

Seven Things To Worry About

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SEVEN

THINGS

TO WORRY

ABOUT

by

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Dante Ego Prior "Seven Things To Worry About"

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THE HOLOX

I

"This is what they call the point of no return. Beyond this point, you are in the heart of the entire laboratory." Sergeant Gleck swiped his identification card through the high security lock. A muted chime sounded and the heavy concrete and steel door slowly moved aside. He stepped through the shadowy doorway, Gonzales and McKinney followed.

The two soldiers were led down a long corridor, lit every twenty paces by incandescent work lights. Above them, the ceiling tapered out of sight, making the darkness in between the light seem harsh and sudden. Strange too was the lack of echoes.

The corridor opened up into a large, bunker type area. Here the ceiling was at least sixty feet high. Something massive was concealed in the concrete, all which shown of it was a lone, solid looking silver door. It was unlike any of the others in the laboratory. A large circular window rested in its center, about three feet in diameter. Nothing could be seen inside the unreflective black glass. It was another containment room. In fact, the whole N49 Science Institute, or N49SI, was more like one containment room inside another, holding someone or something more top secret the deeper you went. This was the deepest level. For being such an important place, it was eerily understaffed.

"N49SI had at one time been a privately owned laboratory with endless funding from anonymous donors who kept security tight." Sergeant explained to the rookie Gonzales. "With the collapse of the One World Bank, the military was forced to take over and what had once been collective and profitable had become potentially weaponized. After a while, the private security companies were replaced by soldiers and the discoveries that were made went underground, into secret tests."

"What is it?" McKinney asked pointing to the containment room.

"A fifth dimensional creature and like all creatures of that dimension, they...."

"Eat humans." McKinney interrupted, playfully nudging the rookie with a wink and a smile.

Gonzalez's eyes widened, but he kept quiet. It was his first time doing guard duty on level minus five.

"...are dangerous!" The irate Sergeant clarified. "Just being near this one is dangerous!" He stood tall with intensity in his eyes, "you will not let your guard lapse on this one because you have been lucky that none have escaped so far, do you understand me?"

McKinney sobered up and acknowledged him, "yes sir."

Sergeant continued, "They use the Holox as a power source for the facility. It's energy supplies the voltage that runs the safety systems and the locks. Without it, we would all be in serious trouble."

He pauses to look deeply into the black window. "I don't like what they are doing down here. Those scientists are messing with stuff they don't understand and leaving us to clean up and cover-up. I have lost too many men already." He turned to McKinney, "so stay alert, this is no game."

"Yes Sergeant" they saluted. He returned the salute then walked back through the corridor leading out of the containment area. The two soldiers silently took their places for the four hour watch. After some time, they heard the large concrete door slide into place sealing them in.

They were there because a bomb, disguised as a carbon tritanium detector had been found in a maintenance tunnel. Now the laboratory was on high alert. Sergeant Gleck was doing a search for other bombs that may have been planted and had every available soldier posted to all the high security areas. McKinney and Gonzales were stuck with the most dreaded job of Holox duty. Had he known that he would be standing here today, McKinney wouldn't have been out all night drinking. The facility guard handbook explained that officers must be in top condition due to the somewhat psychological effects of being in close proximity to the "captives".

The pressure of the air seemed to change. It reminded Gonzales about a story he read on the slaves and serving girls, or Shabti, who were entombed in the great pyramid along with the corpse of the Pharaoh. "How long did they pray before the dark crushing silence stole them into death?" he thought darkly.

The draft of the subterranean laboratory was starting to make its way through his clothes. He kept his focus across the bunker and down the long corridor, the only entry.

McKinney shifted the weight off his throbbing right foot. His night out ended when his girlfriend slammed his foot in the door. She made it up to him, so it wasn't all bad, but he was getting extremely sleepy. Somewhere within the underground complex, a disturbance happened. He felt it in the solid floor. It revived him.

"Whoa, did you feel that?" He un-holstered his gun and Gonzales followed. They strained to listen. Gonzales stared at McKinney not certain what it was he felt, he was just going along with McKinney's experienced intuition. As a rookie, Gonzales was still learning the ropes of being one of Sergeant's facility guards.

"What is going on?" Gonzales whispered. "Why is your gun drawn?"

"I don't know... I'm just preparing myself, c'mon".

They ran across the bunker and down the long corridor. The window on the containment door they guarded seemed like a giant eye behind them.

McKinney unlatched his radio and called for instructions. There was no reply. On cue, Gonzales tried his, but it was the same. The intercom on the wall next to the entrance was lifeless too.

"Dammit, this thing hasn't worked since N49 was private." McKinney slammed a fist on the black and white buttons. "We're stuck here for a while."

"We can't get out?"

"This is deep isolation, we have to be released."

Gonzales stroked the unshaven bristles of his beard stubble, something he did whenever he felt

anxious. McKinney's eyes and obvious unspoken thought were beginning to alarm him, but he remained calm for his sake.

"I felt something like an explosion, something is definitely going on."

"What do we do now?"

"Wait for Sergeant to contact us." He seemed a little more rational. Gonzales was beginning to wonder if McKinney was pulling some prank. It would not surprise him after what he had put up with in Sergeant's boot camp. "Nothing else we can do, our radios can't receive or transmit through these walls. We will just have to wait until shift change." They walked back to their positions on either side of the door. It took all of his strength to remain calm, but Gonzales decided it best to lose himself in thought, if possible, positive thought.

II

"I am starving" McKinney said, breaking his composure.

"Me too." Gonzalez was relieved to let his guard down a bit.

"I wish I knew what time it was." A band of lighter skin encircled his wrist from where his watch had been. Last night was still coming back to him in pieces.

"It seems like we've been here for at least twelve hours, so it must be about nine o'clock at night."

"More like fourteen I'm guessing." McKinney sat down on the floor with his back against the cold grey hull of the submerged ship, stretching his foot out gingerly.

"Is it true what they say?" Gonzales had the courage to ask. "This creature is one of five?"

"Who have you been talking to, Henry at the guard gate?" He laughed, placing an unlit cigarette in his lips then offered Gonzales one. "Did he tell you we had to transport this thing to another containment room?"

"Yes" Gonzales said deflated as he sat down, declining the offer for a smoke. He had fallen for a stupid rookie trick. He was looking out for them but didn't see this one coming.

"Well, he doesn't know everything," McKinney confided, drawing on the unlit cigarette. A mischievous grin spread on his face. "This compound is actually built around a spaceship." He gestured to the cylinder they were guarding. "This is the door right here." Gonzales cautiously peered at the black window, it seemed larger. "We are not sure how long these things have been here, but it was Sergeant Gleck who discovered them embedded in the ground."

"Interesting", Gonzales said half believing, he often wondered what role the Sergeant had with this laboratory.

"No one is sure where they came from, Sergeant had a hallucination that the creatures of the ships talked to him once, said that they were exiles called the 'Holox', banished from a massive planet, the size of the sun, or so he says, and that the Holox had been ejected into the universe. Astronauts found three ships on Mars with the doors smashed open. Geology reports of the planet discovered that they might have been the reason why the life there is dead. Though we know the air can sustain life, it was the force of the things inside the ships that made it uninhabitable. Look at Jupiter, there are hundreds there, it's like they live off the planet."

Gonzales sat stunned unable to believe his ears, was this a trick? "Astronauts... on Mars, Holox on Jupiter, how do you know all this? I would have heard something about it back in Kentucky."

"Have you ever heard of this thing you are guarding before? In Kentucky?"

Gonzales shrank. Again, it was the rookie defense system, but McKinney understood.

"Look, we now know that there are more than five of these ships, I've guarded at least two others. Sergeant claims that ancient civilizations might have had a run in with the Holox." He rubbed his arms against the chill of the underground. Gonzales kept quiet, still massaging his stubbly chin with his finger. "Sergeant went so far as to theorize..."

"Sergeant?" Gonzales said in surprise.

"I know." They laughed. Sergeant was known as a man who went by the book to every degree. "Anyway... he brought his idea to the Intelligence unit. The theory was that the ancient peoples had built monuments over the remaining ships to keep the things from getting out." He pauses to take an inhale from the unlit cigarette, then flicks an imaginary ash off to the side. "Soon after, the Sergeant is given clearance to visit all these sites around the world, goes down into the tunnels under Giza, Ankhor Wat and... well... dozens of stone mounds that they have found and you know what... he was right!" He exclaimed.

"Whoa..." Gonzales' eyes widened to the enormity of the situation, "you mean..."

"That there are at least forty other ships if you add all these different sites together and maybe dozens more in the ocean, we are of course not counting the unexplored forests of China. If one of these Holox got loose, it would most likely search for others of its' kind. The world as we know it would be gone."

"Why do they keep them?"

"These ships are massive. This right here", McKinney slapped his hand on the wall, "is just the tip. The rest of the iceberg is where the thing resides. There is nothing we can do."

"Is this something to worry about?"

"Dunno." They fall into thought again. McKinney inhales again from the unlit cigarette, exhaling imaginary smoke rings and kicking back against the ship in a reclined position. Gonzales stands at the thought of Sergeant seeing them like this. He looks down in time to see McKinney's arm drop in a manner consistent with someone fighting the urge to sleep. In the deep quiet, Gonzales tries to unravel whether any of this was real.

McKinney was acting strange, perhaps trying to scare him. He had fallen for tricks like this before, it was always a set up. If it were an act, then the Sergeant would get an award for how realistic he made things seem. Yet at the same time, there were still unanswered questions like who planted

the bombs and why? Another peculiar and rather large question was whether Sergeant would normally place a rookie on such a high level assignment. There was so much he didn't know still. He stared across the bunker and down the tapered entryway, willing the long winded prank to end soon if that is what it was.

"I see you out there." McKinney said softly, as though in a daze.

"What's that?"

"Did I say something?" His eyes shot open, he quickly wipes some drool from his chin. "Oh... I think I was starting to doze off." The alarm chirped out three tones, followed by a brief red flash. McKinney sat up at attention, Gonzales mimed his actions.

"What is it?" Gonzales asked.

"This is different." He quickly scrambled to his feet. "This is bad. You heard that alarm?"

"What?"

"We have to get out of here and back to the surface." He threw the unlit cigarette down.

"We can't leave our post, anyway I didn't hear...."

"Guard change was hours ago, no one is coming for us! Don't you get that rookie?" He seemed more frantic.

"Well, there is no way we are going to get through that door." He pointed toward the thick concrete slab at the end of the corridor.

"Let me think for a moment."

Gonzales rubbed the beard stubble of his face, waiting to hear McKinney's plan. There was no way to pry the door open and unlike the heavy containment doors of the base, there was no primer lever to manually open it. After looking around in the bunker area, they found another intercom. It was also out of commission. Just under it was an electrical conduit, a long grey metal box that housed the wiring for the room.

"Let's get this intercom apart. I know of one way to get these doors open, only, it will give us a small window of time to get out."

"How do you plan on doing that?"

"We have to cycle the containment locks, a short circuit would do it."

"Wait a second, there's no way of knowing what's going on."

McKinney paid no mind, he was busy removing the ribbon cable from the panel.

"Don't you think we should wait a little longer for the relief officers?" Gonzales pressed.

McKinney was behaving as though something bad was about to happen. Gonzales realized it.

"What is going on? What is going to happen?" he asked, pulling McKinney's arm to look into his

face.

"The whole laboratory will be zero pointed." There was a look of subdued panic in his eyes. Gonzales' face fell. He had never heard the term used before, but he was smart enough to gather what it meant.

After dismantling the button array, McKinney took off his necklace.

"Gold... the best conductor of electricity" he said somewhat winded. "Are you ready?" he asked, looking into Gonzales' eyes. After a moment, Gonzales nodded.

He touched one end of the unclasped gold necklace to the intercom's circuit board and the other end to the steel conduit that hid the electrical wiring from view. An explosive spark sent him flying back. Gonzales rushed over and helped him up.

"Quick, the passage will only be open for a few moments."

They ran up the corridor to the point of no return. The hallway beyond was already disappearing.

"The door!"

"We need something to prop it open."

Gonzales, who was first, had squeezed himself partially in, pushing with all his might. The heavy slab was unstoppable.

"Get out of the way or you're going to get crushed. We'll have to keep radioing."

He shimmied free. "No... please!"

"Base, this is McKinney we are in need of immediate evacuation!"

A brief spat of static returned his call before the door re-entombed them.

"That was our only chance, wasn't it?"

"Yes." They stood frozen. Loud metallic clicks popped within unseen corners as the chamber was re-energized. The containment door moved slightly. Neither McKinney nor Gonzales had noticed whether it had opened. *

You were not warned, you were not foretold, there was no hype, it just happens. Dante Ego Prior's "Seven Things To Worry About", exclusively on Amazon / Kindle. Features seven SciSpense tales. Here is a brief synopsis of the stories without giving too much away. Author information below descriptions.

- I. The N49SI was once privately owned, but with the world's bank collapse, the military is forced to take over due to the nature of the experiments. Two soldiers are placed on the dreaded Holox duty.
- II. What is it about the Green Lollipops? Greta cannot get enough of them and soon,

her father will feel the same.

III. Believing in the Great Yawn may be the only answer, but could it be true?

IV. A facility cadet is given the chance to show what abuse he could take for what he believes is a secret space mission, after a spin in The Grinder, he finds things are way different than they appear.

V. Having been in trouble with the Justice before, Ralph appears like the ordinary neighbor, but he is busy moonlighting in The Rosetta Code .

VI. On a colonizing mission, four astronauts make base on Moon 7. Things start out seemingly normal, until the two female crewmates become ill and the animals disappear.

VII. Madeline Carter has the smoking gun evidence that Global Warming is occurring. She and some other scientists unfortunately begin to understand what it really means as it is occurring.

Author Information: Dante Ego Prior, Maine, New England, USA. Born 1969. Seven Things To Worry About (STTWA) is DEP's first short story collection upload. Previous work can also be found in the Spinetinglers 2010 Anthology, for the story "Sineater"; also on Amazon! Link below. Please like and share, ENJOY!

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