

PROGRESS



A SHORT STORY BY SYDNEY KING

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PROGRESS

“Begin log. Project Chimera, Experiment 74-B.

“It would seem the Grand Mesa acquisition has proven satisfactory: the serum from the Soldier Enhancement Program is purer than I anticipated. Though Dr. Naughton’s foundational work was always elegant, she was hampered by excessive ethical considerations. A pity—reluctance to push beyond theoretical limits is the death of progress. How fortunate her creation now rests in unfettered hands.

“I am now integrating the serum’s base code with my own retroviral vectors. Vendetta demands a stable, mass-producible formula for herself and her gladiators. Enhanced strength, speed, cognitive processing, with no need for metabolic respite. And of course, zero risk. She has her father’s ambition but far less patience. Logically, I anticipated some form of retribution due to my involvement in her family’s downfall. I may not have pulled the trigger myself, but the vengeful are not known to discriminate. Yet now she funds my laboratory without a second thought. I suppose inexorable conquests have a way of smoothing over past grievances.





“Doomfist’s fall, Vendetta’s rise . . . merely a footnote in my research logs. Akande’s sole managerial virtue was staying out of my way. Whether my new patron affords me the same independence is an open variable. The work, however, remains the constant.

“Stability. That was always the flaw in the original formulation. And in my own early forays. The cellular regeneration I induced in Reyes was a monumental leap: to force the body to continually repair itself, to cheat death through sheer biological will. A beautiful, brutal concept. But the accompanying degeneration was . . . volatile. I learned more from watching his body tear itself apart than I ever did from the temporary stasis it fought to maintain. With Reyes—himself an enhanced soldier—as my test subject, I had to work backward from the final result. With the original formulation in hand, there is an opportunity to build a better product from the ground up.

“A momentary diversion. The vector is rejecting the serum’s protein markers. A predictable, if tedious, complication. I’m introducing a binding agent to force cohesion . . . There.

“Progress demands a price, it seems. I had no qualms accepting this stolen serum from Vendetta, yet my own work has suffered similar setbacks twice in recent memory. First in Runasapi, where interlopers sabotaged countless data points on the Inti Warriors’ solar threading. Then in Oasis, where the so-called Phreaks—some underground movement Helix had antagonized—made off with my vanadium isotope. But the loss of a tool is not the loss of knowledge. Every failed synthesis, every catastrophic reaction . . . it’s all data. Their theft forced me to develop a far more efficient extraction method, one that will allow me to bind the serum’s properties to a subject’s telomeres directly. So in a way, I suppose I am grateful. One must always find the advantage in adversity.

“The synthesis is complete. No violent exothermic reaction. No rapid crystallization. Just a perfect, pliable solution. A formulation that will make Vendetta and her gladiators unstoppable—or so she will tell them. In truth, whatever power it brings will be hers alone to wield. A predictable move for one so fixated on a crown. No matter. In time, the genetic rewrite of this serum will allow for far more . . . specialized applications. This use is merely the beginning.

“Scientific advancement stops for no one. Not for failed subjects, not for stolen isotopes, not for the rise and fall of the world’s warlords. It is a river, and I am its only conscious current.

“Samples proceeding to phase one trials.”



