

PROJECT ELYSIUM

City of Refuge

Chapter 1
NEW BEGINNINGS

The gentle hum of machinery filled the underground chambers as Maria Perez-Collins stepped into her newly renovated home. They had spent the last few months decorating their home together. A warm smile played across her lips as she surveyed the vibrant colors and intricate designs that now adorned the floor, walls, and furniture, a testament to her meticulous eye for detail. They had expanded their three thousand square foot standard living space to nearly eleven thousand square feet. Maria had turned much of the decorating over to the decorators to bring rugs, wall coverings, wood and marble flooring, and various works of art from around the world to adorn their walls. Lighting was built into the ceilings to accentuate each art piece.

"Anthony, come take a look," Maria called out. Her voice echoed through the spacious living area.

Moments later, her husband, Dr. Anthony Collins, emerged from his study, his eyes alight with curiosity. "It looks amazing, sweetheart," he said, embracing her tenderly. "This looks fantastic."

Maria beamed with pride, her hand instinctively resting on the swell of her growing belly. The excitement of their impending parenthood, mingled with the thrill of creating a haven for their family within the vast expanse of Elysium, made her want to create something unique and beautiful.

PROJECT ELYSIUM City of Refuge

"I can't wait to show our little one the wonders of this place," she said as she looked at her husband, her gaze drifting towards the newly expanded dining room, its sleek lines and warm tones inviting them to linger over shared meals.

Anthony's eyes followed her gaze, a look of awe etched upon his features as he examined how she had decorated the room.

"With phase technology, the possibilities are endless," he marveled. His mind was already whirring with ideas for future expansions.

The next day, Maria and Anthony exercised together in their exercise room equipped with a 60-foot rock-climbing wall, a running track, and a seventy-five-foot swimming lap pool and jacuzzi, located downstairs under the running track. Anthony ran along the track as Maria walked swiftly along the inside near the rail, being careful not to exercise too rigorously so she didn't endanger her baby who would be due in about three months.

As Anthony passed her, Maria asked him, "What would happen to the stuff in this room if the power went out and the phase technology failed? What would become of the things and the people inside the room?"

Anthony stopped running for a moment to catch his breath, with his hands on his knees, he said, "It depends on which kind of phase we have installed." As he gained his breath, Anthony said, "One type, like the one set up on nearly all of our trains, is off-location. This means that when you walk through the portal while on the train, you walk into a stationary space that is located somewhere else other than the train. If the train were to crash while you were standing in an off-location space, you would not be harmed because you would be standing in a space located away from the train when you walked through the portal.

"On the other hand," continued Anthony, "If you walked through a portal attached to your house and all power was lost, the phase technology would only expand your current space and would not transport you away to a different location. Therefore, if you were

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

to lose the power to expand the space, you would lose everything and everyone in that room. The atoms that connect and bond everyone and everything together would separate and appear like dust.”

“What are the chances of that happening?” Ask Maria, looking very concerned. “You’ve got something that will keep that from happening, right?”

“There is virtually no chance of that ever happening,” said Anthony, “since there are four independent redundant backup power systems built into each room. Two backup power supplies are built into a room that will sustain the room on their own for seventy-two hours, one additional power supply is provided for every house that has the capacity to sustain the whole house for three months, and if that all fails, which is highly unlikely, the fourth source of stored power is in the main power room which supplies power for the all our computers, air circulatory systems, and computers, which is an indefinite source of power, or for as long as the sun shines on the surface.”

“Good,” said Maria as she returned to her morning walk around the track, looking like she was thinking this through. “Good,” she said again. “Of course, you’ve thought of everything.”

As the days passed, Maria's role within Elysium continued to evolve. Her nightly news broadcasts had become a beloved institution, a beacon of information and unity for the bustling underground city. Recognizing the growing need for specialized coverage, she handpicked a team of talented anchors, each one dedicated to their respective beats.

"I want our viewers to feel informed and connected," she explained during one of the regular anchor meetings, her voice carrying the weight of her convictions. "By diversifying our coverage, we can ensure that every aspect of life in Elysium is given the attention it deserves."

As the newly appointed Director of Communication, Maria found herself at the helm of a rapidly expanding department, her vision and leadership guiding the flow of information that kept the

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

city thriving. With each passing day, she felt herself growing more confident, more attuned to the heartbeat of Elysium, and the dreams of its inhabitants.

And as she gazed out over the bustling underground metropolis, Maria knew that this was only the beginning – for herself, for her family, and for the extraordinary world they called home.

Recently, Maria had also begun her doctoral studies through Elysium University, established by Dr. Kim Young. Dr. Young established a doctoral program with Maria in mind, as she would be the University’s first doctoral recipient. Maria made an appointment to meet with Dr. Young to get a better understanding of her academic road ahead.

During their meeting, Dr. Young said to Maria, “The full doctoral program can be accomplished in under six months,” assured Dr. Young. “This program will culminate with a dissertation and oral exams. This is all possible through the ACLIS and through the aid of Michael, your AI assistant. I think of the hundreds and hundreds of hours I spent working on my doctorate thirty years ago, researching, organizing, and cataloging data and typing out my dissertation while attending Harvard University. All of this can now all be done in the proverbial blink of an eye and with total recall,” said Dr. Young. “We are now in an era where knowledge is no longer a long and arduous process requiring years to acquire, and even more years to truly understand the implications of what we’ve discovered. Through the ACLIS, we can now read with total recall every book and article that has ever been written on a subject with the speed of our fastest computers, so learning is no longer a barrier to us.”

“This is all so very exciting,” said Maria. “I can hardly wait to get started.”

“Have you decided which area of communications you want to focus on?” said Dr. Young.

“I think Organizational Communications,” said Maria, “since that program fits within my current role as a director. I tell you Dr. Young, this is something I never saw myself doing. I thought I would

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

spend thirty years as a newspaper journalist and retire in the Bahamas. This place sure has a way of elevating your point of view, as if through a wind tunnel of challenges and opportunities for growth.”

“I have prepared a download package for you consisting of sixty-five books and one hundred seventy-eight articles written by your peers in the field of organizational communications,” said Dr Young. “This will get you started. Once you complete the download, which will take about six hours, have Michael organize data points using information obtained from our residents will help you make correlations and organize the information in a coherent way.

“Once you have the correlations mapped out, you will start to see natural trends occurring in the data. Of course, you will want to pull your own data based on specific conclusions you want to prove as a result of your findings, but that will become clearer as you get further into your research. Micheal can help you with your conclusions. Michael can also help you write your dissertation. He will ask you the pertinent questions that will help you draw your conclusions. These conclusions will be the basis for your oral arguments, also known as oral exams.”

“What is that?” asked Maria.

“That is where three doctoral peers will ask you questions about your research, and based on your answers, we will decide whether you have sufficient knowledge of the topic, can adequately defend your conclusions in your dissertation, and deserve the title of Doctor of Philosophy, or PhD, and that’s it. Are you ready?”

Maria nodded with a smile, feeling a touch of anxiety and excitement at the same time. “Yes, I’m ready.”

Back home, Maria found Anthony in the living room, reading through some reports. She sank onto the couch beside him, her mind buzzing with the details of her meeting with Dr. Young.

"How did it go?" Anthony asked, looking up from his papers.

"It was incredible," Maria said, a smile spreading across her face. "Dr. Young has everything set up for me. I'll be able to complete

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

my doctoral program in six months, with Michael's help. Can you believe that?"

"That's fantastic news!" Anthony exclaimed, leaning over to kiss her. "I'm so proud of you, Maria."

"Thank you, love," Maria said with a smile. "It's a bit overwhelming, though. I'll need to absorb an enormous amount of information in a short time."

"You've got this," Anthony said, his voice filled with conviction. "You've always been amazing at what you do. And remember, you're not alone. You have me, and Michael, and virtually everyone is ready to support you."

Maria sighed contentedly, leaning into his embrace. "You're right. It's just... I never imagined this path for myself. It's a bit daunting but exhilarating at the same time."

"Life has a funny way of surprising us," Anthony mused. "But I believe in you, Maria. You're going to excel in this new role and make a real difference in Elysium."

Maria looked into his eyes, feeling the warmth of his support which bolstered her resolve. "Thank you, Anthony. Your faith in me means everything."

As they sat together, Maria felt a renewed sense of purpose. She was ready to embark on this new academic journey, knowing that with Anthony by her side and the advanced resources at her disposal, she could achieve anything.

Chapter 2
BACK TO SCHOOL

It was Saturday morning; the day Maria had set aside to begin her educational download. She sat in her comfortable high-backed leather chair behind her desk in the office she had created to help her stay organized. *With everything going on*, Maria thought, *I need a place to think and make notes about things I need to do.*

Dr. Young, Maria's doctoral mentor, said that the curriculum was set up to download sixty-five books and one hundred seventy-eight peer-reviewed articles. *I hope I have enough brain cells to absorb that much information*, thought Maria. *I wonder if there's ever been a case where someone's head exploded during an ACLIS download*, Maria mused within herself.

Maria remembered the first time she received a download using the ACLIS. She was so overwhelmed by the experience that she passed out right into the arms of the handsome Dr. Collins. *Although she couldn't have timed it better to have her knight in shining armor come to her rescue*, she thought with a smile, but she didn't want to repeat the experience. The last time she felt a bit unprepared. She'd never felt anything like that before in her life. This time was different. She knew what to expect, and how it felt, like flashes of information funneling into your mind at a terrific speed, and when it's done, you can look at it all with perfect recall. *Stunning. Exhilarating*, Maria thought.

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

Michael, the AI system, promised to monitor Maria's vitals as she began the process. Michael would be monitoring Maria's stress levels and promised to warn her if her stress levels became too high.

Maria placed the ACLIS on her head and said, "Okay, Michael. I'm ready."

Beginning the download, said Michael. "The rate of download can be adjusted as we go, so don't hesitate to communicate with me as we go through this process. The further into this process we go, you'll notice that your mind will adapt to the current rate. That is when you can request to increase the download rate. This can be increased or decreased depending on your comfort level."

"Very good. Thanks, Michael," said Maria. As Michael began the download, Maria felt a rushing sensation in her mind. She could see hundreds and hundreds of pages of information, charts and graphs, tables and diagrams funneling into her mind with absolute clarity and understanding. It was all so organized and complete. From one book to another, and then another, it felt so exhilarating, that she felt like laughing out loud. Maria was able to download thirty-seven books and eight articles in just over four hours, and then she stopped. She pulled her ACLIS off her head and said to Michael, "That's enough. I need...I need to go lay down." I am exhausted. She walked from her home office to her bedroom collapsed backwards onto the bed and was quickly sound sleep. When she woke up, Anthony was leaning over her with a smile, and said, "So my beautiful lady. How was your first day at school?"

Maria sat up and said, "What time is it? How long have I been out? Michael, How long was I in download?"

Michael replied, "four hours and seventeen minutes."

"How long have I been asleep?" asked Maria.

"Three hours and ten minutes," replied Michael.

Maria put her hands on her face, and then looked up at Anthony and said, "I'm sorry. I didn't realize that I had completely blown through the day."

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

“It’s ok,” said Anthony. “I ran over to your mother’s place to help her hang some pictures and to move some furniture around. She’s really getting the decorating bug and it’s really making her place look great. She’s so excited. You should see it.”

“I will,” said Maria. “I haven’t talked with her in a few days so she’s probably thinking I’m ignoring her. I’ve just been so busy with everything. But I will go see her tomorrow for sure.”

“That would be great,” said Anthony, “because she wants us to come for dinner tomorrow at six. Hope you don’t mind?”

“Oh, that will be perfect,” said Maria.

The next night, Maria and Anthony drove their electric car to her mother’s house and parked in front of her building. It wasn’t that long ago, thought Maria, that this was her home, the place where she met Anthony and they fell in love, the place where he proposed, where she tried on her wedding ring for the first time, and where she planned her wedding. All those memories came flooding back into her mind. *Good times*, she thought.

Up the elevator to the 40th floor, third door on the right thought Maria. She knew it well. As she and Anthony approached the door, the door opened automatically and Michael said, “Good evening, Dr. Collins and Dr. Collins. Maria, your mother would like you to help her in the kitchen.”

“Oh, wonderful. Thank you, Michael,” said Maria as she found her way to the kitchen. Rose, Maria’s mother, was an excellent cook and had whipped up a wonderful turkey dinner. She refused to allow Anthony to provide her with a cook, saying that she was perfectly capable of doing her own cooking.

At dinner, they talked all about Maria’s new educational activities and she tried to explain what she was trying to accomplish, as well as her work with the Command Center and her Directorship. Rose didn’t think that becoming a doctor was what a woman ought to be thinking about and that she needed to take time off to prepare to be a mother. Maria replied, “There will be time for everything, mother.

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

And, besides, Anthony said he would be hiring me a nanny to help me with the baby and to watch after her when I'm at work."

After dinner, they walked through the house to see all the changes that Rose had made to her new place. "It is quite different from the old place where I used to live in New York City," said Rose, as she walked them through the house showing them what changes she'd made. "It was a four-story building with no elevator," said Rose, speaking to Anthony. "I lived on the third floor in an old Apartment building, you know, and it was tough getting groceries up three flights of stairs. It was not easy, I'll tell you. Now, they bring them to me and put them away for me. All I have to do is click on the things I want on this iPad thing and like magic, it's in my fridge. People come and put them away for me. Have you ever heard of such a thing?"

Anthony and Maria smiled at each other and said to Rose, "That's wonderful, mother." Anthony and Maria pay for all her groceries and ask them to put them away for her. They also asked them to engage her in conversation to ensure that she was in good health as they put her groceries away. They report to Maria to let her know if they suspect any health concerns since Rose is seventy-eight but in good health.

After a while, they got in the car and headed home. On the way up the elevator, Maria said to Anthony, "This is perfect," as she gazed out the window and looked at the city lights on their way home. "Have you ever seen anything so beautiful in your life?" still gazing at the city lights.

Anthony pulled her to him looked into her eyes and said, "Yes, I have. When I met you." Anthony then leaned in and kissed her gently as he felt her round belly push against him. When he released her, he smiled and said, "I agree. Life could not be more perfect." When he said that, he noticed that she was crying. Anthony said, "Why are you crying, sweetheart?"

Maria said, "I don't know. I'm just so happy. I'm sure my hormones are all messed up because of my pregnancy. This is just so crazy. I usually have better control over my emotions, but lately, I've been crying for no reason at all. I'm such a mess."

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

“You’re not a mess, sweetheart,” said Anthony. “You’re having a beautiful baby and you’re gonna be a mom. That’s bound to get you emotional. Don’t worry though, I am always here for you.”

As they walked into their home, Maria pushed him gently against the wall kissed him, and then said, “Close the door, Michael,” as she pulled her husbands by the hand down the hall.”

Chapter 3

LISTENING IN EVERY DARK CORNER

On Monday, Maria received an email from John Hendry, director of the Command Center asking for a meeting to go over plans for gathering intel from the surface. They had talked about putting three to four hundred people on the surface, in different cities throughout the world to gather raw data so they could have their own source of surface intel. They could not depend on established news sources for situational awareness. Their stationary cameras and sensors could only provide so much information, so it was time to insert live reporters of their own who would gather raw footage of events as they happened. Maria Collins would be helping to train staff and direct that coverage, which data would be inserted into the Command Center's risk assessment analysis system.

Maria arrived about 7:55 a.m. at the Command Center for an 8:00 a.m. meeting in the conference room. John Hendry started the meeting off by saying, "Good morning, Maria. I see that congratulations are in order seeing that you're expecting. Am I correct?"

"Yes, that's right," said Maria with a smile.

"Well, that's wonderful news," said John. "I wish the best for the growing Collins family."

"Thank you so much," said Maria.

"When are you due?" Asked John.

"In about eleven weeks," said Maria.

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

“That’s wonderful,” said John. “Well, shall me start our meeting?”

“Yes. Please,” said Maria as she took a seat across from John.

“As you know,” said John, “we closely monitor events as they occur on the surface. However, there have been events that we should have been better prepared for but were not, such as when the CIA stuffed a nuclear bomb down our throats when we weren’t looking. We have promised the citizens of Elysium that we would be more diligent in our surveillance of the surface to ensure they don’t get a second chance to hit us again. And we can only be as good as our intel. Do you understand what I’m trying to say?”

“I see what you’re getting at,” said Maria.

“When ships fire their big guns,” said John, “they fire three rounds. The first two are just to test the wind and conditions of the sea. Then, by the time they fire the third round, it’s dead-on target. What we are building here is a system of intel that will help us know when our enemies are zeroing in on us again to give us time to keep them from making their third shot. The tools we will use are called nano-bots, which are very small flying robots with cameras and listening devices. These things are so powerful that they can transmit a signal up to two miles away. But they must be strategically placed prior to meetings taking place so we can know what they’re planning. We really don’t care what they want to do against other nations. We only want to know if they are planning to attack Elysium again so we can intervene before they have the chance to drop another bomb on us, and we’re focused on the US government because they have attacked us in the past.

“We have been successful at placing some of these in the past, which has helped us keep one step ahead of the FBI and CIA, but this effort needs to be expanded everywhere the US government operates. Eventually, we’ll have these devices listening to every government in the world.

“We need you to get your people in specific buildings and into certain rooms within those buildings to place nanorobots in rooms

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

where meetings are held. These devices can sit on tables, or be attached to walls, doors, and ceilings. We are counting on your people to help us do that. Are you with me so far?"

"Yes. I understand what we need to do," said Maria. "I have a couple of questions, however."

"Sure. What?" said John.

"Do we have people available who can train my operatives to put this technology in place," said Maria, "and do we have people who can train them to enter these buildings without being detected, detained, or hurt?"

"Yes," said John. "We have been successful during some test runs we conducted a few weeks ago and the reception was excellent. Those who performed that test run could provide you with practical experience for how to get in and out undetected. As for placing and activating the technology, Dr. Hung Winn, who developed this technology, is our best option. Have you had a chance to select your operatives yet?"

"No," said Maria. "I thought I would wait to understand your requirements first so I would know what profiles I was looking for."

"Very good," said John. "Now that you know, we would like to activate this plan in two weeks. Can you manage that?"

"That y doesn't give me much time to find the right people", said Maria, "let alone train them properly, and get them to the surface with proper accommodations. There's a lot of logistics involved here. It's more realistic to say thirty days at least."

John just stared at Maria without saying a word for a full thirty seconds.

He's waiting for me to speak first, thought Maria, remembering an old sales tactic she remembered from her cosmetic sales days: *'He who speaks first after they ask for the sale loses.'*

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

“Fine,” said Maria. “Two weeks, but don’t expect everything to be perfect in that amount of time. We will start with what we have and build from there.”

“Agreed,” said John. “I will check with you in a week to see how things are going.”

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” said Maria. “Remember, I don’t work for you. I’ll get you what you need according to our agreement and keep you informed.” Maria stood, they shook hands, and Maria left.

After the meeting, Maria thought about the meeting. *What was that crap about ‘I’ll be back in a week to check on your work?’* Then she realized, *He was testing me to see if I was a pushover.* She rolled her eyes and said to herself, *That Jerk! Does he know that I’m licensed to carry a gun?... Just...kidding,*” she thought to herself.

Maria went to her office on the sixth floor of the Command Center building. She hired an assistant named Silvia the previous week and gave her a few tasks to help us get settled. Today, they were going to send out an advertisement for a new position to survey the surface. Maria knew this would attract a large number of people, but eighty percent of those who apply will not be what she is looking for. She needed people, male and female, between the ages of eighteen and fifty-two, who don’t flinch at taking risks.

Over the next several days, Maria and her assistant interviewed over three hundred fifty applicants. The first stage was in a group setting. The second stage required applicants to fill out a lengthy questionnaire that would help to identify personality traits. *That whittles the list down to eighty, a far cry from the three to four hundred we’re looking for,* thought Maria, *but it’s a start.*

Maria and her assistant created a map of Washington to identify targets, numbering them, and identifying those who work in those buildings. “That will be our first task,” said Maria to her assistant. “We need to make a list of whose-who and where their office is, and where the meetings are held. Once we have that, we can identify when they hold their meetings and who goes to them. We also

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

need pictures of everyone in those meetings so we can identify who is speaking.”

By the end of the first week, they had a game plan. Silvia, it turns out, is great at logistics. She whipped together a plan for eighty people to stay in nearby hotels and restaurants, and take tours of government buildings that would provide cover for their operatives. There was no time to lose, so training began on Friday of the first week. They were trained in how to take the tours, how to ask questions about offices and conference rooms, and who meets in those rooms and when. They were to appear as tourists asking questions. They were going to be wearing nano-cameras so everything they experienced would be recorded. If they were blocked from gaining access during a particular attempt, another couple or group would be assigned using a different strategy.

The following Monday, Maria’s team of operatives selected for this mission visited the office of Dr. Hung Winn who developed the nano cameras they were to place. When they walked into his lab, they saw several large TV screens hanging from the ceiling showing the faces of Maria’s group taking a tour of his office. Maria’s operatives tried to see where the cameras were located but could not see them. They looked at each other to see if anyone on her team was able to identify where the cameras were placed, but no one could, to the delight of Dr. Win who glanced up from what he was working on with a smile, and said, “I’ll be right with you.”

Dr. Winn walked over to the center of the room, lifted a four-inch square glass plate from off the table where he had been working, and put it in the palm of his hand. It looked like the kind of glass used for viewing specimens under a microscope. He then walked over to the side of the room and placed the glass plate under a microscope. The microscope had a camera that projected an image on the TV which was hanging from the ceiling in the center of the room. Those in the room could see on the TV what Dr. Winn was looking at under the microscope.

At first, it was so tiny, that they could hardly make it out. But as Dr. Winn magnified the object more and more, they could all see

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

that the object they were looking at was a helicopter, a replica of an Apache helicopter that the military uses, with a large camera attached to it. The intricate details were amazing. Using remote controls, Dr. Winn could cause the helicopter to fly upwards, backward, turn around, and land. It was so tiny that no one could see it with the naked eye, but the camera was excellent and provided great pictures and sounds.

Dr. Winn caused the helicopter to fly over to one of the touring members in Maria's group and land on their shoulders. Once it landed, the camera onboard showed the landing, and small claw-like clamps dug into the fabric to secure itself from falling off. Dr. Winn was able to maneuver the camera through the remote control to project the other faces in the room on the overhead TVs.

"It has remarkable clarity," said Maria as she and those who were with her stared up at the overhead TV screen.

Dr. Winn beamed with pride and with a big smile said, "Yes. It is quite good, isn't it? We came up with the helicopter design so it could be relocated to provide a better angle for picture or sound, if necessary." Others on the tour had similar responses to this marvelous technology. They were all looking at the shoulder of the person the tiny device landed on, but they could see nothing. Another tried to move the fabric a bit to see if they could see it better, but Dr. Winn cautioned them not to touch the fabric, saying, "These devices are very delicate. One swipe of a hand to brush away dandruff and the device will be smashed to pieces."

Another person in Maria's group asked, "How did you make these so small?"

Dr. Winn said, "We use powerful microscopes and robotics to assemble the parts. The parts are made here using a 3-D printer. We've spent hours reviewing the designs of a real Apache helicopter. Then, my team recreated those parts in miniature using the 3-D printer. Everything has to be done under a microscope. Once we create the parts, we transfer them to another microscope where intelligent or programmable miniature robotics assemble the parts for us. Each unit has a battery that can operate the camera and rotor blades continuously

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

for up to twelve hours, or if it remains stationary, the camera and sound can transmit indefinitely since it is equipped with its own solar charger.”

“This is remarkable,” said Maria. “I am so impressed with what you’ve created here. So, tell me, Dr. Winn, How can we get these devices into places where they’re needed without anyone knowing what we’re doing?”

“It’s quite simple really,” said Dr. Winn. “We simply attach a device to a person’s clothing and have them walk into the room. Then, the operator, who is nearby, but is likely outside the building, causes the device to fly off the person’s shoulder and lands on a wall, a painting, or a bowl of fruit in the center of the table. So, all we need you to do is walk into the room and we’ll do the rest. Easy, right?”

“Right,” said Maria. Everyone looked at each other with smiles on their faces. “This work doesn’t seem so clan-destined after all,” said Maria. When Dr. Winn’s tour was complete, Maria said to the group, “Let’s all meet back at the Command Center sixth floor office to go over our assignments.” Maria and members of her group thanked Dr. Winn for showing them his Nano Tech lab and then shuffled out of his lab to their respective cars.

Back at Maria’s offices, the group entered the large main room and took seats at tables set up like a classroom. Maria asked the two people who were referred by John Hendry to talk about their experiences of how they successfully placed recording devices in targeted government offices and conference rooms. “When no one is in the room,” said one of the operatives, “these devices switch to sleep mode. When someone starts talking inside the room, they become active and start transmitting. We also have transponders hidden in shrubs just outside the building that receive the signal and relay it to our Command Center. It’s all pretty slick.”

Maria thanked them for their advice, then turned her attention to the group. “Each of you will be assigned a partner. On the table in front of you is a packet of information containing your train schedule and destination, your hotel accommodations, your length of stay, and

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

the respective targets. You will also find some cash and a credit card for meals and spending money while you're there."

"Some of you will be going to Washington DC to tour the White House," said Maria, "while others will be going to the Congressional building and individual offices of congressmen and senators. You're there to poke your head in to meet them and move on. You only need to be stationary inside the room or office for thirty seconds, and it doesn't matter if anyone is in there or not.

"If you and your partner are not able to gain access, another team will be assigned to take over the assignment. We'll have cameras on you the whole way, and each of you will receive a small earbud that fits into your ear canal so you can hear our instructions along the way. This is so you'll be aware of what others are doing to assist you. If you are stopped, just act like a dumb tourist who didn't know better. If you can get into the center of the room, that will be ideal. But if all you can do is reach the doorway, the device is capable of traveling on its own to find a wall or table centerpiece to land on. You don't have to worry about the device, because it is all controlled by an operator outside the building sitting on the steps or a nearby park bench looking at their laptop and using their joystick to place the device. We just need you to help us get close enough to be effective.

"You will need a travel bag and three changes of clothing for the trip. For those of you who do not have a small overnight bag, there are several to choose from in the next room. Take one home and bring your things with you tomorrow morning looking like tourists, and...be happy. You're on vacation to see the Capital," Maria said with a smile.

"Tomorrow morning?" Said one of the new operatives. "That soon? I thought we weren't leaving until Friday."

"This mission is urgent," said Maria, "So the departure date has been moved up to tomorrow, Tuesday. I hope you're all Okay with that?" They all nodded their heads, yes.

The next morning, the group boarded the train to Washington DC, destination: Dulles Airport. A phase portal had been set up in a long hallway where they would walk into the airport out of what

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

would normally be considered to be a janitor's closet, but eighty people would walk in and out of that space without being noticed. From there, they would take a cab to their hotel, check in, and wait to meet up for dinner where Maria would be waiting for them in a conference dinner room catered by the hotel. At dinner, Maria told her group of operatives, "A technical support person will be waiting for you just outside the building where you are scheduled to take a tour of the building," instructed Maria. "There, they will place one or more nano helicopters on your shoulder just before you walk in. Once the device is placed, the technical operator will notify you that the device is placed, and you will immediately go to your next target. Are there any questions?"

"Will there be any time to go and have fun?" said one of Maria's operatives.

"Yes," said Maria. "Each team will have about twenty targets to complete. Once you have completed your assignments, you are free to see the sights, go see a movie or just lounge in the pool at the hotel. It's up to you, but remember, you can't miss a single target on your list. You are also responsible for your partner to ensure they return to the hotel. Do not get separated from your partner. If this should occur, notify me or your technical operator immediately. Does everyone understand?" They all nodded in unison. "Okay," said Maria, "Let's eat, and I'll see all of you downstairs in the lobby around nine o'clock a.m. and be sure to eat breakfast in the morning before we leave."

The first on Maria's list of high-priority targets was the National Security Advisor's office in the West Wing of the White House. Taking a tour of the White House would only get them so far, and then the technical operator would have to fly the device into the room using the joystick. The operative walked to the rope that blocked the way to the West Wing and asked the tour guide, "What's down that way? Pointing to the cordoned-off hallway. "That's where those who support the President have their offices," said the tour guide. "That's called the West Wing, and it has three floors of offices, for the Vice President, The White House Chief of Staff, the National Security Advisor, the Counselor to the President, the Senior Advisor to the President, the White House Press Secretary and their support staff."

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

The technical operative purposely placed several devices on the clothing of the two operatives taking the tour. Once they were at the rope, the technical operative outside activated all of the devices at once to fly towards the open doors of their respective targets. The first two had open doors, but the door was closed for the National Security Advisor, so he slipped the drone under the door and landed on a picture frame on the wall behind the Advisor's desk perfectly positioned to see who was speaking.

Once Maria heard the news, she was delighted that they were able to place devices in every priority room in the White House. This was a huge success. The next day, the technical operatives reported that all targets at the House and Senate had been successfully placed.

While Maria's team was focused on Washington DC, other teams traveled to other cities to target more secure buildings used by the CIA, NSA, Homeland Security, and the FBI, which required special handling, such as placing multiple devices on the clothing of those who work in those buildings. After placing these devices on about ten people for a particular building, the operatives were able to move their devices to every strategic room on every floor of the building. This process continued over the following three months until they had placed their devices in every US Federal building from New York, Virginia, Maryland, and Washington DC.

Once Maria and her team completed their tasks, they boarded the train to Elysium. On the way back, Maria used one of the private conference rooms to call Anthony. She placed the ACLIS on her head and asked Michael to contact Anthony for her. When he answered, he said, "Hi. How'd it go? Are you doing Okay?"

"It went well, and we accomplished our mission," said Maria, "but I'm left with a feeling that I've done something terrible."

"Why? What do you mean?" Asked Anthony.

"Well, I feel like I just committed espionage and treason against the country I grew up in. I love America and here I am planting cameras and listening devices in every power office in the nation. What do I do with that?"

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

Anthony said, “You come home knowing that you placed those devices among our enemies so that the country you now live in with your mother, your husband, and your children are safe because we will be forewarned of their intent to drop another nuclear bomb on us again. Remember that, without this intelligence, we are vulnerable to another unprovoked attack.

“It has been more than eighty years since a nuclear bomb was dropped on a civilian population, and rogue members of the US government did that in plain sight. What you did is merely act in self-defense against a group of rogue members of the US government who are so arrogant that they think they can perpetrate the most heinous act known to man and never get caught. They are over-confident, and if there is one group willing to do this thing, you can bet that there are others who are ready and willing to over-reach their power and authority. If they did it once, they are perfectly capable of doing it again. They think that they are above the law. We retaliated, but that was not enough. Now that we know what they are capable of, we took decisive action to make ourselves aware of their every move so we can shut them down before they get a chance to hurt us again.

“I am certain that President Howard told them of my conversation with him, where I mentioned that we lost men in the underground blast. That allowed them to narrow the radius of where they think our city is located. They’re like a tiger who is hunting for its next kill. They smell the blood and figure it can’t be far from where they last hit us, so they continue to plan their next attack, despite losing a general and a few NSA and CIA comrades. They are always calculating to see what else they can get away with under the cover of secrecy and darkness. Well, we planted a bug in those dark places so we can hear and be aware of their evil and treacherous plans so we can stop them in their tracks. You and your staff are heroes to the city of Elysium. Heroes! Now, please come home. I miss you!”

“I miss you too,” said Maria with an easy smile. “I needed that. See you in a few minutes. My train is almost home.”

“See you soon. I love you,” said Anthony.

PROJECT ELYSIUM
City of Refuge

“I Love you too. Bye,” said Maria, and she disconnected the call. Sitting back in her seat, she reminisced about the life she and Anthony were building and how happy she was in her new home. She had been living there less than a year and already so much had changed in her life. A year ago, she couldn’t have imagined that she would be in such a leadership position, married to the leader of a nation, and having a baby on top of everything else. She couldn’t remember ever feeling as happy as she was right now and feeling like she was thriving in every aspect of her life. She smiled to herself as the train pulled into the station.