

Alien child

Scott Skipper

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*Dedicated to Lexee
Our Yorkshire terrier who snoozes on the chair beside me while I write*

Also in the series:
[Alien Affairs](#), book I
[Alien Eyes](#), book II

Chapter 1

It started before my mom was even born. In 1947, at a place called Roswell, a flying saucer crashed near an Army base. An Army guy pulled a reading device from the hands of a live alien, who they killed the next day, which I thought was pretty mean. All the other aliens died in the crash. A few years later, the first director of the CIA, a guy named Allen Dulles, assigned Mom's Uncle Miles to figure out how to translate the stuff on the reader. When he told people why the aliens were here, it got everybody shook up and they decided to keep it a secret so people wouldn't panic. Mom said she was about six when her Uncle Miles started teaching her to speak alien. He told her it was the language of the Dogon people of Mali. She didn't find out the truth until she was ready to start college and her uncle was dying. The truth was the aliens from Tau Ceti 4 made the human race as a sort of biology experiment, and they thought they had better put an end to us before we got into outer space with our nasty attitude. They said they had a cosmic responsibility, but they didn't want to just blowup the Earth because they felt sorry for the other species, so they released a virus that made everyone sterile.

Mom went to work for the CIA as a linguist. Nobody but her knew that the aliens were going to come back to try again, and nobody but her knew that she could talk to them. Back then NASA was worried about asteroids wiping us out like the dinosaurs, so they watched for things that were headed for Earth. When they spotted three big round things coming toward us, Mom went to see her boss and told him they were spaceships. She said he wanted to have her locked up, but she convinced him to let her see the director. At that time the director was a lady named Georgia Turnbull. When I came along she became my Godmother, but I call her Aunt Georgia.

So Aunt Georgia put Mom in charge of the Department of Alien Affairs, which was a top-secret division of the CIA, or the Company as we insiders call it. When Mom took over there were three other people in the department, Uncle Paul, Aunt Jan and Uncle Eddy. They're not really my aunt and uncles. Mom was an only child, which may explain a few things about her. Anyway, when Uncle Eddy found out Mom could speak their language he got the big idea to get her in contact with them. They got engineering to draw the plans for a cell phone site and Mom recorded a message daring them to build it, then she gave them her phone number.

Mom got pretty close to one alien, but she wasn't able to talk him out of releasing the virus. I guess she got close because he's my dad. Yeah, I know that's really weird, but if you grow up knowing something like that, you pretty much take it for granted. Mom didn't sit down to have the 'part of you isn't human' talk with me until I was six. It started because I complained about her meatloaf. She'd been thinking about making it all day and I was dreading having to choke it down with tons of milk.

"Terrie, how did you know I was thinking of making meatloaf?" she asked me.

"You've been thinking about it all day."

"I didn't say anything, did I?"

"No, you were just thinking."

"And you knew what I was thinking?"

"I always know what you're thinking."

"Do you know what other people are thinking?"

"Sure. Don't you?"

"No, sweetheart, I don't know what you're thinking. What am I thinking now?"

"You're thinking I've got ESP." I answered right away but I didn't know what it meant.

“Oh, my God. How long have you been able to do this?”

“Always, Mom. What’s the matter?”

“Well, dear, this is something nobody else can do. Do you know what I’m thinking when we’re not together?”

“No, we have to be close. Think how confused I’d be if I knew what everybody was thinking at the same time.”

“I suppose. Do you know why you’re special?”

I recall her looking uncomfortable, but later she told me the idea of having to tell me this had her scared shitless. She always did have a colorful vocabulary.

She said, “You realize that your father doesn’t look much like anyone else?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you know why?”

“Cause he’s an alien.”

“That’s right and that’s why your beautiful eyes are the way they are. So this—uh, gift—is something else that you got from your father’s side of the family.”

Now I know she must have been thinking, “*What else did she get from him?*”

Dad’s name was Deshler—well, it still is unless he’s been vaporized by a comet or something—so my last name is Deshler even though Mom’s name is Player. I didn’t think it strange at the time that other people were named Deshler, especially in Germany, but later Mom said that he told her it was an artifact left in our society from earlier contact with his species. What is strange is to think that he’s heading home in suspended animation, and I’ll be dead before he gets there.

Naturally Mom didn’t describe how I came to be conceived, but I was able to find out about it by spying inside her head. Aliens are hermaphrodites, which is pretty creepy to think about, and Mom couldn’t have gone through with it if she hadn’t been drugged. Uncle Eddy says she was date raped. One of her arguments when trying to convince them not to make everybody sterile was that she wanted to be a grandmother. To Dad’s thinking, getting her pregnant was the closest he could come to fulfilling her wish, so he made her fertile again and consummated the deal.

Part of the plan to wipe out humanity was to release a second dose of the virus after the aliens were gone with some aerosols that were set to go off automatically. Dad and his pals hid them, but after the Russians shot down two of the flying saucers, he had a change of heart and his parting gift to Mom was his personal reading device with the locations of the aerosol canisters stored on it. Aunt Georgia sent Mom and her team out to find them, and later SpaceX blasted them into the sun.

The day I bitched about her meatloaf was the first time she showed me the reader. “I want to show you something,” she said, and took a small metal square thing out of her purse. “This is the reading device your father gave me when he left.”

I held it and instantly heard it reading to me in my head—in Dad’s language, of course. “Cool,” I said, “it knows our secret language.”

“That’s right, dear. Only you and me, your uncles, Eddy and Paul and Aunt Jan can read it. You can read it now too, but you have to let me pick the stories for you.”

I was reading something that was the alien equivalent of Dr. Seuss. “Why,” I asked innocently.

“Because many of the stories are too complicated for your age”

It didn’t take me long to learn that ‘too complicated’ was a euphemism for ‘too filthy.’ Dad had a thing for porn.

“So what do you want for dinner instead of my dry old meatloaf?”

“Tacos.”

She rolled her eyes. She always rolled her eyes. “Okay, I guess I’ll go make tacos.”

While she was browning the ground beef my half-sister, Sherrie, arrived with my niece and nephew, Bobbi and Cary. Being a little more than a year younger than I am, Cary was still quite the brat. He snatched the reader from me and we got into a shouting match. Our pediatric angst drew a predictable response from Mom and Sherrie who made peace and returned the reader to me. I had finished Dr. Seuss and moved on to a short essay on alien aphrodisiacs, then a lengthy treatise on anti-particle propulsion.

We finished our tacos and had ice cream. Sherrie stayed long enough to help put dishes in the dishwasher. She had gathered her brood and was saying goodbye when Aunt Georgia, who was still Mom’s boss, arrived. Even then I was in awe at how Aunt Georgia looked. Mom naturally seemed old to me and I knew Aunt Georgia was about twenty years older, but aside from her silver hair, you’d think she and Mom were the same age. Where Mom looked sweet and kindly, Aunt Georgia looked like a movie star. I ran to hug her and get fawned over and to show off Dad’s reading device. Of course she knew all about it from her days as director of the CIA. Now she ran Turnbull Academy where she secretly dispensed doses of the anti-virus that restores fertility.

“So, what have you been reading?” she asked.

When I told her she took it better than Mom.

After Mom took the reader from me and fixed Aunt Georgia a Martini, she broke the news about me being able to read minds. She looked skeptical and asked me to tell her what she was thinking.

“You’re wondering when Mom is going to get her head screwed on straight about Turnbull Academy.”

“I’ll be darned. It’s true.”

Mom said, “Now we have to watch what we think, and for the record, I may never get my head screwed on straight.”

Mom and Aunt Georgia were always arguing about the anti-virus. Aunt Georgia had control of it and only gave it to the graduates of her extremely conservative university. Mom wanted to give it to the government and let them decide what to do. I sided with Aunt Georgia.

Aunt Georgia said, “Carrie, we are reshaping the human race. Culling the herd. Improving mankind.”

“But the birth rate is way too slow.”

“It will pick up. The kids are busy building careers.”

“They should be building families.” Mom got herself some more wine and offered me a Coke. I accepted.

Aunt Georgia continued. “The U.S. population is decreasing by three million a year and world population by fifty-six million. That in itself is solving a lot of problems. Anyway, the reason I came here tonight is to tell you that I’m opening academies in Europe and I want you to train the boards of admissions.”

“Where in Europe?” Mom asked.

“England, France, Spain, Switzerland and Italy.”

“What about Germany?”

“Carrie, don’t you think the Germans have caused enough trouble?”

She rolled her eyes again. “What about Terrie?”

“Well, take her of course. It’ll be a great experience and school doesn’t start for two months. That should be plenty of time.”

I thought it was a great idea. Mom said, “I suppose. Five more academies will be a boost for the population recovery.”

Then Aunt Georgia turned to me. “Okay, smarty, what am I thinking now?”

“That you’re going to start Turnbull Industries.”

Mom said, “Now what?”

Aunt Georgia gave her a dirty look. “Turnbull Industries will employ our engineering grads in the development of alien technology.”

I thought that was another great idea and was looking forward to getting ray guns and anti-gravity shoes for Christmas. I hadn’t had any time to study alien stuff except anti-particles and aphrodisiacs but I wanted to be part of the conversation so I said, “You mean like anti-particle propulsion?”

“That’s right, sweetheart. What can you tell me about it?”

“First you need two plasma fields to keep the anti-particles from the particles, but you have to go into space to collect anti-particles and we’re stuck on Earth.”

“Not quite stuck. SpaceX’s Falcon can reach geosynchronous orbit.”

“That should be far enough,” I said as if I knew.

Mom said, “What have I created?” She was always a little melodramatic.



Chapter 2

The places we went to in Europe were great. I especially liked the Hadron Supercollider in Switzerland and I got to see a session of Parliament in London. Mom took me to Disneyland in Paris. It was okay. On the downside, there were lots of ghettos with graffiti, mostly in Arabic script, and there were places that they told us to avoid. It suited me and I was glad that Mom was there to teach the Turnbull employees to exclude Muslims, socialists and people from families on the dole. She has a great job if she only knew it.

At home it was time to go back to school. Mom drove me to Turnbull Elementary, which was on the same block as Turnbull Academy in Washington, Northwest. Aunt Georgia was acquiring the whole block so she could increase security. Mom parked the car and started to get out of it.

“Mother, don’t embarrass me by walking me to class.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it. I want to talk to your Auntie for a few minutes. I’ll just walk you as far as the gate.”

At the gate we ran into Sherrie’s husband, Alex, who ran Turnbull Security International. “Hi, Carrie,” he said and smiled at me, “how was Europe?”

She said, “It doesn’t even look the same. The refugees have overwhelmed the place. It’s dirty and covered with graffiti.”

“That’s a shame but at least it’s a problem with an end.”

“As long as our leader is in charge. I’m on my way to see her now.”

Alex said, “Give her my best.” He was thinking how much he liked Aunt Georgia.

Mom said, “Ha, I think you already gave her your best before you got involved with Sherrie.”

She was thinking something I wasn’t supposed to know about. Suddenly Alex was thinking of Aunt Georgia without any clothes. I figured it was best to keep my mouth shut.

I went to class and was having a good time until some little brat started teasing me about my eyes. It forced me to share with the class that he had wet the bed the night before. When he started crying and ran out of the classroom, we all had a good laugh until the teacher got pissed.

After class I was surprised to find Alex waiting for me. He said, “I’m going to take you home. Your mom’s in the middle of something and can’t make it.”

“What’s the matter?”

“I don’t know. She’ll have to explain.”

I didn’t like the sound of that. At home Uncle Eddy was helping Mom with her computer.

“Thanks, Alex,” Mom said.

“No problem. What’s up?”

“The FBI is going to raid the house and Georgia told me to copy my hard drive and all the things I need to do my job after they confiscate my computer and files. I have to take a bunch of stuff to the attorneys’ office.”

At the time I had only a vague idea what a raid was but I knew the FBI was the government and that could only be bad.

Alex asked, “What’s this all about?”

Mom said, “Georgia got a tip from one of her old colleagues at the bureau that they’re going to raid Turnbull Academy. Some genius at the Department of Justice figured out that nobody is having babies except Turnbull graduates. They want to know why. Georgia thinks they will raid all the board members too.”

Alex said, "Shit." Then he looked at me and covered his mouth. "Do you want me to take Terrie for the night?"

"No, there's no way to tell when they're going to do it. We'll be all right."

Uncle Eddy gave Mom an external hard drive. "Here's the clone of your hard drive. When you get a new computer I'll help you install it. Be sure to get one with a subatomic 'C' drive and the Sentient 2.0 operating system." She really needed a new computer. She was still running Windows.

"Thanks, Eddy. You're a pal."

"Hey, I'll do anything for the Queen of the Universe." I always enjoyed when he would try to get her riled.

"Eddy, one of these days..."

Then Uncle Eddy said to me, "Hi, beautiful. How was the first day of school?"

I told about the kid who made fun of my eyes and how I got even with him.

Mom had to explain to Uncle Eddy, "Little Miss Deshler inherited the ability to read minds. We just found out."

"How cool is that?"

"Just be careful what you think."

"I'd better get out of here before I think something inappropriate for a seven-year-old." He patted me on the head and in alien said, "Going." Which is what you say instead of goodbye.

I had to ride with Mom to take the stuff to the attorneys. It was really boring so I read about alien abnormal psychology. When they go crazy they get convinced they are either male or female. You'd think being both would make them crazy.

It wasn't even light out the next morning when the FBI started banging on the door. I thought they would break it down, but Mom ran down the stairs tying her robe to get it open before they did.

"Don't you know how to ring the damn bell?" she said as they pushed her aside and started pouring in wearing dark blue windbreakers with 'FBI' in big yellow letters on the back. They had their guns in that two handed grip and waved them around the room.

I followed Mom down the stairs and was standing behind her. I didn't think she knew I was there until she said, "Put the damned guns away. You're scaring my daughter."

I was a little scared. They looked crazy.

One said, "Standard procedure, ma'am. We never know what we're going to find. I'm Special Agent Adams and I have a warrant to search this property for information relating to Turnbull Academy."

"Yeah, I've been expecting you. Knock yourself out."

The dark blue jackets kept pouring through the door. They spread throughout the house and began dumping the contents of drawers into boxes or simply onto the floor. They upended furniture and slashed the gauzy bottom coverings. They cut slits in the cushions and felt around in the stuffing. One ran out carrying Mom's computer and another had my tablet.

"Do you have to take a child's toy," Mom sounded pissed.

"We have to see what's on it. We're specifically looking for the thing the alien is supposed to have given you. Where is it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't play games, lady. The whole world knows about you and your alien reader. Now, where is it?"

“And if you had it, what would you do with it? You can’t read it.”

“We need to know what’s on it. Give it to me or I’ll have to arrest you for obstruction.”

“If you want to know what’s on it, go look at the one the Company has.”

“They may not be identical.”

“Nobody will ever know if they’re identical. The amount of data on them is infinite.”

“That isn’t for me to worry about. Now, where is it?”

“It isn’t here.”

“Where is it?”

“I don’t know.”

I said, “I lost it.”

Agent Adams seemed to notice me for the first time. He stared rudely at my eyes. “You lost it?”

“I took it to school for Show and Tell and lost it.”

He said, “Well, go get dressed. You’re going to show me where you last saw it.”

I fixed him with my eyes, which seemed to make him squirm, and said, “Agent Adams, what’s a hooker?”

“Huh?”

“All you can think about is the hooker you were with last night.” I knew damned well what a hooker was.

Mom said smiling, “Shh, honey, I’m sure Agent Adams would like to keep that a secret.”

“Lady, your kid is scary.”

“Wait ‘til you see what else she can do. Are you sure you want to take her to school?”

He never answered. He took his phone from his pocket and went outside. The rest of the navy blue hoard finished tossing the house and hauled their evidence boxes out to the vans. Adams never reappeared and as abruptly as they came, they were gone.

A news crew was on the lawn but Mom refused to talk. She told me to get ready for school. “I’ll get Sherrie to drive you so I can get this cleaned up, and don’t worry, I’ll get you a new tablet.”

When Sherrie arrived, she said, “Oh, my God, are you okay?”

“Well, I wanted new furniture anyway.”

“They acted like savages. I thought the FBI was professional.”

“They are, dear. They go to school for this.”

When Mom picked me up from school we went to Aunt Georgia’s house out by Alexandria. Later I learned that Aunt Georgia gave Mom a check for fifty-thousand dollars, and when I next saw our house, everything was brand new. We got her reader back from the attorneys and waited to see what would happen next.

That first night at Aunt Georgia’s Mom asked why the FBI hadn’t raided her house.

“Oh, they did, but because of my connections, they refrained from tossing it.”

Mom said, “I’ve seen your connections. Did you have a video of the lead agent with a Chinese translator?” Aunt Georgia just smiled. “Actually, Terrie must have learned a lesson from her Godmother. She asked the lead agent about the hooker he screwed last night.”

That made Aunt Georgia laugh. She said, “That’s my girl.”

Mom asked, “Did they trash the academy?”

“Not much. They were finished before class time, so there wasn’t much disruption. The worst part is they’ve got all the students’ personal records. I see a huge invasion of their privacy coming.”

“Somebody is sure to figure it out after they interview all the graduates.”

“None of the grads know how their fertility was restored. What are they going to learn by interviewing them?”

“Well, they were sterile going in and fertile coming out. It won’t take a rocket scientist to understand that something happened to them while attending Turnbull Academy.”

Aunt Georgia smiled her inscrutable smile. “Yes, but so what? Do you still have the scanner I gave you to check for bugs?”

“Yeah.”

“Use it often.”

I was reading some of Dad’s smut and zoned out on the rest their conversation.

The new computer was pretty awesome. It was the size of a big book and had a person in it named Cassiopeia who did all the work. We called her Cass for short. Everything worked though it wirelessly, even our phones and the TV plus a gadget we got from Turnbull Industries that was like a 3D printer that made food. It also took out the trash. If we put garbage in it and told it to run backwards, it separated the stuff back into atoms. We were connected to Cass by satellite wherever we went. One morning in May she was reading us the news. Congress had convened a committee to investigate the anomaly of the Turnbull births. Sherrie was going to take me to school and she arrived early enough to have coffee with Mom. I had been reading about alien politics, but I put the reader down and showed her our new toy.

Sherrie said, “That’s pretty cool. Make me a scone.”

“Nothing to it. Cass, make Sherrie a scone please.”

“Okay, Terrie, just give me a second. I have to Google the recipe.”

Then the doorbell rang and Mom went to see who was here so early. She opened the door and I saw a young guy in a black suit, which in DC can only mean ‘Fed.’ Mom carried a manila envelope back to the table and slit the top with a paring knife.

She read the top sheet. “Crap! I have to testify before Congress.”

“Will you never be a normal mom?” Sherrie said.

Mom looked me in the eyes and said, “No, I think that ship has sailed.”

She said, “Cass, get Georgia on the phone for me please.”

“Public or private call?”

“Public is okay.”

“Do you need video?”

“No thanks.”

“Good morning, Carrie, did you get your love letter from Congress yet?”

“Just now.”

“What’s the date of your hearing?”

“A month from today.”

“Sweet, we can carpool.”

It isn’t every day your mom testifies before Congress. I wasn’t going to miss it. The day was sweltering hot. Aunt Georgia knew her way around the Capitol Building from her days as director of the CIA. She led us, and a gaggle of attorneys, to the hearing chamber. It was not her first time testifying before Congress. Sherrie and I sat in the spectators’ section while Mom and Aunt Georgia went to the hot seat below the raised dais where the committee members sat. On

the floor below them reporters wielded cameras and microphones. I never understood why they refuse to give those poor suckers someplace to sit.

The chairman was portly and black. He had the expression of a bullfrog and his shaved head glistened under the harsh lights. He got right to the issue. “Mrs. Turnbull, how do you account for the fact that students enter your academy infertile and exit able to make babies?”

“I respectfully decline to answer.”

It surprised me that he let that go so easily. I guess he got that a lot. A congressman from Michigan whose name plaque said he was R. Habibi, took the floor. “Will you explain your criteria for acceptance into Turnbull Academy?”

“Certainly,” Aunt Georgia said, “we require high academic scores, a spotless background and unimpeachable moral character.”

“Do you discriminate on the basis of race or religion?”

“Of course not.”

“Then why out of approximately thirty-thousand graduates you have produced thus far are there only a handful of Hispanics and African Americans, and no Muslims?”

“One criterion is that both parents of the applicant must have been born on U.S. soil. That eliminates most Hispanics and Muslims.”

“Then you admit to discriminating on the basis of race.”

“Absolutely not. Being a native born American is not a race.”

“I have before me an affidavit sworn by a young man whose parents were born in New York, he has a four point grade average and has never been arrested, yet he was denied admittance into your school. His name is Reza Amirpour. Do you deny rejecting him because of his faith?”

Aunt Georgia said, “I don’t review the applications.”

“Who does?”

“Ms. Player and the other board members.”

Mom’s head jerked and she gave Aunt Georgia a dirty look.

“Then let me direct that same question to Ms. Player,” the guy from Michigan said.

Mom took a sip of water before answering. “The moral character of that applicant may have been in doubt.”

The congressman looked ready to explode. “Why? Because he’s a Muslim? I’ll have you know that the vast majority of Muslims are peace loving and only want to get along and they deserve an education.”

“So were the vast majority of German citizens in 1938,” Mom shot back at him. I was proud of her for that one. I could see the veins bulging on the guy’s temples.

“There is absolutely no comparison—”

“There is every bit a comparison.”

The Michigan guy could only sputter, so the chairman asked Mom, “What can you tell us about the phenomenon of restored fertility?”

Mom and Aunt Georgia always argued about this and I was afraid of what she was going to say.

“I also decline to answer that question.”

I was relieved.

“Ms. Player, we are prepared to offer you immunity if you will tell us what you know about this.”

“I don’t need immunity. I have done nothing wrong.”

“Pleading the fifth implies the potential for self-incrimination.”

A lawyer leaned forward and whispered in her ear. She said, "What law are you alleging I have broken?"

"Affirmative action."

Aunt Georgia interrupted. "Wait just a minute. We are a private school, we take no public money, we are not seeking accreditation from the Department of Education, therefore, we are exempt from affirmative action."

Mom looked at her with a big grin this time. The chairman's double chins were quivering.

He said, "Mrs. Turnbull, please do not make me hold you in contempt of Congress."

"You should have your facts right before you dragged us here."

"That will be enough."

The questioning continued for another hour until the chairman ended the hearing with, "You are somehow deciding who has the right to reproduce and who doesn't, and I promise you, I will never rest until I put a stop to it."

In Aunt Georgia's town car on the way home, Mom said, "Well, that went well."

Aunt Georgia said, "Actually, it did go well. They've got nothing."

"Except they vow to keep hounding us."

"I've been hounded all my life. You get used to it. It's like negotiating with aliens. Now, invite me in for a Martini."

"You're going to make Albert wait in the car?"

"He'll indulge his secret vice. He listens to country western music on the radio."

I liked Albert, Aunt Georgia's driver, but I never would have guessed he was a shitkicker at heart.

Right after the Congressional hearing Aunt Georgia presided over another graduation ceremony. I usually got to go and watch from the wings, although it was fairly boring to watch strangers march across the stage, shake hands with Aunt Georgia and get their diploma. After her address and before presenting the diplomas, she always triggered the little anti-virus canister that restored fertility to everyone in the auditorium. As soon as it was done Alex' security team hustled everyone through the airlock. When people asked about that, his guys told them it was there when they took over the building. Alex climbed onto the platform and Aunt Georgia thanked him for another superlative job as she put it. Then she handed him the empty virus aerosol so he could toss it into the boiler in the basement.

Mom walked to Aunt Georgia and asked, "How are you going to get canisters into Europe?"

She said, "I had my team at Raytheon conceal them in magnums of Champagne. I'll simply be traveling with a case of celebratory material."

"Don't say it. I know we're not fucking with kids." She obviously didn't know I was in earshot.

Aunt Georgia said, "Next year we will try to open branches in Australia, New Zealand and California."

"California? You expect to find conservatives in California?"

"It may be a failure, but the real estate is a good investment."



Chapter 3

I finished high school at thirteen. I could have done it at ten but Mom thought starting college as a preteen would warp me socially. Whether it would or not is hard to say. I'm pretty out-going and am comfortable associating with people older than me, so I had no trouble being a thirteen-year-old freshman at Turnbull Academy. At that time the population of the United States had decreased by thirty million people since I was born. The fertile population of the U.S. stood just below fifty thousand and the immigrant population at twenty million—all infertile. They were mainly Hispanics, mostly Mexicans, and lots of Muslims. When you went to the grocery the place was crowded with women in headscarves. Mom said it was time to move, which we did. She bought a house in the suburbs near Aunt Georgia. According to the news it was a lot worse in Seattle, the Bay Area, Brooklyn and Michigan was a total loss. Georgetown was bad but those other places were 'no-go zones' like we saw in Europe.

College was as big a cinch as high school and I had enough credits to graduate in three years. I majored in political science and sociology, with an emphasis on alien politics. For a senior thesis I translated the alien constitution, which got me a lot of attention and I was invited to give a lecture on it. As I was leaving the lecture hall that day a guy stopped me. He looked like he was in his early twenties and he had Hollywood good looks. He definitely got my attention.

"Have you got a few minutes?" he asked. "I'd like to get to know you."

Well, that was direct enough. "Sure," I said. "Let's go to the cafeteria."

He bought us a couple of Cokes and introduced himself as Marcus Hardcastle. A pretty cool name, I thought. "So, why do you want to get to know me?"

"I majored in alien engineering and thought you might know some interesting things. Things that only you know and that would be useful to my career."

"So this is a professional relationship?"

"I didn't mean it like that. I want to be your friend. Maybe we can work together. Right now I'm developing an algorithm to target a nuclear containment weapon."

"That's pretty heavy, but I'm more into politics."

"I'm interested in politics too. Things have been all screwed up for way too long."

"You can say that again. The government is always trying to prove that my mom and Aunt Georgia are breaking some law by running this place."

"Mrs. Turnbull is your aunt?"

"Not really. She's my Godmother. I just call her an aunt."

"Everything your mom went through was really cool. I wish I had been older when it happened and had paid more attention."

"How old are you?"

"I'm twenty-two."

"And you want to be friends with a sixteen-year-old?"

"You're not like any other sixteen-year-old, and way smarter."

"Thanks, I think. What you really mean is there aren't any other sixteen-year-old half-alien girls, and you think it would be cool to hang out with the only one."

"That's not what I meant."

I knew it was but it was kind of flattering. "Is that nuclear containment thing ready to test?"

"Not yet."

"You know my mom translated those specs."

“Yeah, I’d like to meet her too.”

“She’ll probably object to me hanging out with an older guy.”

“I was afraid of that.”

“I can convince her that you’re okay—that is if you turn out to be okay.”

“Well, what do you think so far?”

“So far, not too bad.” That made him laugh. He had a nice smile.

“I get to use the Turnbull Industries lab and I’ll go to work there as soon as I graduate. Want to see it?”

I did want to see it. I’d never been in it.

When I started attending the university Aunt Georgia had Alex upgrade the biometric security system so it would scan my iris-less eyes. Otherwise I couldn’t get through the front door. Marcus thought he’d have to get a visitor’s pass from security. I guess he forgot who he was escorting. When you’re the chancellor’s Goddaughter, you can go anywhere. The lab had a million computer monitors and lots of electrical chassis with cables and printed circuit boards.

He pointed at the mess of wires and said, “Soon we’ll be able to eliminate all those cables and transmit electricity through laser beams.”

“Are you working on that too?”

“No, I’m into weapon systems, but the two areas are related. Hey, look at this.”

He showed me a closed circuit TV with an image of a flickering blue flame just floating in space.

“That’s the plasma field of the nuclear containment device.”

“Is there a nuclear weapon inside it?”

“No, they’ll have to take it to White Sands to live test it, but it will be my algorithm that guides it.”

“How does it contain the atomic explosion?”

“The plasma field surrounds the atomic pile with cadmium atoms that dampen the fission.”

I didn’t think I’d want to trust it. I told him, “My mom said they shot a bunch of small warheads at Dad’s flying saucer but he was able to contain the blasts.”

“Good thing or you wouldn’t be here.”

“Yeah, but later the Russians were able to blow up the two other ships because they were low on anti-particles.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, she was there when it happened and got zapped by the radiation.”

“Did she get burned?”

“No, she just got a big dose. It didn’t hurt her though.”

That was when he gave me a funny look and said, “Can I ask you a personal question?”

I said, “You can ask. I might answer.”

“Are your eyes the only thing that’s different?”

“You mean do I have two kinds of sex organs?”

He grinned and turned red. “No, I just—”

“The answer is no. I’m all girl.”

“Oh, well, you know they said that about your father.”

“Yeah, it’s true. The aliens are hermaphrodites.”

“That’s weird. You know all about them.”

“It’s because I can read the book Deshler gave my mom.”

“So it’s true that on their planet all crimes are capital crimes?”

“Yep, so they have virtually no crime.”

“I don’t think we should go that far, but we’ve got to get tougher on criminals.”

“Not letting them reproduce is a start.”

Another guy about Marcus’ age wearing jeans and a sports jersey entered the lab. I’d never seen him before, but he said, “Oh, hi, Terrie.” I guess I’m not hard to pick out of a crowd.

Marcus asked if we knew each other, then he said, “Terrie, this is Roger Bates. He gets to use the lab too.”

Roger Bates said, “Nice to meet the most famous girl on the planet. Is Marcus bragging about his algorithm?”

“I hadn’t heard any bragging, but it is cool. Are you on the nuclear containment team too?”

“No, I’m working on gravity waves,” he said. “A lot more lethal.”

“Having any luck?”

“We’ve detected them, now we have to perfect making them coherent.”

Marcus said, “Lots of luck. We were just leaving.” He hustled me away from Roger Bates as fast as he could. “Am I still on track to getting approved by your mom?”

“I’m leaning toward ‘yes’.”

“Good. Then how about we go to a movie?”

“Okay.”

“I’ll drive you home and your mom can look me over.”

I said to the phone in the pocket of my jumpsuit, “Cass, get Mom for me.” I told her that she didn’t need to come get me and that I had a ride with somebody I wanted her to meet. She gave poor Marcus a thorough grilling. After several minutes of intrusive questions, I had to remind her, “Mom, you already vetted him for Turnbull Academy.”

“Well, yes, but really, Marcus, aren’t you a little too old for Terrie?”

“Mother, how much older than you is Dad?”

“Well, look what happened to me.”

I rolled my eyes but of course you couldn’t tell.

“Ms. Player,” he said, “Terrie is more mature than anybody I know.”

“Yes, but maturity and experience are two different things.”

“So, how am I supposed to gain experience except by doing things?”

“I guess it’ll be okay, but come straight home.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

“Don’t worry, Ms. Player. I’ll bring her right home.”

The theater was crowded for a remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. The main character was no longer humanoid, but they swapped that old Keanu Reeves guy for a computer graphic gray alien who was a little cheesy. In line for popcorn, I said, “Marcus, I didn’t really answer completely when you asked about anything being different about me.”

The look on his face was pure terror. “What is it?”

“I know what people are thinking. Right now you’re afraid I really am a hermaphrodite, but that guy in the gray sweatshirt has a gun and is going to shoot people in the theater.” It didn’t register. “You’ve got to tackle him. I’ll call 911.”

“Are you serious?”

“Think of a number over one thousand.”

He concentrated.

“Two thousand one hundred and ten. Now, do you believe me?”

Marcus took the guy to the floor and made it look easy. He held his hands behind his back while I talked to Cass. Employees ran toward the scuffle and tried to pull Marcus off the skinny guy, but I shouted, “Stay back. He’s got a gun.” The 911 operator heard me and demanded the location. The cops got there faster than I thought possible and they handcuffed both Marcus and the shooter. After frisking them and finding the semi-automatic pistol and three spare magazines, they released Marcus.

An older cop with a notepad said, “Okay, son, so how did you know he was armed?”

He started to say, “My girlfriend is—”

I can’t hide my eyes, but I like to keep some things secret. “I saw it in his pocket. He was playing with it and let it slip out a little.”

The cop stared at my eyes. “Are you that alien girl?”

“Terrie Deshler, that’s me.”

“Does your mother know you’re out with an older man?”

Again, unbeknownst, I rolled my eyes—I get that habit from Mom. “Yes, would you like to talk to her?”

“Since you’re a minor I’ll have to please. You will have to testify at the trial.”

I got the call connected and gave him the phone. After a brief exchange he said she wanted to talk to me.

“See. I told you, you would get in trouble if you went out with an older guy.”

“Mom, Marcus protected me from getting shot.”

“Is he being a gentleman?”

“Yes, mother. Now we still want to see the movie.”

“Okay, but no more shootings.”

“I promise.”

