

CHAPTER THIRTY

For centuries, the jungles of South America served as a breeding ground for some of the most deadly creatures known to mankind. There were snakes that could squeeze a person so hard their eyeballs were forced out of their head. Scorpions that with one sting could send a grown man spiraling towards an eternal slumber. There were even schools of fish that could devour entire livestock in one eating. For centuries, these jungles offered a safe haven for world's most dreaded killers. To many, this environment meant fear and uncertainty. For Geniomics, it represented the opportunity of a lifetime.

Two of Geniomics' dock loaders waited patiently at the edge of the receiving bay, swatting constantly at the giant insects that swarmed the powerful outdoor lights. Both were dressed in yellow Gore-Tex body suits complete with an attached helmet that hung loosely behind their backs. Each was an American ex-patriot on temporary assignment in South America. It was their sole responsibility to set up the first three months of operations so that the Brazilian workers would have time to adjust to the new technology and transfer system of the R2-X facility.

The first man glanced at his watch. It was two fifteen in the morning, Macaba time, and the workers had been waiting patiently for the first shipment of the Conrava Goliath species. Behind them was a massive steel door marking the receiving bay for the entire R2-X factory.

The facility's technical complexity was fascinating. When a truck was ready to deposit its contents, the large steel door would open and the dock would slide backwards so that the truck could back up beneath the factory's roof. To keep the frogs moist, each truck was equipped with

complex, high-tech misting and temperature control systems. Once the massive trucks had backed partially beneath the building, larger misters would shoot water from the ceilings onto the small amphibians as they slid down a wide plastic chute to a holding area beneath the ground.

The purpose of the misters was to help maintain the frog's skin temperature. If their environment changed by more than five or six degrees it would mean changes in their skin temperature, and as far as Geniomics research knew, that meant certain death and money lost.

"Damn these bugs," said one of the men, swatting the air in front of his face. "Texas don't have shit on these things."

"That ain't no lie," the other man agreed. He kicked his legs back and forth as they dangled over the edge of the dock. "They're like dogs with wings."

The first man reached beneath the sleeve of his jumpsuit and pulled out a half-full pack of cigarettes. "You go into town today?"

"Hell no, Ray. Thirty minutes on this crap road? I'd rather just break my spine here and save the trip. You know who built the road, don't you?"

The other man shrugged his shoulders.

"Nationals. So our company wouldn't take the blame for clearing forest."

"That's smart."

"Yeah but it still means crap for a road."

"Didn't think we'd be receiving shipment so soon."

"Me neither," said the first man. "White coats must've passed them tests."

In the distance, the men could hear what sounded like deep, rumbling thunder. They looked up at the sky but found a cloudless night with a sparkling array of stars.

As the noise grew louder, both men bounced to their feet and threw their cigarettes to the ground. The first worker grabbed his clipboard, which held a printout

detailing the delivery schedule. Three quarters of a mile down the road, at the first major turn, a white glow could be seen slowly growing in intensity. “First shipment ain’t for another two hours. What the hell is that?”

The other man shrugged his shoulders.

A side door opened and out walked Ted Malley, Geniomics’ South American Director of Operations. Each worker straightened their posture as Malley walked beside them. He carried with him three pairs of noise reduction headphones.

“Enjoying the show?” he asked, speaking loudly to overtake the distant, booming noise.

“What is it?” one of the men inquired.

Malley nodded towards the glow and said, “Watch. You’re about to witness technological might.”

The glow at the end of the road seemed to peak in intensity when suddenly powerful lights blinded the men. Malley handed each man a pair of headphones, which they immediately placed over their ears.

In a matter of minutes, the powerful lights had grown in number to three, then four, and now five. Every ten seconds or so another brilliant light would appear causing each person to cover their eyes as if they were blocking out the direct rays of the setting sun.

The plant’s powerful outdoor lights flashed several times behind them, and like a set of dominoes, the singular lights in the distance shut down one by one. It was then that the two loaders could see the perimeter lights outlining the huge fleet of Selva trucks. The vehicles were massive, one tire measuring ten feet tall. From the ground to the top part of the cab was over twenty-five feet. Geniomics had adapted them for the temperature sensitive transport of the frogs across jungle terrain. Each cost in excess of five million dollars and could never be transported to any other part of the world.

Malley saw the first man look again to his charts. His numbers would tell him there were only supposed to be three cargo loads. The most they were ever supposed to entertain was five in one twenty-four hour shift. That was what the Conservation Consortium had made into international law.

The worker looked up from his charts and made a visual count of the trucks. He glanced to Malley who returned the look with a stale nod.

Like a family of elephants, the string of trucks made a giant circle to back into the individual docking bays. The massive receiving door broke from its base and rose slowly behind them, exposing the large interior slots. Malley nodded for his men to place the hoods over their heads. Once the massive door had locked into its open position, hundreds of misters began to spray water over the entire area.

Yellow and red lights flashed all around as several workers dressed in waterproof jumpsuits entered the bays from multiple side doors. Some of them rolled the massive chutes into position as others helped guide the trucks into their slots. Though his American team appeared to be executing in near perfect fashion, Malley was anything but satisfied.

Earlier that day, he'd been involved in a conference call to a European warehouse in Dublin. Some of the distributors were concerned about the lead times for delivery for the first batches of R2-X. Reports from sales indicated that their phones were ringing off the hook from virtually every channel retailer across the globe. Malley painfully explained to them his inability to ship product until the end of the month. In the middle of his explanation, however, Malley was interrupted by a phone

call deemed priority one. He excused himself politely and rushed to his office where he took the call.

“Ted. Randy.”

“Great timing,” said Malley. “Our friends in Dublin say advance orders are lighting up the switchboard. Europe is going nuts.”

“Yes. I know.”

“I told them they were clear for the 31st, but these guys are ready to play ball right now. And we’re ready to go down here. Got rid of the generator glitches yesterday.”

“Ted,” Edmonds interrupted. His voice was controlled and deliberate.

“Yeah?”

“I want us to move into Phase II immediately.”

“Are you serious? Now?”

“Crooks ran the numbers. It’s the right thing to do.”

“Six days?”

“Don’t act so surprised, Ted. You’ve been in the industry long enough.”

“That’s only if there are no issues.”

“Issues?” repeated Edmonds.

“Yeah. Only if our product is ready to go.” Malley knew that in recent years, several large pharmaceutical companies had endured painful product liability lawsuits. Both Dow Chemical and Bristol Myers were virtually forced out of the market by a multi-billion dollar lawsuit concerning breast implant imperfections. Not long before, A.H. Robins was forced into closure by a similar lawsuit regarding the now infamous Dalkon Shield. Each case demonstrated that the product, despite passing federal requirements, had not been thoroughly tested.

“We’re ready,” Edmonds assured him. “Are you?”

“Two phone calls,” answered Malley. “That’s all it’ll take.”

“Good. Send out ten Selvas and begin production immediately.”

“Ten?”

“That's right. Look. Nothing will hit the market until after approval but we need to move now. Let's build up some inventory. Stuff the channels.”

There was a pause in Malley's voice. “We're jumping the gun.”

“You are brilliant, Ted.”

“What about the government down here, Randy?” Malley asked. “The leaks.”

“You got enough man power for six days of production with our own people?”

“I suppose. Brazilian nationals don't report until the night of the 30th. They've completed their training. We were just waiting for you guys.”

“Then this is an internal matter. Use only ex-pat staffing for these six days. If the nationals ask what you're doing, tell them this is a series of test runs before we can start and that we fully intend to honor our contractual agreements. You know the drill.”

“You're the boss, Randy. But it sounds risky.”

“I'm aware of the risks. What I need right now is someone I can trust down there. These six days mean light years down the road. As long as nothing ships until after the approval, we're fine. Let the inventory build up. Advance orders will easily deplete that by the end of the first week. And you'll be handsomely rewarded for your efforts.”

“Okay, Randy. Ten Selvas?”

“That's right.”

“You don't think the ICC will know? Sometimes they send reps down here.”

“You're responsible for your own security at night.”

“Yes.”

“Have the trucks arrive at night then. In series of five if you can. It’s only for six days. Hell, you’re in the middle of the jungle down there.”

“I’ll do it, but-”

“It has to be done,” Edmonds stressed. “I’m sure you understand.”

Malley sat behind his desk with the phone dangling loosely in his hand. He didn’t agree with Edmonds. Geniomics was asking for trouble in more ways than he cared to calculate.