against the risk of a career-ending verdict, she chose to manage around the former and allowed the testimony to proceed.

Danika exhausted her options and rested. The closing statements riveted the global audience. The justice system's all-women starring cast was expected to impeccably

establish the atmosphere of impartiality and advocacy, and their final words on the matter did not disappoint.
Callahan reminded the jury of the witnesses.
Danika ended on the question of a guilty mind.
Judge Marvin presented her instructions. She did not turn to face a human group of twelve who were to deliberate on the evidence presented to them. Instead, her words went into the air, required to ensure a complete end-to-end trial transcript ready for data analysis after capture by electronic voice recorders. Every word of the proceedings was on an audio file, every admitted picture and document uploaded to a server on The Network. To reach a jury verdict, the legal decision application, or auto-jury as many called the program, matched every detail from Rafer's case against similar cases throughout U.S. history. The digital instructions aligned and cross-referenced the facts to determine the majority of the time the information had been found to be true. Silently, efficiently, without lunch breaks or questions, the program worked through each issue, each raised point and its equivalent counterpoint, every objection, every ruling, the precision of the law, and the vagaries of distributed justice. Rafer's conduct was matched word for word, line for line, photo for photo, against those who had committed similar crimes.
The app had no age, education, ethnic or gender information about the defendant, no birthplace or home address capable of identifying a select demographic. Mitigating circumstances were only included if the situation spoke directly to the crime, but even leniency decisions were made by the computer. In most cases, only a medical condition, altered by drugs or other treatment, would find a place in the determination of the verdict. Rafer had none of these externally allowable variables available to influence the data's process.
Immediately after the formality of reading the jury instructions for the recording devices, Judge Marvin launched the auto-jury application from her com. Cameras rose to capture the moment as she projected a screen, logged in with her security code, took a moment to scroll through the displayed accounting of the record; double-checked the names of the parties involved and the number of evidence items listed; double-checked again for notations on all segments of the trial she had presided over, and with a glance to the audience in the courtroom, selected 'start.' Only the sound of journalists and camera people jostling for positions to capture the moment followed the silent touch of her finger to the suspended screen. Judge Marvin glanced at the audience one more time, selected another icon to collapse her screen and briefly paused before announcing a recess and defining when the court would reconvene. Depending on the amount of evidence presented, the auto-jury application typically required less than an hour to run through all of the data and generate a verdict. But recognizing the universal attention on the case, Judge Marvin had insisted the app run twice, overnight. The directive was not unusual, nor unexpected, but defenders of the auto-jury functionality claimed the precaution was not necessary. No repeated running of the program had ever produced different verdicts. Judge Marvin ignored the criticism. Waiting also enhanced the trial's dramatic effect, the expectant room would be dismissed from the court for the day, and return in the morning for her reading of the auto-jury decision.
Rafer was returned to his cell, Danika and Callahan went to their respective hotels near the courthouse. Judge Marvin fell asleep in the transport carrying her home. Silence fell over

the trial process and the city. Only within The Network servers did the case continue on to its digitally generated conclusion.

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At 12:07 am, on the early morning of the night following Rafer's trial, the jury verdict generation application stopped running. The process was not complete. No decision had been transmitted to Judge Marvin's com or the official courthouse server.
At 12:09 am, the application started up again.
The break did not register on the security alert protocols established to detect breaches at any hour of the day or night. Nor did The Network register an anomaly.
At 12:14 am, the electronically-controlled door on Rafer's jail cell clicked open. Lying on his narrow bed, Rafer slowly opened his eyes. Beneath the blanket he was fully clothed in the civilian business suit he had been permitted to wear to court. Earlier in the day, when he had returned to the prison, he had told the guards he would change later into his regulation prison jumpsuit, and they did not return to confirm if he did. To all occupants of the prison, Rafer was a condemned man, facing a well-deserved death penalty, and offering no threat to the facility's operation. As he went to bed, Rafer pulled a jar of hair dye from a hole he had dug in the cement wall behind his bed. Reaching into the jar, he pulled out a palm full of silver gel and ran his hand through his hair. Repeating the action, he turned his soft, black locks into a straight, grey flecked, salt-and-pepper display. Next to the jar were thick black-rimmed glasses with clear lens. Since most people only wore glasses as a fashion statement, not to see, the accessory was popular for men and women alike and would attract no additional attention.
Holding still under the blanket, Rafer waited for the sounds of an alarm or other warning activity, but as each minute rolled by, silence followed. Slowly he raised the blanket off his body, and rose to walk to the door. Pushing the handle out with one hand, he stepped forward and looked into the hallway. The grey walls reflected no shadows captured by the light from beneath the exit door at the end of the hall. No guards were within his sight range. Rafer quietly slid the cell door completely open, and walked into the hall. Straight ahead, a green light shone over the exit into the next hallway, the passage was unlocked. On the other side of the door, to the left, Rafer could see one guard, his head down.
'Probably staring at a com screen,' Rafer thought as he dropped to his knees and crawled towards the hallway door. Reaching the frame, he leaned against the metal with his shoulder, letting the door open wider, inch-by-inch, until the space was large enough to slip his body through. No movement came from the guard as Rafer crawled underneath the guard station's glass windows.
Circling a corner into another hallway, he stood up and quickly walked to his next destination, a lawyer's meeting room. Deftly moving inside the unlocked door, he strode to a corner of the unlit space, slid down to the ground, and sat to wait.
At 1 am, the prison guards began switching shifts. Hallways filled with double the sets of uniforms traveling in both directions. Rafer stood up in his hiding place, slipped on the glasses, and looked through the door's glass window. He did not want to be seen exiting the room, and needed a crowd of distracted guards to melt into when he reached the hallway leading from the lawyer's exit to the outside. As expected, more than a dozen men approached from both directions at once, they jostled and joked as the groups passed the door behind which Rafer stood with his hand holding tightly to the handle. When all of the

guards' backs were facing him, he slipped from the room into the hallway. The retreating and arriving men did not notice the older man in a suit as he walked with purpose behind a group destined to depart for the night.

At another green-lit door, a guard briefly looked from Rafer to a monitor screen. Rafer swiftly continued walking, not acknowledging the guard or his actions. Rafer knew the guard was looking for verification of a lawyer exiting the facility in the middle of the night. Such an action was unusual but not impossible. Prisoners' advocates were allowed to visit whenever necessary, and a dutiful guard would first check the visitor records before questioning an officer of the court. And since the prison facility's doors only opened for people who were authorized, and lawyers received authorization through their coms, the guard had no reason to mistrust the green light or stop Rafer to challenge his actions. A data screen was the authority within the prison. Guards received and executed their orders based on instructions provided by The Network through their coms, not inquiry generated by their own eyesight or inquisitiveness. If there was no alert indicated on the com or security monitoring screens, there was no alert in the facility.

Prisoners did not have coms. At entry into the facility, the prisoners who were flight risks received an electronic plastic tracking device, the size of half a band-aid, melted onto an arm or leg. The device housed an embedded chip containing all of the prisoner's personal information including length of sentence, expected release date and prison privileges. Authorities could control a prisoner's movements by reprogramming the chip to allow access to the library, recreation area, or the outdoors.

A prisoner awaiting trial had no release date until the day of the auto-jury verdict. If the verdict was 'guilty', a judge certified the sentence and the prisoner's identification tag automatically recorded the end of the sentence as the future release date. If the sentence was the death penalty, The Network set the release date to two hundred years in the future. If the verdict was 'not guilty', the release date was automatically set to the time and date of the verdict. Normally, the prisoner would be released from the courtroom at the reading of a 'not guilty' verdict. But technically, if a prisoner were in jail and knew the 'not guilty' verdict had been determined, he could leave. Human rights advocates had demanded technology be utilized to automatically recognize the accused as free when a 'not guilty' verdict was delivered. The prison system would stop recording the acquitted as a prisoner, stop internal surveillance of his movements, stop providing updates of his whereabouts, and unlock the prison doors in his presence.

For protocol reasons, guards normally released prisoners who received a 'not guilty' verdict while not in court. The action was a final flex of their authoritative muscles, and provided an opportunity to return personal effects and surgically remove the tracking device.

But legally, a prisoner with a 'not guilty' verdict was a free man.

On the early morning after the closing statements in his trial, Rafer Acton received a 'not guilty' verdict. But he was the only person who knew that fact when he purposefully walked out through the exit doors of the federal prison in Roanoke, Virginia and stepped into waiting transport.

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Between 12:30 am and 1:30 am, the U.S. Federal Prison in Roanoke failed to record the absence of its most notorious prisoner. The first guard to recognize this discrepancy was

Johnny Antonelli, a fresh recruit who had received a routine Network instruction to conduct a visual inspection of several cell areas, including Rafer's section. When Antonelli glanced through the window of the door to the hall where Rafer was being held, he noticed the prisoner's cell door was open. Antonelli glanced at his com. No alerts were displayed. He looked up again at the open door. Trembling, he looked down again at his com. The visual inspection tour did not include the individual prisoners' cells, only a glance through the hallway window to observe. Since there was no alert about an open cell door, Antonelli had no instruction for further action. But with the eager intentions of a newcomer hoping to impress, he sensed a disconnect he could not name. 'A prisoner's cell door shouldn't be open overnight,' he thought. 'But The Network says...' He stopped. 'What did The Network say?'

Antonelli projected a com screen and entered Rafer's name in the prisoner search records. The returned search result read: 'Released' with the day's date. In shock, Antonelli nearly dropped his com. 'Rafer Acton has been released? How? When? If a high profile prisoner like Acton had been released, all of the prison guards, even a newbie, would know the reason. How had he not heard about this release?'

Staring at his com, he wondered if there was an error. But almost immediately considered error was not possible. The Network status had to be correct. Designed to be the ready blueprint for a functioning world, The Network recorded and processed all human and machine-operating actions at all times. If a conflict existed between the activities attributed to the physical world, and the data churned through The Network servers, the system corrected the human, the machine or itself. If a human entered information claiming to be in one location, but The Network had a camera image of the human in another location, the system would automatically update the formerly entered data, and advise the human, and anyone expected to know the human's whereabouts, that the human had been wrong. Antonelli began to question his own actions. Maybe he had missed a message or a news report or maybe Acton's flashy criminal lawyer had got him off on a technicality. Maybe the prisoner's absence was expected and The Network's release information was true.

Antonelli hesitated at the entrance to the hallway. But he was standing within range of the entryway sensors, and his com triggered the green light, unlocking the door. Slowing reaching up with his sweating hand, he pushed against the metal handle and walked through. In the short steps putting him in front of Rafer's cell door, Antonelli considered all of the excuses for his actions, he would need to provide to his supervisor. He was off his scheduled rounds. Since The Network was frantically alerting him that his current coordinates indicated he was in a location not approved by its instructions, he would be flagged for failing to correctly complete his tasks. But for the first time in his adult life, a remembered tone of childhood curiosity prompted Antonelli to ignore a Network order. A buried instinctual sentiment was overwhelming his pre-programmed reactions. Without digital prompting, he knew he had to determine if there was an issue with Prisoner Acton. As the guard responsible for covering the inspection of this section of the facility, he could file a truthful explanation, stating the door was open, requiring the need for further investigation. 'But would his supervisors believe him? The Network was not registering an open door error. Would they really consider the door to be open?' Even if he could see the gap, his visual inspection was not considered valid next to an incontrovertible Network reading of the situation. The only reason guards performed physical inspections of the

prison facilities was to comply with workplace health directives requiring human employees to move around, and to provide a human-only task as part justification for the existence of their jobs. But in daily operations, no human accepted another human's visual or audio perceptions over the unbiased, unceasing detail of a Network report.

As he walked down the hallway to the cell door, Antonelli vividly realized he was moving into a terrifying limbo with his decision to deviate from his assigned path. 'Who could he tell about his suspicion? Acton could have been removed for a specific reason, maybe he was ill. Or maybe he has been transferred.' If Antonelli started asking questions and making trouble, the other guards would vilify him. No guard executed work tasks outside Network orders, or completed extra steps. Asking questions automatically required the additional effort of answering, and working people hated non-mandated exertion. Yet despite these negative possibilities, he felt compelled to move forward.

Reaching the cell door, Antonelli slowly turned to look inside.

The room was empty.

Antonelli felt his feet gripping the floor, but exerted a separate force to propel forward into the space created by the open door. As he gravely swept his eyes over the area, Antonelli noted, Rafer's prison jumpsuit limply hanging off the edge of the bed. A terrifying thought forced a tight gasp into his throat. 'If Acton had been taken for a walk, he would be in his jumpsuit. If he was anywhere in the prison, he had to be in regulation clothing, unless he had been released.'

Leaning into the cell bars, Antonelli projected a com screen in front of his eyes. Next to an alert demanding he return to his rounds, he again saw the word 'Released.' 'Could Rafer Acton really have been released? Who could he ask? Who could he tell about the physical space he was observing in real-time versus the digital reading The Network simultaneously monitored?' No action occurred to Antonelli. Despite the unfamiliar conflict sensation, his instinct for action lay subjugated to the instructions on The Network, and as he continued to view the screen, he noted with anguish, the official words did not change.

"What are you doing?" a voice shouted from the hallway. Antonelli jumped and swung around, his body moving into the projected com screen, which displayed across his chest as if he were a human billboard. "You're completely off your rounds!" John Backas, Antonelli's immediate supervisor shouted as he walked towards him. "Can't you see the alert?" he demanded pointing to the words broadcasting from Antonelli's chest.

Stunned, Antonelli instinctively responded by pointing a finger at Rafer's abandoned jumpsuit.

Backas followed the finger with his feet and walked further into the cell. On days when Network instructions were not being ignored, Backas was a relaxed manager, even-tempered and generally levelheaded. Typically, he assessed a situation before reacting, if Antonelli had seen him approach, he might actually have generated the nerve to ask for guidance.

Upon entering the cell, Backas immediately noted the missing prisoner and began moving around, touching the walls and stomping his foot on the floor, as if looking for a gap or physical proof Rafer had left through another opening besides the cell door.

"What the...?" Backas asked as he turned in a circle in the cell while simultaneously searching his com. "Rafer Acton...released?" Backas looked up at Antonelli in stunned awareness.

"Do you...do you know anything about moving Acton?" Antonelli hesitantly inquired, while registering Backas' reaction.
"Rafer Acton! Moved!" Backas' expected calm demeanor disappeared. "Of course not. His verdict is today. They're going to take that bastard's life. Of course we didn't move him."
"Well...I...I found his...his cell this way."
"Found...this?"
"The cell door was open, I could see it open, from there," Antonelli explained pointing back towards the hallway door as if to ensure the reason for his decision to deviate from his path was recorded in the confusion. "I came down the hall to look."
"To look?" Antonelli nodded. "That's it?" Antonelli froze. "You ever heard of an alarm, kid?"
"But...The Network...The Network says he was released. I could not trigger an alarm."
Backas stared at him and back at his com screen. Antonelli was correct. No option existed to trigger an alarm. The facility did not chase down released prisoners. "What the..."
Antonelli could sense Backas was also at a loss for action. The supervisor had no instructions on his com. "You need an override," he suggested.
"I know, you idiot," Backas responded in panic. "But we have no override. Who has an override for a guy who's been released?"
"I don't know," Antonelli dared to answer.
"No one! If a guy's released, a guy's released!"
"But how could...how could Acton have been released? The Network says he's free."
"I know what The Network says."
"Could the system be wrong?"
"Wrong?"
"Yes."
"I don't know." Backas considered the question. "I don't know if The Network can be wrong, I've never heard of that before."
"But maybe it's possible."
"But, then..."
"Acton is missing," Antonelli completed the sentence for him.
Backas turned his com over and over in his hands. "Yeah he..."
"He escaped."

*

From her office in Washington, D.C, Jocelyn Rongen had responsibility for the operations and activities at all U.S. federal prisons. An early riser, she was preparing to cycle a stationary bike to her heart rate limit when her com buzzed with a contact request from the facility in Roanoke, Virginia. Rongen frowned, the time was a few minutes after 5 am, and the contact was coming from a human. Briefly scanning for alerts, she saw no messages about a prison incident. 'Who would need to directly speak to me at this hour?' she wondered.
Selecting a speaker icon, Rongen curtly answered, "Yes."
"Director Rongen?" the voice shakingly responded.
"Yes." Rongen's voice rose.
"Director, this is Phil Davis, I run...I run the facility at Roanoke."
"Yes?" Rongen demanded as she projected a screen with Davis' profile.

"We have an incident."
"Go ahead."
"Ahhh mamam...this incident is...well..."
"What's going on?" Rongen impatiently demanded.
"Rafer...Rafer Acton is...missing."
Rongen picked up her com. "What do you mean Rafer Acton is missing?"
"Well, as far as I understand...a guard found his cell empty and—"
"The system lists him as 'released,'" Rongen angrily interrupted when the prison's latest internal status report projected in front of her eyes. "How did he get released?"
"We don't know."
"What do you mean, you don't know? Who processed him?"
"We found an empty cell and The Network status listed as 'released.' But no one saw him, no guard processed him. He's just...gone."
"Wait, wait, wait...Rafer Acton cannot be gone. He's the most hated man in the world. He's in our custody."
"No mamam, he's not. I mean, yes he's hated, and no, he's not in our custody."
Rongen frantically scrolled through the prison's records. "You initiated a search?"
"Yes, when his cell was reported empty and we did not hear about a release, we initiated an inside search but..."
"But what?"
"We are a little...confused, I guess. Because The Network says he was released. And we could not confirm—"
"What are you talking about?"
"We could not confirm his release. I mean, there's no authority to ask. We could not contact the judge or the lawyers or...you, because...well he's in our custody and we should know exactly where he is, but..."
"Are you asking if Rafer Acton could have been released?"
"Umm, yes I guess."
"What do you think?"
"Think?"
"Yes, what do you think?"
"I...I...don't know."
"You don't know? He's a terrorist." Rongen's voice rose higher. "His trial was the biggest in the world, detailed in the news every day. The whole world is waiting for the verdict to be announced today. He's due in court in a few hours to face the consequences of his actions. Do you really think he was released?"
"I...I guess...no. No, he could not have been released."
"And if not..."
"Mamam?"
"What do you want to say about the status The Network is reporting?"
"I...I..."
"Go ahead."
"The Network is...The Network is wrong."
"Yes, The Network must be wrong. Did you think of that?"
"No, not really...I mean, I did not know. I mean...The Network is never wrong."
"You don't think The Network is ever wrong?"

"No."
"Even if the images you see and the data you are reading are in conflict?"
"But we were trained to follow—"
"I know you were trained to follow Network instructions. I'm well aware of how the world works. But you are running a prison. A prison is full of criminals. And criminals commit crimes and try to avoid the law. Crimes like breaking out of prison. One of their pastimes is to find a way to escape. Did you think about that?"
"Yes, sure. We checked the camera surveillance and the prisoner movement reports, and the news to see if the verdict was announced. We asked the guards if anyone had seen unusual activity. But we had to do the investigation manually, we have no override for a general alarm."
"Besides asking a few guys if they saw unusual activity, you conducted the entire investigation by looking at The Network?"
"Ahh, yes."
"Did you contact outside law enforcement to start looking for Acton?"
"Contact? Outside? Well, no. The Network says he's been released. There's no protocol for looking for a released man. If an active prisoner escapes, The Network automatically triggers the tracking protocol as soon as his signal shows up outside the prison walls. But we have no Network instruction for contacting law enforcement if the tracker is off. I mean, there is no frequency to search for."
Rongen hesitated. For the first time since the conversation began, she agreed with Davis. Legally, law enforcement could not track a released inmate without probable cause. In this case, the probable cause was an unprecedented suspicion capable of destroying her entire operation. If her instincts were correct, The Network had released Rafer Acton. Legally or illegally, the system had let him walk out. Too stunned to reproach Davis any further, she commanded, "Make sure your facility is on lockdown. Do not speak to the media. I am going to contact all the law enforcement agencies and coordinate the overrides to begin the search. You realize the seriousness of this incident?"
"Yes Director Rongen."
"You also realize the need for absolute secrecy and discretion? Do not tell anyone about this and make sure your staff are silenced."
"Yes Director Rongen."
"Acton has a five, six hour head start?"
"Yes."
"And we let him out," Rongen slowly stated in controlled terror. "We let out Rafer Acton."
"Not we, Director Rongen...The Network, The Network let him out."

*

The com buzzed on Kadie's kitchen table, she glanced down and saw the incoming contact request was from Slater James. "Oh, great..." she sarcastically exclaimed.
"Who is it?" Roman asked from across the room as he glanced away from a com screen projected one foot in front of his face.
"Slater," Kadie answered while simultaneously selecting a speak button to respond to the call. From across the Atlantic Ocean, British Intelligence agent Slater James managed not only his law enforcement organization's official connection to Special Command, but also the unofficial connections forged by membership in The Alliance, a clandestine global

management group facilitating more efficient, but unofficial reactions to world-disrupting cross-border incidents. Surreptitiously united as Alliance members, Slater became Kadie and Roman's first point of contact if the depth of an issue required powerful brains to guide a human-controlled response.
"Kadie, we have a global emergency," Slater began without introduction.
"Good morning," Kadie responded with reproach.
"No, not really," Slater continued ignoring her tone. "We have a new crisis."
"Okay."
"People are reporting a human or maybe...The Network...has released Rafer Acton." A global alarm emanating from Jocelyn Rongen's com to the law enforcement point people of the world had rung across the ocean at British Intelligence within minutes of her discussion with Davis. Rongen did not wait for the mandated stepped protocol order of U.S. law enforcement's hierarchy. She knew Rafer's head start could mean he had already left the country and comfortably relocated. The world's most wanted man likely had a string of accomplices waiting, ready to deactivate his tracker, change his appearance and reissue his identity. To catch up, Rongen bypassed all expected levels of supervision, and went directly to those in charge at organizations with proven reliability when working with outsiders. Unlike the men running the Roanoke facility, Rongen was a thinker, one of the few in the world who operated under the direction of her functioning mind, not on commands from The Network. She knew only those in global law enforcement, with instant authority to move forward, could consider and coordinate a response as quickly as she needed.
Kadie reached for her com. Slowly raising the plastic rectangle towards her face as if the movement would make Slater's all too clear words, much clearer, she slowly asked, "What do you mean someone or The Network released Rafer Acton?" Roman looked away from his screen to stare at her in amazement.
"People are reporting he is gone."
"What people? What report?"
"All we have is a rundown of The Network's displayed data. I have summarized and sent the information to you." Kadie projected a second screen and began reading Slater's report. "In general, in the middle of the night, a 'not guilty' verdict came through for Acton and apparently The Network changed his status to released. And he walked out. He's gone."
"How could he walk out?"
"Technically if there is a 'not guilty' verdict, he's free. But for procedure reasons, a prisoner should not be permitted to depart without a formal checkout. In every case, several human level verifications are expected to take place, but here, none worked. Or I should say, no human properly responded to a clear Network error. In this case, while guarding a dangerous criminal, the humans ignored the shreds of their common sense and let him leave. But of course, they are denying their inaction. According to all reports, the guards did not see him leave."
"But this is ridiculous. We ran another set of security protocols across the U.S. justice system's servers before the trial began."
"You did? Why?"
"As a precaution," Kadie carefully answered remembering her discussion with Danika. "Acton is a unique prisoner with a massive profile. We performed extra diligence."
"Well maybe the additional security sweep was not enough."

"Really? Back up, Slater."
"No, pardon me Commander, but you have to accelerate. We are establishing a global investigation to be based here in London. You will be expected, please come over as soon as possible."
"You want me in London?" Kadie glanced at Roman who had moved a chair beside her and was reading the reports on her screen. "But the Americans will be running the investigation from D.C."
"The Americans have lost one of the world's most infamous criminals. We can no longer trust their systems...or their people. Acton was not only an inmate for U.S. justice, he was due in The Hague at the International Criminal Court. The world was waiting. Do you know how many more refugee resettlement locations he could target? If the press releases this story, people will be terrified. A global response will be expected. Acton could be anywhere. But we will run the global investigation from here."
"Who are we?"
"Kadie, with all due respect, stop asking questions and get on a plane. We are the entire global security arsenal. Special Command has to be all over Acton's case, his escape could be a Network issue. In my opinion, the humans are surely at fault, this is human error. But they...the Americans are going to say he was released because of The Network. And you can assume if Acton had infiltration help with The Network, and if he had a world-class hacker manipulating Network commands, he must have accessed his global resources to ensure his success. You will have to address those questions and find the answers. British Intelligence will coordinate."
"Coordinate this investigation?"
"Yes, coordinate the global hunt for the most wanted criminal in the world."

*

On the rolling aqua waves of the Mediterranean Sea between Gibraltar on the Spanish coast and Tangier to the south in Morocco, a boat silently drifted across the final miles to its destination. Suppressing an urge to smile, Rafer wistfully looked towards the northern African shore. His escape from the Americans had been swifter and more orderly than anticipated.
'Reliance on The Network...' he had thought the night of his escape, as he had climbed into a transport waiting outside the federal prison in Roanoke to take him down the U.S. east coast. 'Slow to adjust...' he disdainfully considered when he arrived at the home of Dr. Steven Howard near Wilmington in North Carolina. Howard knew Rafer was due on his doorstep, he too had received instructions from a network. But the network they used to communicate was managing a separate world of untraceable human action right below the sight lines of global law enforcement.
The rise of the official Network into the lives of every human on earth had been mirrored by the rise of rogue technologists, the name given to suspected educated and professional computer programmers, coders, network engineers, software designers, hardware service technicians and a support team of consultants, lawyers, managers, doctors and other professionals who sympathized with their cause. Unaligned but remarkably cooperative with each other, the group provided technology services-on-demand for those who were seeking a road around the official protocols of The Network. Each request represented a challenging project offered to rogue technologists anywhere in the world who agreed to

complete the work for competitively negotiated prices. Few knew the legitimate identities of these working technologists. Aliases were expected, and fees were paid through bank accounts in Caribbean islands. To avoid the intricate penetration of The Network, rogue techs had re-routed their world through secret servers housing virtual private roads known as off-ramps. Law enforcement relentlessly attacked these entry and exit points to the public Network, but rogue techs were self-employed and determined guardians of their domain. Access stood shielded behind impenetrable firewalls, coded multi-level encryption keys, and global redundancies. A one percent of the one percent list of international billionaires financed groundbreaking advanced research, and the implementation of redesigned security protocols, in exchange for control over an accessible parallel internet for their private and personal use. Each time governments drew closer to infiltrating the rogues' established structure, a redefined level of obstruction was raised. The battle was an unrelenting challenge for both sides, caught in a digital world war neither opponent expected to end.

Even without a com inside prison, Rafer had contact with his connections and those friends knew exactly how to manoeuver in both the official and unofficial communication worlds. Rafer had walked into Dr. Howard's house without a word. Howard handed him a com and pointed him towards a back bedroom where Rafer could see medical equipment orderly posed on a white cloth, sterilized and prepared to be used.

Removing his pants, Rafer lay down on the bed and propped his legs up on a pillow. He turned his head away and projected a com screen, as Dr. Howard turned on a light beam and began tracing the concentrated heat up and down Rafer's two legs. Dr. Howard was an aged man, approaching ninety, no longer in fear of The Network or its government tentacles. Having wanted to understand the most inventive reaches of technology sophistication, and to earn additional money for an extra comfortable retirement, he had extended his services to the rogue tech world by offering the opinions of a like-minded collaborator to those in need of a doctor in North Carolina. Successful but unapproved medical experiments were a thriving global business, and Dr. Howard a favored dispenser of these alternative options for the desperate. Although most procedures could be performed virtually, with no need for face-to-face contact, emergency surgery to remove a U.S. federal prison-tracking device could not. Dr. Howard had to find the device first, an action requiring human eyes.

The lighted beam beeped a recognition signal. Rafer stiffened but continued to look away as Dr. Howard took a black felt marker, drew a circle around the identified area, and began programming a laser cutter. Most prisoners wore only an electronic identification bracelet, which would automatically unlock on the prisoner's release. But Rafer was no ordinary prisoner in U.S. custody. For him, the government had embedded the more invasive tracker used only for the most extreme security risk cases. A released prisoner with the embedded tracker would have had the removal process done only by a medical professional authorized by the court or prison authorities, both of which had the only proprietary equipment used to extract the device from under skin, leaving no scars and causing no pain. But a self-released prisoner had to improvise. The laser cutter would almost definitely leave a scar, and the pain factor was unknown. Neither Rafer nor Dr. Howard knew how deep under his skin the tracker had been implanted, and the beam locator app was not sophisticated enough to correctly identify an exact location. Blindly, Dr. Howard turned on the cutter and Rafer closed his eyes.

Thirty minutes later with his leg throbbing and bandaged, Rafer stretched out his hand, and Dr. Howard dropped the tracking device onto his waiting palm. Staring at the one-centimeter square of plastic that once controlled his every step, Rafer slowly rose.
"Wait a second," Dr. Howard admonished as he raised his hand to stop Rafer from standing.
"I don't have a second," Rafer responded, placing both feet on the floor to test the weight on his leg. "Shit," he exclaimed as his body bulked at the knees.
"I said wait. You only need about an hour for the regeneration."
"I told you, there's no time."
"Okay, okay, but ease off putting weight on your leg. I'll give you crutches and when you get into the transport, prop your leg up."
"Okay, but I need to do something first."
"What?"
Rafer did not respond as he grabbed the crutches from a spot along the wall, and hobbled across the bedroom and into a hallway leading to a back door. Dr. Howard watched as Rafer went outside and slowly moved across the back lawn to reach the water. The southern plantation-style mansion lay at the edge of the barrier islands lying on reconstructed piles along North Carolina's Atlantic Ocean coast. Taking a minute to stare at the waves, destined to merge on the other side of the world to take him further away from his pursuers, Rafer raised his arm and threw the tracking device into the cold water.
As he slowly turned around to return, he nearly bumped into a hovering transport. Dr. Howard had directed the vehicle to his side, the older man's work was completed, now he needed the world's most wanted terrorist off of his property. Rafer climbed into the transport and tipped a hand towards Dr. Howard who stood watching from his back porch. The transport rose over the water and fled away, north.
'Dependent on others to confirm reality,' Rafer had later contemplated as he dried his hair, transformed from black to light brown, in the bathroom of a motel near Boston's Logan International Airport. Inside the motel room he had found a slightly worn European Community passport, and the make-up necessary to adapt his face to the one on the passport page. The work by his colleagues was, as usual, perfect. A reconstructed identity was precarious to manage within The Network. From the day a person was born, The Network began aggregating personal data. All information inputted into computers as text and voice communications, reports, records, education results, employment files, travel, entertainment preferences, food and drug purchases, recorded movements from cameras and sensors and all other information stored on globally-connected servers became an individual file on The Network, one file for every human on earth. Continuously scanned servers, even those not exposed to the public Internet retrieved, cross-referenced, and integrated data within controlled server spaces every second of every day without stopping. Aggregated data was used to create and send appropriate daily life instructions, specifically prepared for each individual's com, and all other coms interacting with an individual. The line of data was expected to end with the person's death, but with the advent of simulated conscience functionality, such inevitability was no longer assured. Creating a unique identity from scratch was nearly impossible. Although programs could create records about a fictitious individual, recreating a human's movements throughout a lifetime would take a degree of processing prowess the rogue tech community had yet to identify. Instead, a human wanting to resurface as another had to assume the identity of an existing person. The legitimate person would go underground, avoiding cameras and all

electronic systems, while the imposter using the identity moved from one place to another with the hope of avoiding capture. Since all humans were integrated with their coms, no one was expected to remember their life details. If an individual was stopped on a suspicion and asked to confirm his last activities, requesting to search his own com for the information would not be considered unusual. Professing a lack of knowledge about yesterday's activities was no longer grounds for assuming an evasion of personal identification. Humans automatically reacted to instructions from coms, few independently planned and thought about their actions. The com kept the record of a life while the individual human's brain barely registered a memory.

But to match the physical identity, all facial adjustments had to be subtle to prevent The Network's surveillance cameras from formulating a definitive image, but not insignificant and likely to set off an alarm. The best option was to attempt to appear close to the image of multiple records. If The Network captured a face and registered an anomaly in its massive database of all human records, the system would automatically cross-reference to determine the source of the trigger. Programmed to track, not disregard, humans who attempted to evade its surveillance protocols, the system would prompt a tracer to determine where the human had originated his trip and the entire route of his travel. If a human was caught in a disguise, an automated suspicious behavior tracker would permanently flag the record, and a watch file would be activated until an incident gave law enforcement an excuse to act.

Boarding another transport, Rafer had moved on from the motel to the airport. International transport facilities were layered from sidewalk to skylights in cameras and sensors. But the buildings were also crowded, and packed faces stretched the cameras' individual views. Walking with purpose and order, Rafer passed through security and boarded a direct flight to Dublin, Ireland. Checking his com, he had considered his prison guards in Roanoke rising to the realization he was gone.

After arrival in Dublin, he had immediately boarded another flight bound for Seville, Spain via Madrid. Another transport seamlessly awaited him in southern Spain and made the journey to the coast. From there he found his boat, and before Jocelyn Rongen had marshaled the international investigation team, he was within sight of the shore in Tangier. A signal flashed through the darkened Mediterranean night prompting Rafer to sit up straight and lean towards the light. As the boat drew nearer, two Moroccan men slipped into the water, grasped the front and dragged the watercraft up onto the shore. Three additional local men emerged from behind a sloping wooden structure, arms outstretched and smiling. Rafer climbed out of the boat and stepped into their hugs, as greetings and congratulations were exchanged in Arabic. The arriving party pointed towards a waiting car, a ground level vehicle with four wheels and a human sitting behind the steering wheel. Rafer turned to his boatmen, shook hands, exchanged more euros, and kissed each on both cheeks before following the others to the standing vehicle.

Traditional cars remained on the roads in many African countries where the locals had yet to fully accept the sight of an auto-controlled hovering transport. In tourist locations, visitors paid for the privilege of slowly viewing a city at street level from behind the glass of an aging novelty. In Tangier, the men had both excuses for moving around on four wheels. No passer-by would question the sight of a car on the fabled city's broken roads. Even though the hour was late, and none of the passengers appeared to be tourists, there were enough private automobiles in the city to avoid suspicion at the sight of one more.

"You're brilliant," Rafer honestly exclaimed as he climbed into the backseat and settled next to another passenger.
Monifa Abed looked at the man next to her with clear eyes. "The challenge was extremely interesting."
"And brilliantly executed."
Abed smirked without responding and turned her head to look out the window, her long, dark hair rolling with her gaze. Only in her twenties, Abed was officially an Egyptian chemistry scientist working in Lebanon, and unofficially a rogue technologist who, depending on how much a party was willing to pay, played both sides of the global cyber war game.
"You have your money?" Rafer asked.
"Yes of course," Abed sternly responded, turning back towards him. "If I didn't you'd be in the water."
Rafer laughed. "Of course I would."
"They will take you to Rabat," she continued gesturing to the driver in the front seat.
"Are you coming? I would enjoy intelligent conversation on my journey. Prison guards in America are uneducated idiots. They do not even know where Egypt is located."
Abed narrowed her eyes. "I agreed only to meet you," she flatly stated. "You wanted to see my face and I yours. But you must know, I am against killing children."
"They killed our children."
"A long time ago."
"And they showed no remorse."
"A very, very long time ago."
"They are the descendants."
"We are not on this earth to fight our great-great-great-and-greater grandfathers' battles."
Abed's voice began to rise. "We are descendants too, and we have bigger issues in today's world. We are here to improve the future for our children, to keep our civilization going. We survive for ourselves, not to revive an ancient feud until they kill us all."
"Yes, yes, I understand your sentiment," Rafer professed. "You want to focus on the bigger issues for our better world." Abed waited for him to continue. "But first, I understand you and your friends can extend this little Network window to...free a few more of our friends?"
Abed sighed. "We...yes, perhaps if the attempt is work the risk," she confessed. "You were a test. And we appreciated the experiment. But the circumstances in other places are not the same."
"But you will work on it...as agreed."
"Yes as agreed."
"Soon we will all be free."
"Only if our attempts work as planned, perfectly."
"You and your friends will be successful. The things you can do..."
"I can only do my part if global cyber security does not interfere before we are finished. They are going to react with megaforce when they realize how you escaped. All of the electronic controls on all prisons will be changed."
"Government will not interfere with our plans."
"How do you know?"
"We are smarter than they are."
"Not always."

"This time...this time we are, and that's all that matters."

*

Simultaneous shouting permeated all four corners of the conference room at British Intelligence headquarters in London as Kadie walked in with a scant team consisting of one advisor and one technician. A global group of law enforcement officials were debating every aspect of Rafer's escape. Circling the room, video screens hanging on each wall displayed more officials located in different world capitals, but joining in the animated words and gestures as if they were sitting in the room. Kadie looked at her team and rolled her eyes.

In the U.S., within the day of Rafer's disappearance, Judge Marvin had announced the indefinite suspension of Rafer's trial, and refused to state the results of the auto-jury verdict generated by The Network. Global media was aghast. Reports ranged from speculation the judge was attempting to circumvent the auto-jury application to make her own decision, to rumors of Rafer's escape. The U.S. government refused to comment. Instead, the official statement was for all to await the impartial and fair pronouncement of the justice system. Until such time, there would be no further information.

A select group of insiders, Judge Marvin, U.S. government officials at the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security, and Intelligence officials knew The Network had issued two verdicts. At 12:11 am on the night he walked out, Rafer had received a 'not guilty' verdict. Seven minutes later, The Network issued a 'guilty' verdict. But to The Network, the latter result was a 'guilty' verdict against an already released prisoner. The system registered the second verdict as an error, did an automated verification - and canceled the second message. No one had ever seen an auto-jury verdict canceled or even knew the action was possible. Where did the instruction come from to cancel a verdict generated after months of preparation and weeks of a trial? No one could explain the outcome. The cancellation ultimately also cancelled the second running of the aggregation Judge Marvin had originally ordered. Suspended in unprecedented legal waters, Judge Marvin debated whether she had a valid verdict in the Rafer Acton trial. And if she did, which one was legally legitimate to announce? Internally, the U.S. federal prison system listed the verdict result as an undefined Network issue under investigation by U.S. law enforcement and global cyber security. Jocelyn Rongen used a Network override to officially record Rafer as being held 'in solitary confinement,' and returned his release status to 'pending trial.' Both actions were suspected to be illegal, the type of manipulation of prisoners' rights justice organizations had been battling around the world for decades. But Rongen and the entire U.S. prison system apparatus had no intention of informing the world Rafer was free.

In London, Kadie surveyed the room again. For the first time since being named the head of Special Command, she was facing a team of colleagues over whom she had no control. Special Command was a uniquely autonomous division of the United Nations Security Council. Her permanent organization was founded and funded to protect the member states' cyberspace against rogue technologists, and the more organized Cyber Army who had declared outright war against all forms of digital government control. The teams in the room were national police forces and international investigators. This group of officials had long resented Special Command's role in investigations they believed rightfully belonged under their jurisdiction. But Special Command had the uniform trust of all U.N. member states, the badge of neutrality and a singular sense of mission of which the rest

could not boast. Kadie was more aware of her position than the others. But in a moment of silent pique, she questioned why she had come to London at the request of British Intelligence, for a group meeting about an incident clearly within her investigative authority.

Upon seeing Kadie enter, Slater moved to regain control of the room. "Everyone," he shouted over the conversations. "Ladies and gentlemen, we would like to begin. Please sit down, please..."

The level of noise began to slowly recede as the group quieted and individuals moved into identified seats. Kadie noted the position of the U.N. Special Command placard, next to Slater's sign, which read 'British Intelligence,' and to America's Central Intelligence Agency, the C.I.A. Showing no emotion or surprise by the placement, she joined the others in accepting a seat at the table. The C.I.A. was at the top of the list of organizations disdaining the rise of Special Command. But Special Command had a backer no other group could claim, the secretive global approval force run by The Alliance. The world's most influential people paid for the security and expectation of ensuring the online Network functioned correctly, without incident, and to their benefit, at all times. The Alliance furtively underwrote Special Command's unique ability to attract extraordinary professionals to work on one-off projects whenever the organization solicited additional resources to expedite solutions. Every other national government cyber law enforcement organization tried the same tactic. But no group had the skill or contacts Special Command had amassed over the years. As much as the groups were united in a common goal to protect the global Network, they were all also rivals, jealous of the resources, prestige and power available to be wielded. And the human frailties exhibited in their fragile cooperation structure were a weakness exploited time and again by rogue technologists.

"We almost certainly have a cross-border situation," Slater said to the quieted room. "Acton is unlikely to have stayed in the United States. We have asked you all here to represent every inch of the earth and coordinate a global search for Acton. His escape is a surprise to everyone, not only the United States."

"The U.S. system released him," Interpol agent Patrice Ouellette angrily interjected. "He should have been at the World Court."

"We are not here to point fingers," Slater continued. "Only to reach an agreement for finding Acton."

"We all need to participate in catching a criminal the Americans lost?"

"Yes of course, this is a global situation."

"The Americans let that animal walk free."

"We do not have all the details. We need to work together."

"We are conducting our own investigation," Gillian Fowler, the C.I.A. director sitting next to Kadie, suddenly insisted. Straight-backed and severe, Gillian's twenty-year rise through C.I.A. ranks had been highlighted by direct decision-making and bold action. "We have the resources. We do not need..." she looked around the room, "...this team."

"Excuse me, but your government prefers a cooperative approach," Slater stated. Gillian glared at him. "Acton is most likely outside the U.S. You need the cooperation of all the national governments to pick him up on the ground and..." he turned to Kadie, "...Special Command to hunt him down online." Gillian glanced at Kadie, only slightly modifying her derision.

Kadie was bewildered. She could not understand why Slater was presenting her to the meeting room as an unofficial resource, like a rookie agent in training. Nor could she believe she was expected to work with a mixed, unruly set of organizations focused on their singular agendas and their own benefits. Slater should have known better than to request her attendance at this meeting, and expect her to stay.
"The Network analysis will be conducted by Special Command," Slater was saying as both Kadie and Gillian scowled at him. "They will have full jurisdic—"
"Not The Network analysis of our U.S. judicial system applications?" Gillian interrupted, incredulous.
"Yes," Slater replied.
"A foreign analysis is not acceptable. We will not allow a U.N. investigation into our justice network."
"This is a cooperative global investigation into the wrongful release of a wanted criminal."
"We will conduct the investigation on our own."
"Director Fowler," Slater calmly stated, steadying his breathing. "Perhaps you are not aware, but you can have some comfort in knowing the escape was not a result of your protocols. At least not directly."
"What are you talking about?"
"Initial analysis revealed the incident to be a form of Network compromise."
"What?" Kadie exclaimed, as she suddenly diverted her gaze from puzzled to engaged.
"Compromise?" Gillian asked.
"Yes and The Network received the instruction from abroad," Slater clarified.
"Has that information been officially confirmed?"
"Yes, we received confirmation an hour ago. We looked at your analysis, specifically the disruption sequence. The incident was instigated from outside U.S. borders." He turned to Kadie. "And Special Command will be tasked to determine exactly where."
"Special Command has no authority in our systems," Gillian repeated. "We will not allow global government inside our network walls. This is not the analysis of camera feeds and sensor readings. You are talking about the detailed governance protocol of the U.S. justice system. We cannot hand our citizens' confidential information over to foreigners."
"Director Fowler, Special Command has broad authority to—"
"Not in this. Special Command has no authority in the inner workings of the U.S. justice system."
"I think it's too late for jurisdictional squab—" Slater intervened.
"This is a U.S. government matter, not the U.N."
"This is a global matter."
"Only apprehending Acton, wherever in the world he is, yes, we agree that's a global matter. But investigating the U.S. justice system protocols in The Network, no. The U.S. government will take care of its own network."
"We are not here to debate."
"Correct, we are not. The U.S. came here only out of courtesy to our allies." Gillian turned slowly to glance at the faces of her global colleagues around the room. "We are aware Acton is a global criminal and his next stop was due to be the International Criminal Court. For those reasons, we have come to brief you on the current situation and the extent of our investigation. We are not asking for, nor expect, nor allow..." she turned to Slater, "...any other action involving U.S. controlled cyber resources. U.S. Cyber Security will conduct an

investigation into the jailbreak. U.S. Intelligence will lead the physical hunt for Acton, and cooperate with all other global law enforcement organizations involved in the search. We will keep British Intelligence and U.N. Special Command informed on a need to know basis."
"One moment," Slater slowly stated as he struggled to control his reaction. "Are we operating under similar instructions presumably handed to us by our cooperating governments?"
Annoyed, Gillian stared at him as if forced to repeat a command to an indifferent child.
"This group..." she gestured around the room to her global colleagues, "...does not represent the official search for Acton. Only U.S. resources do. He is our prisoner and we will find him. Of course, we welcome global cooperation. But not global interference."
"Acton is a British national."
"Wanted by the U.S."
"You have no jurisdiction over criminals British Intelligence decides to search for—"
"And you have no jurisdiction—"
"Please..." Kadie forcefully interrupted holding up her hand. She turned to Gillian. "If you have separate instructions, go ahead, follow the commands you've been handed. I'm sure your path and this one..." she pointed to Slater, "...will be reconciled before the day ends. After all a dangerous terrorist is walking freely in the world and our collective goal is to catch him."
Gillian and Slater stared at each other.
"In the meantime..." Kadie continued, "...we all have mandates within the scope of this investigation. Therefore, I would like to suggest we continue with the reason we came together today. We share the information we wish to share, including our investigation plans for finding this criminal. British Intelligence can coordinate our ongoing communication. But in the meantime, shall we move on with the intention of this meeting."
"Absolutely," Gillian triumphantly agreed. "We should be hunting for Acton and we can advise each organization if we require additional cooperation within their territory. This meeting has been...I'm afraid, a waste of our precious time."
"I didn't say—" Kadie stated.
Gillian stood and looked at Kadie. "Thank you Commander, for putting us back on track." Turning back to the room she said, "As I have stated, the U.S. will conduct the investigation, and you will be kept up-to-date on a need to know basis. Thank you and good day."
Abruptly, she backed away from the table, stood before anyone could comment and walked out of the room with her team trailing behind her.
Kadie looked at Slater with a subtle gaze urging him to move on.
But Slater turned to the room and said, "Let's take an hour to reconnect with our governments before reconvening." As participants in the silent room stood, he followed Kadie out the door.
"Okay go ahead, explain your reaction to me," Slater admonished her as they both reached a private corridor away from the view into the open conference room doors. "Are you on my side about our goals here or not?"
"You can't possibly expect me to work in a group like this," Kadie reprimanded him. "With people who are hostile to Special Command's mandate, and others who do not even know their own."
"Kadie, we are trying to coordinate globally."

"Who are we? The Americans are obviously not interested in a global team."
"But British Intelligence is trying to coordinate a global team."
"And?"
"And...and the organizations we usually collaborate with agree we should lead this effort. Look Kadie—"
"No, you look. Gillian was right. This meeting is a waste of time. I do not attend meetings having no specific purpose or goals. Special Command does not passively join a team. We coordinate our own resources and our own people. We never react to a situation with undirected mass think."
"This time is different."
"Why? What is going on?"
"As I have stated, we are coordinating a global approach."
"You know I do not function within a global approach," Kadie angrily repeated.
"Okay, yes...yes I know."
"But this time..."
Slater hesitated before carefully stating, "People want Special Command to be more integrated."
"Integrated? With who?"
"With everyone."
"What are you talking about? We have representatives from every organization on our team."
"Mostly at low levels."
"At exactly the level where their talent puts them. Believe me if the people they sent us were qualified, I'd have them sit right next to me."
"Exactly."
"What?"
"You put your selected best people next to you and leave all others on the margins."
"My objective is to run a world class organization. I'm forced to accept representatives from around the world, but I assign the work based on individual capability."
"Piecemeal work is not enough, Kadie. You are a U.N. organization and well...people want more access."
Kadie stared at him incredulously. "More access? To my core team, to my strategy and tactical teams...no."
"Kadie—"
"No Slater, never. The only reason Special Command is effective is because of our flexibility and autonomy. If I'm sent representatives solicited from every organization and have to use them in roles for which they are not qualified, my team will fall apart."
"We are under pressure to be more inclusive, Kadie."
"Who?"
"Global government."
She raised her eyebrows. "Global government? I think I would have heard if people were looking for changes within my arm of global government."
"You are hearing the feedback now."
"Am I..." she suspiciously looked at him, "...I'm not exactly sure what I am hearing. But I know there are many other people besides you who could have delivered such a

straightforward HR message. If you have a legitimate reason for trying this move on me, you might want to come clean and tell me the truth."
"I am telling you. We have a bit of pressure from our partners to open up Special Command and make the organization more inclusive. You have to care about ensuring greater global involvement?"
She smirked. "Really?"
"Cooperate, Kadie."
"I'm responsible for Special Command's mandate. A mandate we need to execute efficiently and correctly to be successful. You will not have a chance to micromanage me. Our investigation will be conducted under our rules. If the Security Council wants to fire me, fine. In the meantime, I have to find a terrorist and the hackers who helped him escape. Leave me to my job Slater, as you know very well, I only operate on my terms. Accept my decision or face the consequences, I will leave Special Command."
"Kadie, do not be so dramatic. You will not quit and the U.N. would never fire you. No one wants or expects such a disruptive outcome. But help me, please give me a concession on the team."
"No."
"Must you copy the obstinacy of our American friend and demand a completely independent investigation?"
"Yes."
"Kadie, please—"
"Slater, there is a price to be paid for efficiency and competence. Your bureaucracies and favors owed will not slow me down. You should know better than to even ask me to consider the possibility."
"Yes I know, I know, but...but at least give me more time to work out—"
"No. This investigation has already started and dragging me here to a useless meeting is delaying our progress. I'm moving on, Slater. I will establish my team, find Rafer Acton, and uncover the issues with The Network."
"You will need Alliance resources."
"I've got Alliance resources." Slater hesitated. Un-noticed in the labyrinth of global politics and world trade, The Alliance operated as a human network of unofficial channels determined to ensure a safe, functioning global order beyond the pronouncements of U.N. press releases. Not only did the secret organization directly recruit qualified people for its internal efforts, but its benefactors also attracted the most reliable of those working within the world of government, private companies, non-government organizations and independently, by offering generous financial support and human brainpower to ensure the successful execution of defined plans. The work was never transparently illegal, but always shrouded and influential. And the organization preferred to maintain its cover behind the people internally celebrated as its global team. "Not on this," Slater guardedly noted. "On this you will not have Alliance resources, at least not yet. Certain people want this done—"
"I am conducting this investigation on my terms. The only way Special Command functions."
"But you will need support."
"I'll have support."

"Who? Where are you getting this..." He stopped as the answer arrived before the question could exit his mouth. "Oh of course, your boyfriend." Slater smirked and Kadie did not react to confirm or deny his suspicion. "Okay sure, yes Roman could help you. But on this investigation The Alliance is looking for much more. The organization wants to reduce its risk."
"Really? Risk of what?"
"This is not a simple issue, Kadie."
"No, but it is 'the' issue, correct? That's why you called me here. You have an Alliance mandate, not a 'global government' issue." Slater did not reply. "All right, try me on the complexity. Tell me the risk The Alliance is trying to avoid?"
Slater leaned back into the wall. "Other countries are...are worried about their cyber security capabilities."
"Everyone is worried, Slater. And their concern led to the creation of Special Command. We operate at the highest levels of cyber sophistication and all nations benefit from the operations we manage."
"Some believe others are benefiting too much, and each country is not receiving an equal share."
"Oh c'mon. Stop dancing around. Tell me the truth, Slater. What's the issue? Who's complaining and why?"
"Russia and China think Special Command is too heavily influenced by the U.S. Based on their feedback we agreed British Intelligence would coordinate this investigation and make The Network analysis work more neutral. A number of people within The Alliance are trying to keep all stakeholders happy. Our purpose is global stability. We need calm waters to function, to trade, to make money, to stay healthy...you understand. Any hint of discord, and people want to make adjustments."
Kadie stared at him, barely hiding her rage. "Seriously? You want me to make adjustments to our protection of global cyber security because of a few crybabies. We are not playing politics with the lives of billions of people, Slater. In The Alliance of all places, they should know there is no compromise on our approach, ever."
"Yes of course they know, Kadie. The Alliance exists for a reason, to avoid having to compromise in the name of politics or bureaucracies. Believe me, everyone understands. But the world is becoming more complicated. And each Special Command success, or I should say, any global success of Alliance connected people, creates a little bit of unease."
"They should be celebrating our success."
"They are, they are. But in the interest of avoiding attention, they are also becoming more cautious."
"I know my mandate Slater, they do not have to be uneasy about Special Command."
"I know."
"If they trust they've made the right leadership choice for the organization, this conversation is unnecessary...and insulting."
"Please Kadie, give me a little help."
"No."
"Can I beg you?"
"No."
"Please. You know I would never ask unless the request was urgent and very, very necessary."

Kadie looked at him. Slater's face had slid into an unwilling strain, part frightened, part suffering. She narrowed her eyes, she had never seen him appear unhinged. "What's really going on?" she softly asked.
Slater adjusted too late to her concerns, he reset his face to avoid further reads, but grasped she had already come to her own conclusions. "I promise you, one day I will explain all of the details."
The promise was too empty a trade for Kadie's control of Special Command, and she knew Slater was well aware how she would react. Stiffening she said, "You can conduct your investigation as you see fit, but your actions will not interfere with mine. I will run my operation with totally independent decision making."
"Kadie please."
"Last chance Slater, I'm not staying here to debate with you all day. Either my investigation is on my terms or you receive no direct assistance from Special Command."
"How is your proposal cooperation?"
"Because in my investigations, I ensure the connections we need are established and efficiently functioning. We will have to cooperate to accomplish our goals. But if no coordination is necessary, we will not need to speak."
"Kadie please, you are a diplomat. You can find a way to work with each person who needs to participate and make them feel comfortable."
"This is not a U.N. negotiation meeting, Slater. This is the hunt for a global terrorist. I know exactly how I want to run my investigation without interference. And I'm not about to adopt another approach while Rafer Acton disappears forever. Now give me an answer, I want to return to work."
"I need more time."
"Wrong answer."
"Kadie..."
"Special Command is investigating the escape of Rafer Acton with the intention of finding him and handing him back to the U.S. justice system. My team will put their reports on our Network and you can update yourself on the progress. But if you interfere, I'll retaliate."
"Retaliate? Against me?"
Avoiding a direct answer Kadie replied, "Contact me only if you are prepared to accept my control of all Special Command decisions. You can tell me the truth about your ridiculous demands anytime, but I doubt you will have a compelling reason to prompt me to change my mind." She turned to walk away.
"But Kadie..."
"Bye Slater." She raised her hand in departure while turning her back and leaving.
Running a shaking hand through his hair, Slater looked to his left and to his right. His commanded global cooperation meeting had disintegrated into a factional split between two uncompromising adversaries. 'How in the world had he lost Kadie?' he thought. Fifteen years of friendship, and a partnership legacy in combatting cyber security, and he had lost her in a few minutes. Worse, his own position had become a scramble to monitor separate U.S. and Special Command operations within the same investigation led by two people who suddenly were not prepared to cooperate with one another. Slater bit his lip and shook his head. 'So much for executing on my own instructions,' he thought. 'Now no legitimate organization in the world has a coherent picture of the hunt for Rafer Acton.'

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Depending on where a person landed in a country crossing only 55 miles at its widest, winter in Lebanon can appear as in the French Alps with tossed sprinkles of fresh snow lacing low mountain peaks, or the French Riviera as yellow sands blowing slowly across the flat lines of beaches. But in the interior Beqaa Valley, pushed up against the border with Syria, muggy air hung thick with a permanent frost of anxiety. In a circumferential area of over eleven miles, barbed wire fencing had been hastily hammered into the ground, its twisted spikes menacingly pointing inward to separate the valley's fertile agricultural land from 25,000 Hittite refugees. The arrivals included those who were technically internally displaced people, uprooted from within the country's borders, and those who poured in from neighboring lands fleeing an ancient upheaval shockingly catching an indifferent world unawares. Uninspiring winds blew off the Anti-Lebanon Mountains to the east, intermittently cracking through the dust and sweat dominating the ground below. The supple, productive soil was trampled into invisibility by thousands of light blue and white U.N. tents creating a temporary canvas skyline stretching in compact lines to form a grid providing a semblance of order in all directions.

An inner fence of repurposed wood boarded off a separate zone for unaccompanied women and next to them, the orphaned children. Further along, another zone contained convenience-store-sized all white tents brightly marked with painted red crosses and red crescents, supporting patient lines of people holding bowls for food or bags for medicine. For a functioning town, built within days by four non-governmental organizations under U.N. supervision, the refugee camp remained uncomfortably calm. Every week, a convoy of transport trucks arrived from Beirut, and deposited boxes of supplies with the paid and volunteer administrators who had signed on for an undefined time to protect and manage the thousands who had nowhere else to go.

The displaced people, when they spoke at all, seemed to whisper as they moved from home tent to food tent and back again two or three times a day. Overhead civilian drones, unmanned aerial devices, flew broad security sweeps from one end of the camp fence to the other, recording the movements and activities of people in their temporary homes. Drones operated automatically on instructions from The Network or by a human with a manual remote control. The machines were all sizes and employed in a range of functional uses from carrying products and emergency kits to assisting with repairs and targeted surveillance. In most countries, businesses, organizations, professionals and individuals ubiquitously used civilian drones in all aspects of their daily lives and operations. At the refugee camp, the government employed a drone security patrol to fly over throughout the day and record images for required retrieval.

At all hours, in despair and amusement, refugees went to the center of the camp where a two-sided electronic message board, ten feet high and twenty feet long, had been erected to receive text messages from around the world. In the rush to depart an area under siege, coms were often lost or service disrupted, or the survivors never reached their intended destination. To provide general information and keep communication flowing, anyone in the world with the hope of receiving news of a missing loved one could text a message to those in Beqaa. 'Did anyone see M—?' 'Was there anyone left in S— village?' 'Is there a new camp in Lebanon?' 'Where can I ask about children?' All day long the messages, videos and pictures flashed up on the board, displaying by location both where people

came from and where they were currently located, along with contact details or requests to transfer money. Within the camp, a passer-by could view the board from several directions, as thousands did while hoping to catch a glimpse of familiar faces. Or one could go to a free kiosk to search archives of previous messages sent from the day the first person had arrived. Others retreated to quiet corners and accessed social media websites via com. Occasionally the tension around the message board would break with joy as families were reconnected. A man would find a text from his brother, scream with delight and use his own com to contact him and make plans to reunite. But the breaks would also end in tears. A woman would see a video from her son, confirming deaths in the rest of her family, and advising he has fled to France in the hope of finding work. As the woman collapsed onto the ground in tears, a few sympathizers would quietly move her away from the viewing path, to allow another person more space to face the consequences of instant communication.

Demir Hurrian stood watching the board and did not divert his gaze as a crying elderly woman was carried past his feet to a place in the sand where she could continue her despair alone. His youthful eyes drifted up, down and over each message as the data displayed for 90 seconds, before moving from right to left and up and down the screen in a continuous loop for 10 days prior to filing in the archives. In his family's scramble to escape, they had hastily given each other instructions should they be separated. "Text every message board in every camp," his mother had demanded as they ran from the sound of gunfire. "Look for my words, look for my names for you, for my poem, when you see familiar words you will know I am alive." Every day Demir sat in front of the board for at least two hours, silently looking for his mother's pet name for him, 'Mitty.' If he saw the name spelled, in English, as she always pronounced it, he would know she had escaped and was still breathing on this earth. Mitty was not a Hittite name, not even a word in their language. The nickname came from a character in an American book his mother had read, a character called Walter Mitty. "He is like you," his mother had told him of the character. "Always off on an adventure in his head, like you." Mitty smiled at the memory and thought, 'not like himself exactly, but like the man he wanted to be.'

Messages appeared on the board in a mix of character, form and languages. People used symbols, pictures, icons and even music to attract the unique attention of one set of eyes in a sea of desperation. Hoping to be noticed through differentiation, each contact request was designed to be distinctive from the next. But when the colors, fonts and lines of the board suddenly began to merge, Mitty almost instantly noted the anomaly. The texts were never uniform. Glancing around, he realized he was not the only person who had noticed the slow transformation. Those who were sitting stood and crept closer to the board. Those who were standing began to move back, inching away from the merging flashes in front of them.

A minute later, Mitty realized people were pointing to the sky. Looking up into the dry, blue air he saw hundreds, no probably thousands, of transports smoothly tracing a direct route towards the refugee camp. The sound of conversations around the message board began to rise and the finger pointing moved from the sky back to the board. The anxious pleas from families and friends around the world had disappeared, replaced by two sentences spectators in the camp were grasping to believe. In Hittite, Arabic, English and French and the words read, 'Transport to England. You are Free.' The crowd around the board started cheering, screaming, clapping their hands, and falling to their knees in

prayer, as the message spread from the centerboard to each reach of the edges of the camp. Individuals ran to find family members, families already together flung their arms around each other to avoid separation in the rising push of the crowd, and small children were raised up on to shoulders to avoid being crushed.

Suddenly a cry rose up as people continued to point from the board to the sky, the message changed to "Transport for Everyone. Be Patient." The words appeared before them as a beacon, and in unison the sky above darkened with the arrival of the transports. Each vehicle was an auto-flying circular pod with room for ten people sitting on flat-backed benches and covered in a clear, plexiglass bubble. Although the average personal transport could hover over mixed terrain from sand to ice to gravel, the machines seldom traveled long distances. The Network controlled all transports, and personal transports were prohibited from crossing international boundaries through the air without pre-authorized clearances. No camp administrator was aware of an international transport process to take thousands of refugees from the U.N. camp to a European country. Neither a resettlement nor a rescue of this scale had ever been attempted. No official had been advised of an expected airlift to England. But for those who had been in the camp for months, even years, the impossibility of the situation was not a realistic deterrence. Once again the board displayed 'Transport to England. You are Free,' before changing to 'Transport for Everyone. Be Patient,' and back again. To the extent each desperate individual could assess his own future, the message meant an opportunity existed to leave.

As the crowd originally drifting around the message board, ran back to their tents to gather belongings, camp workers from around the world stood stock still in the open space and watched the ground fill with landing transports. In their stupefaction, administrators initially failed to contact outside agencies for assistance. As transports drew closer, refugees made room for each machine to carefully touch down, and the camp workers swirled around in disbelief. People began scrambling to reach open cabs, pushing and shoving each other as if terrified no other vehicle would land even though another hovered above the occupied ground. Once inside, the passengers noticed the transport's inside monitor screen displaying the same message: 'Transport for everyone. Be patient.' As the first transports filled and rose to fly away, more landed, but the crowd did not calm.

In rising recognition of the camp emptying before their eyes, camp administrators began to raise their own alarms about the unfolding scene. Most were looking at their coms, searching for news reports of a refugee airlift or reassignment from their government. But Dr. Alex Lassiter, a seven-year veteran of Doctors without Borders, instantly exhausted those possibilities. As soon as he saw the sky fill with transports, and heard the cries of the refugees saying they were going to freedom in England, he knew the situation was incongruous. He had glanced at his com, embedded habits are not easily broken, but the automatic gesture led only to noting daily stories on the state of the economy and cross-border overtures to avert conflicts. If he and his colleagues did not quickly notify global governments and the media of the situation, the camp would soon be cleared, and they would have no grounds for providing an explanation. Without further provocation Dr. Lassiter shouted to a colleague, "Take photos of the message board and transports and send them to the U.N. right now." The colleague nodded and ran towards the center of the camp. To another he ordered, "Alert the media, send photos of all those transports in the sky. Talk to your government, hurry!"

The camp workers representing the U.N., Doctors without Borders, Global Christian Coalition, the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies instantly began sending messages, photos and videos to all of their headquarters requesting the information be forwarded to their respective national governments. A news team from Azerbaijan, already in the camp preparing a documentary, was interviewing survivors about their journey when the transports arrived, and they immediately scrambled to capture video footage of the refugees racing to leave. Refugees began calling, texting and posting about the incident, and family and friends around the world received images for re-posting on social media sites.

The Lebanese government had one group of a dozen soldiers patrolling outside the camp. Those men initially sent requests to their supervisors for an explanation or instructions, and followed up their dramatic pleas with photos of the transports and the departing refugees. The government sent two fighter planes to investigate but the pilots could only record views of the tops of disappearing transports. The government would not risk an order to shoot at the unauthorized vehicles, but instead sent more surveillance drones to capture video. When the visuals were displayed in Beirut for examination, no witnesses or investigators had an explanation for the scenes they were recording.

Dr. Lassiter ran back to his medical tent and projected a com screen to contact the U.N. High Commission for Refugees headquarters in New York City.

"Dr. Lassiter, there is no Network report of thousands of transports hovering over your camp," a sleepy low-level functionary at U.N. headquarters greeted him. "Are you sure?"

"Look at the pictures we are sending," Dr. Lassiter insisted. "We have gone to the media with the news, you have to alert the authorities." Silence greeted him, as Dr. Lassiter realized the bureaucrat must be staring at the photos. "The camp is emptying," Dr. Lassiter continued. "Find an official to address this right now."

"Yes, yes, hold on please," the functionary responded as the line went silent. Several minutes crept by as Dr. Lassiter projected another com screen to view news reports. Several media outlets were conducting live conversations with people in the camp. Both refugees and camp workers were providing details about the scenes they were viewing. But Dr. Lassiter also realized the transports were arriving, filling and leaving much quicker than the verbal communications were reaching outside ears. 'Where are they going?' he wondered. Instinctively, he knew the destination was not England.

"Dr. Lassiter?" the functionary returned to the conversation.

"Yes," Dr. Lassiter replied.

"We...we are investigating."

"What are you going to do?"

"We...we don't...we don't really know. But all of the higher-ups have been alerted."

"No country ordered an airlift?"

"No."

"The British government is not expecting 25,000 refugees."

"No."

"We have orphaned children here. We cannot put them on unauthorized transports."

"No...no you probably cannot."

"This camp is emptying. Where are those transports going?"

"Going?"

"Yes, where are they going?"

"Not to England."
"Are they being tracked to England?" The functionary did not respond. "Are they being tracked at all?"
"Ahh...yes, but...no."
"What do you mean?"
"We can't track them."
"Of course you can track them. We've reported the machines are auto-operating transports, you can track them on The Network."
"No...apparently not."
"Why?"
"We are not seeing those transports on The Network."
"Not on The Network?" Dr. Lassiter was silenced. "But...but does that mean...are...are...these people being kidnapped?"
"I have no idea, Dr. Lassiter."
'Kidnapped or freed?' Dr. Lassiter thought but said aloud, "There is nothing we can do? We cannot stop this?"
"We are trying."
"You will be too late," Dr. Lassiter conceded. "Too late for this...this scheme."
"What do you think is happening?"
"I have no idea either."
"We'll contact you when we have more information."
"Thank you," Dr. Lassiter said with resignation as he collapsed the screen and rose from his desk. Next to his tent stood the hospital, a handful of patients had been seized by family members as medical staff tried in vain to restrain them. Others too sick to travel were left with a promise to collect them later. As he walked among the thinning crowds, Dr. Lassiter saw camp workers warning refugees the transports were not authorized, and no official knew where the vehicles were going. But the pleas fell onto the closed ears of those who had anxiously wanted to be settled in a permanent home where they could work or start studying again and rebuild shattered lives. Dr. Lassiter walked towards the children's enclosure. The majority of designated orphans remained left behind, abandoned for a second time. A few had been collected by more distant relatives who knew they were in camp but had not wanted to be responsible for them full-time, but the rest had no connections left to reclaim them. The departing transports were leaving behind, the remainder of the children, the sick and injured, a few wary elderly, a handful of skeptical younger adults, and an international team of volunteers and administrators, in a once thriving, established and peaceful camp built to order, by those providing organized assistance to others. In a few hours, their collective work would be destroyed, leaving the Lebanese government silently pleased to be relieved of the global duty thrust upon them when a radical group had reignited an ancient conflict by fomenting regional agitation against suspected Hittite people. Dr. Lassiter stopped to consider the date. Rafer Acton, the lead actor in the anti-Hittite movement was due to be sentenced but the trial had been suspended. 'Could this incident, the sudden unexplained capture of thousands of Hittite refugees, be related to his fate?'

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"Is there a Network report?" Slater asked.

"No, not really," replied his subordinate, a Network analyst in the British Intelligence cyber security unit.
"Care to explain."
"There is no report of incoming or departing transports around the refugee camp in Beqaa, Lebanon." Slater leaned over the man's shoulder and stared at the screen. The projected image showed the refugee camp location. Although the semi-desert area obviously appeared to be devoid of people, the record of alert searches clearly indicated no transports had picked up the refugees. The U.N. had a structured system for recording every person permanently entering and exiting the camp, but since the process could not be utilized during the mass exodus, all systems continued to register a population of around 25,000 people. Although Slater had seen the photos and videos sent by departing refugees, camp workers and the Azerbaijani film crew, confirming thousands of people had definitely been picked up by hovering transports, his observations were contradicted by the official record.
"This makes no sense," Slater finally conceded. "I have never seen a situation like this."
"No sir, neither have I."
"The surveillance footage shows an empty camp, but The Network shows a full one."
"Yes sir, if people depart without a formal process, they cannot be registered as leaving."
"But The Network would supersede the formal process and track a person's com. If the com is outside the camp zone the signal should be picked up as a departure."
"Not necessarily, if a refugee stepped outside the camp zone but stayed within range, The Network would not register a departure."
"These people did not step outside the camp zone. They flew away."
"Yes they appear to have gone much further."
"But where?"
"Don't know, sir."
"They should register in another location in the world, The Network should know where they are. But with the data we have, we cannot even confirm The Network knows the people were picked up by transports and left."
"Yes sir, appears to be untraceable transports."
"Untraceable?" Slater said under his breath. "But we must have some capability for picking up the transport signals?"
"Well all transports are registered on The Network. And if the owner does not register one, the sensors should detect the oversight and flag and track an unauthorized vehicle. Here the transports are not registered and are not being picked up by sensors. But we don't know why, we cannot find the signals."
"What would be your guess?"
"They have a digital blocker."
"A blocker we have never seen before?"
"Yes sir."
"Okay focus our techs on trying to break through the blocker. I want every bit of data analyzed to find a clue, any clue to lead us to answers."
"Yes sir, I'll have analysts on this immediately, but..."
"Yes."
"If they can't find anything. What would you like us to do next?"

"If they cannot find anything, we have a major global problem on our hands, and you are the ones who need to think about what we would do next."

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Global organizations scrambled to pick up the fleeing transports on satellites or Network sensors or radio frequencies. But despite the numbers, the airwaves detected no known devices traveling from the camp point in the Beqaa Valley in any direction. The transports arrived from a starting point no government could identify, and departed to a destination no tracker could locate. The vehicles collected their passengers with a precision and efficiency stunning the trained administrators within the camp fence. Whoever was controlling the operation was managing a well-planned, properly executed and beyond-all-known-technical-ability-to-control process.

Dr. Lassiter projected a com screen. The British government was vehemently denying the existence of a directive to send transports to pick-up refugees in Lebanon. All over the country, crowds of British people poured into the streets to wait for the refugees and to see where they would land. But the British staring up into the sky saw only grey clouds. Across Europe, all governments were on alert for the swarms of arrivals expected to pass through their airspace. But time spun on. Only the natural progression of migrating birds, and the unnatural shifting of surveillance and transport drones moved with purpose through the open skies of Europe. Residents on the ground with their eyes trained to the sky did not see mass transports traveling in formation enroute to a destination. The Network tracked no anomalies. Global satellites were repositioned to cast a wide sweep over the terrain, but the world's eyes came up empty.

An hour passed, then another, and another, with each movement of the clock, the camp population diminished. Transports filled, and only the disbelieving scattered few moved towards the center to join those who could not move. Mitty had been at the message board when the transports began arriving, and he could have pushed onto an early arriving vehicle, but a sudden shame had gripped him, and he began to move away from the vehicles and against the crowd. Trying to avoid the presses of people moving inward had been a struggle as he worked his way to the outskirts of the camp and began to follow the barbed wire fence. Moving past one empty tent after another, he saw the scattered remnants left behind. Since the refugees had once again been prompted to flee with only the possessions they could carry, Mitty saw shoes and blankets, dolls and books, bags and water bottles tossed all over the ground where hours before families had neatly organized and arranged these few precious items with pride and order. 'Could they really be going to England?' he thought. Like Dr. Lassiter, Mitty had his suspicions about the sudden appearance of a lifeline no resident had expected.

Arriving at the children's enclosure as the camp's ranks dropped down into the single digit thousands, Mitty saw with relief that the camp workers had kept the children inside the fence. The administrators had refused to put orphans on an unauthorized transport.

"Taner!" Mitty shouted from the other side of the fence.

A delighted eight-year-old boy jumped up to run to Mitty. Reaching his thin hands through the wire he exclaimed, "I was waiting for you."

A tear slipped down Mitty's cheek as he remembered a brief urge to jump on the transport.

"Good boy, you know I will always come for you," he told Taner. "We are brothers."

"Real brothers?" Taner asked.

"Of course, real brothers."
"Did you see the transports?"
"Yes of course."
"So many."
"I know."
"Are we going to England?"
Mitty looked at the hundreds of children waiting inside the enclosure, and back over his shoulder at the rapidly deserting camp. "I think we'll miss this trip," he calmly stated. "I think we'll miss our chance."
"Why?" Taner asked, tears in his eyes.
"You can't leave."
"Me?"
"Yes, the children can't leave. I heard one of the Europeans say they cannot put you on a transport by yourself."
"But...but...you can leave," Taner whispered. Suddenly brightening he offered," You go to England and send for me later."
Mitty smiled, 'such a quick thinker,' he thought. "No my brother, I'll wait and see if we can find out the real story."
"What do you mean?"
"Let's find out what's really going on, you and me together. If the English really agreed to resettle Hittites they'll come back for you, for the children."
"Really?"
"Sure, of course." Through the fence, Taner gripped his hand harder as Mitty watched the camp workers staring at their com screens. He could see heads of government making statements in England and around the continent.
Gesturing to Lana Torres, a Filipina nurse standing nearby, Mitty asked her, "What's going on?"
Torres looked up at him with fear filled eyes. "The transports are gone," she answered.
For a minute Mitty reflected on her observation. "Yes I know," he answered with restrained pain.
"No, not from the camp. Gone, missing. No one can see them anymore."
Mitty felt Taner's hand grip harder. "Missing?"
"They are gone. Not to England, not even to Europe. There's no trace, no record. Twenty-thousand people, your people have disappeared."
Mitty's face clouded over. "Disappeared? You mean this was some kind of..."
"Yes maybe, I mean there are already many stories. Like revenge and..." she glanced at Taner, "...and you know."
"No!" Mitty screamed in rage. "No! They have been taken to die?"
"We don't know..." Torres reached through the fence and grabbed his arm, "...we have no information. No one knows the truth."
"But satellites and drones and The Network..." She shook her head acknowledging the simultaneous failure of all global surveillance. "But they have to know, they have to. This cannot be more Natchez, more of our dead, more enemies like Rafer Acton."
"No, not Rafer Acton. He's in jail. He could not do this."
"But there is always another hater," Mitty cried as he collapsed onto the ground in tears. "Always another enemy coming to harm us."

*

...the story continues in The Probable Cause: A Future Tech Cyber Thriller by Case Lane

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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QUESTIONS and ANSWERS with Case Lane

Here are answers to frequently asked questions about the Life Online book series, The Probable Cause book and Case Lane

About The Life Online Series

How did you come up with the idea for The Life Online series?

For more than a decade prior to going to law school, I worked on the transition from physical to digital media in the entertainment industry. We were on the operational side of the business, the digital production and distribution activities, not consumer uses. Part of my work included training. Everyone had to learn to use new technologies, the terminology, the functions, and most importantly the capabilities. The process was an incredible learning experience around how to seamlessly make a major transition like that work for a large and varied group of people. But my impetus for going to law school was working with lawyers who were trying to understand how the new media would be protected under the old laws. The lawyers had to comprehend what the digital media files represented, all those bits and bytes, so that they could determine if the legal safeguards still applied, or new rules had to be created. I imagined this conflict was playing out in every industry and profession. For example, in the book series, I completely do away with traditional schools, and everyone learns online. We no longer need teachers who can stand up in front of a mixed class of children, but educator-programmers who can develop immersive, interactive lessons that automatically adapt to each child's understanding and learning pace. The thought process is completely different, but the base content is the same. That's the core of the changes now taking place, which become the world we live in for The Life Online Series.

What about the psychological side of our future Life Online? In the books people no longer think or operate without Network instructions, what are you getting at there?

The issue here is that as people become dependent on technology to direct them through their lives, they lose the ability to continue evolving. Take a look at the world we live in now, besides technology we have had continuous social progress that is one hundred percent dependent on the way people think. All the laws negatively affecting women, blacks, Natives, gays and others, had to be repealed and replaced, because society changed the way it thought about people and how they were treated. But if computers do all the thinking in the future, what happens to our progress as human beings? Unfortunately, the civil rights movement has not taken us all the way to utopia. Now I'm concerned about the entrenchment of sexism and racism, due to the computers literally being programmed to maintain the status quo or respond based on stereotypes. The majority of people working in the technology industry fall into two demographics (white and Asian males), there is very little diversity, which means it's possible that the technology will not be forward-thinking. If civil society outside of the tech industry do not keep thinking and improving human brainpower, we will not only lose technological innovation, but also social progress. There is a lot more work to be done, we do not want to be frozen.

The book takes place all over the world, did you choose the locations for a specific reason?

Travel mode is my favorite personal setting, and I'm interested in the hundreds of places where I've been, and the thousands more I want to see. As an adult I have lived and worked for more than a year in Canada, the United States, the Philippines, Colombia, and Chile. And I have lived, studied or interned for more than a month in Mexico, Singapore and Tanzania. In between, I've travelled all over every region of the world. When I'm writing, I typically do not have a specific setting for an incident in mind, the locations come out as the writing unfolds.

If I had a particular type of place in mind, like a big tech city, I used today's trends to determine where a location could be in a hundred years. It's part of my process, and I hope readers are just as surprised by the destinations the book travels as I am. All of the geographic locations are real, but described as they could be in the future. For example, The Motion Clue begins in the Canadian province of Manitoba where I grew up. The first time I saw the town of Grand Rapids, I was surprised it was a hydro town. In the book, the dam is significantly larger than the construction there today, and part of a continent wide electrical grid infrastructure supporting tens of millions of people. But I'm guessing that a hundred years from now, northern Manitoba will still be covered in ice and snow in January.

Tell us about your characters, you feature strong women in positions of power or authority?

Kadie Laltanca is the head of UN Special Command, which is an organization established by the United Nations Security Council to maintain peace in Cyberspace. At some point, the world will get together to cooperate in the prevention and recovery from cyber attacks, Kadie's group aids that process. She is at heart a diplomat, trying to implement solutions that move people forward but she is also well aware of The Network's negative impact, and the need to be an individual thinker and only use the computers as a separate tool. On the other hand in The Motion Clue, Lyra Ellis, the Captain of The Omaha, which is a civilian subvee, a sort-of submarine cruise ship for industrial works, is a leader who always uses The Network. She has to rise up and figure out how to think around the system, and convince the people around her to also take this risk. Kadie recognizes Lyra is battling this limitation, but at the same time is a natural thinker who just needs confidence to take action. Janna Marric, in The Unbroken Line, also faces Lyra's challenge of trying to learn to work around The Network. Many people recognize they could be thinking on their own but do not have the courage or support to disentangle from The Network. Janna is forced to do it in an emergency when other people's inertia may allow the world to proceed to war rather than act against Network instructions. Those conflicts are at the heart of the protagonists' struggles in The Life Online series.

The Origin Point novella is a little different because the characters are based in today's world and they are setting up the foundation for the creation of The Network. So we have Julia Davenport who is the U.S. Secretary of State and set in her mission, which she believes, is national security. And Apex, our clandestine rogue technologist who absolutely believes Davenport is wrong and we are being set up to lose our basic human rights. And the woman in the middle is Dallas Winter, a throwback journalist who is trying to find a way to tell the story and let the public decide.

What is the order for reading the books?

All the books can be read independently. But if you want to read in order, start with The Origin Point, which is the first prequel to the whole series. I have a few different prequels in mind so I'm calling this one number 01 (zero one). Follow with Book One - The Motion Clue, Book Two - The Unbroken Line, and Book Three - The Probable Cause which will be released in November 2016. I have the idea for Book Four but no title yet so I'll update that one when it's ready.

About The Probable Cause

The Probable Cause is your most action-oriented book in the series so far, why did you decide to go with this type of story?

The Life Online series has focused on a world where gifted rogue technologists with advanced skill are able to use the technology for future tech crimes. This time I wanted to demonstrate that crimes that are

familiar to us today like kidnapping and murder may also be the outcome of Network manipulation. In The Probable Cause, a criminal, Rafer Acton, has the resources to use technology to execute on an ancient revenge plan. Rafer's ideas are medieval but he recognizes he can make his point by turning the technology against people who thought it was used to support them. This book is demonstrating that the future tech advances will fall into all hands not just benign rogue techs or governments, but every level of criminal will have access to the same tools.

You released the Prologue for this book as a podcast, why did you decide on that approach?

When I see a disaster movie, I often jokingly wonder how the media would cover the story that takes place in the film. My first career was as a reporter so the thinking is instinctive. Hovering in the background of the events in The Probable Cause is the Natchez massacre, the crime that gets Rafer Acton thrown in jail. I did not want to focus on the killings in the novel, but I thought it would be interesting for readers to know about the incident and to have a sense of who Rafer is before the book begins.

Listening to the podcast is not critical to understanding the book, it's extra, but I hope readers enjoy it.

For the first time you have an antagonist who is not a technologist but has ordered and bought the programs he needs for his plans, who is Rafer Acton and how is he able to use technology so effectively?

Rafer is a very resourceful young man. He had been having an idle life before he decided to embark on his revenge plan. To enact a 22nd century revenge against a Bronze Age (26th century BC) crime, he knew he would need to creatively use technology. He could design the program but his challenge was to find someone who could complete the coding for him. This means techs-for-hire are writing code but may not necessarily know the actual intentions of the person who hires them. But, regardless of their knowledge the work will go to the highest bidder.

Is 'the probable cause' a technology question about what went wrong in The Network or a psychological question about what went wrong with Rafer Acton?

Readers could ask whether human error or a machine reaction was responsible for the Network problems that set off the action in the book. At the same time, you can ask whether Rafer is a created or natural criminal based on his background history and behavior. I would be interested to hear comments going either way.

About Case

Tell us about yourself?

I am living the best life that I can possibly have, maximizing every second. I love to learn, by reading, listening, watching, I'm curious about everything. I was born in England, to Nigerian and Jamaican parents, grew up in Canada, joined the Foreign Service and lived in The Philippines, Colombia and Chile. Then I went to graduate school in the US where I completed an MBA and settled in California. All that to say, I'm a global citizen. After working in consulting and business operations in the entertainment industry, I decided to pursue a law degree and a Masters in economics, and to launch my fiction-writing career (yes all at the same time). In summary, I am a writer with a self-publishing and information business who also happens to be a lawyer, trained economist, experienced digital media executive, management consultant and diplomat who speaks three languages and still loves to learn.

What is your writing and revision process? How do you manage your time?

For me, time is like money, you have to manage it, account for every minute, and use it to your advantage. I wrote The Motion Clue during the spring semester of my second year in law school. I would get up at 5 am and write until 8 am, and in the first half of the semester I also wrote from 8 pm to around 11 pm but that tapered off as I got closer to exams. Once I have a story idea I just sit down and write. The story usually appears like scenes from a movie running through my mind. I typically start out hand writing for about 20 to 50 pages on a yellow legal notepad. Hand-writing allows me to rapidly put down story bullet-points all the way to the end. Then I get the laptop and write the novel out completely. I revise a lot because once I've got the story, I literally type really fast and end up leaving details out because the main story just has to be told. I have to come back and fix the details later. I'll write "someone walked into the room and Kadie stopped talking." The main point was that she stopped talking, but I still have to go back and figure out who "someone" was. I'm always worried that I missed a continuity step, like in a movie when there's a bottle on the table in one scene and in the next shot it's missing. I try to check for that, but readers can let me know if I missed anything.

Who are your favorite writers? What are your favorite books?

I'm a fan of so many but the British writer Susan Howatch is my favorite, and her book Penmarric is always on my top ten list. I also love the big sweeping international sagas of a James Clavell or George R.R. Martin, the multidimensional epics of Isabelle Allende, the stunning voice of Kazuo Ishiguro, and re-reading Jane Austen again and again. There are many more but I think for these writers, I've tried to read everything they have published.

What...no science fiction writers?

I know, I know my books are considered speculative science fiction because of the use of technology in future world settings. And I am a fan of science fiction. But I really wanted to focus on the human side of our rising dependency on technology. I'm interested in how our adaptation to machines will affect our ability to function as people. So the human conflicts around trying to manage the machine are the core of my novels.

How long is The Life Online Series Series? What will be in the future books?

For book four, we are going to be operating from a supersonic international airport. Not sure what is going to happen yet or who will be involved, but you can guess it will involve a Network issue that no one saw coming.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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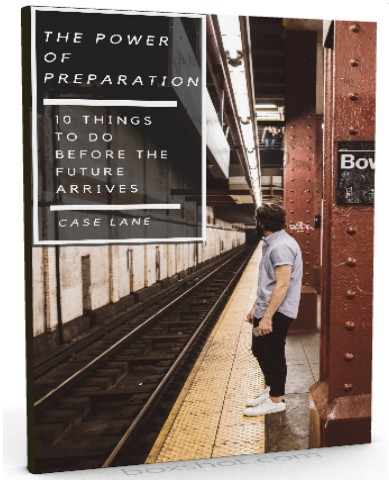
Last updated - October 2016 with the release of The Probable Cause: A Future Tech Cyber Thriller by Case Lane



Case Lane's
THE POWER OF PREPARATION:
10 THINGS TO DO BEFORE THE FUTURE

Future Tech fiction writer Case Lane has developed a 10 point guide for humans to prepare for the advances taking over our future. You can download a FREE copy of the complete guide by signing up for Case's Insiders' mailing list at: http://claneworld.us13.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=20de07d7c758dad1f7db6490a&id=a0e7ec4bb8

Here's a summary of the tips you will find:

1. Education - Learn a Stem Skill
The desirable future jobs will be in knowledge industries.

2. Transport - Resist the Need for Control
Cars will self-drive and you will be hands-free.

3. Housing - Live Vertically
Buy or rent in a high-rise, most will be priced out of the suburbs

4. Privacy - Take a Damage Control class
Your virtual reputation may need the same maintenance as your car once did.

5. Surveillance - Stop Picking your Nose in Public
Cameras in every corner, indoors and out

6. Law Enforcement - Gather Your Own Evidence
Have your mobile ready for photos, audio and even fingerprint analysis

7. Food - Develop a Name for Cockroach burgers
11 billion people are going to need creative nutrition products

8. Aging - Reimagine the Stages of Your Life
Endless virtual choices means no more 'regular' lives

9. Death - Decide if you Really Want to Say Goodbye
Your life online could become your virtual brain forever

10. Behavior - Keep Thinking
Humanity will desperately need those who recognize the technology is only a tool

CASE LANE - SPEAKER ONE SHEET

Speculative science fiction writer Case Lane is the author of the Life Online book series. She holds a diploma in communications, BA in political science, MBA, JD and masters in economics. She has been a reporter, diplomat, management consultant, and digital media corporate executive; living, working and studying in Trinidad and Tobago, The Philippines, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Tanzania, Singapore, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.

After leaving an executive business career to attend law school, Case has now aggregated her knowledge and experience into a global self-publishing media and information business aimed at empowering all people to take advantage of new technologies to improve their lives. Recognizing the challenges coming with next century technological upheaval, Case is working to bridge these issues with action-oriented, diplomatic solutions grounded in business, law, economics and entertainment principles.

Case Lane's Speaking Topics

Writer, Self-publishing, Online business
Speculative Science Fiction and the Life Online Books
Self-publishing and online audience building
Technology Tools (Free and Paid) for self-publishers and online entrepreneurs

Technology - Global Economic and Social Trends
Legal Implications of Key Technology Changes
The Economic Impact of the Transformation to New Technologies
Global Developments in Future Technologies
Surveillance Abroad

Life Transformation Decisions
Mid-career return to Graduate School
Starting a business after a career
Empowering yourself to take risks in education and business

Global Travel and Geopolitical issues
Planning an International Trip
How Diplomats Aid Travelers
How Diplomats Aid Business People

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To obtain further information about The Probable Cause and the Life Online series

To engage Case for speaking engagements

Please send an e-mail to Case at caselane@claneworld.com

Thank you for your interest