

A KIND OF GUILT

Written by

John Cooney

jmc1487@comcast.net
503-679-9783

FADE IN:

EXT. FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTE (FCI) CUMBERLAND - DAY

A large, oval-shaped prison compound surrounded by concentric circles of razor-wire topped walls.

Predatory surveillance drones fly in lazy circles overhead.

SUPER: FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTE, CUMBERLAND - 2047

INT. FCI CUMBERLAND - LOMAX'S CELL - DAY

A drab, single-person cell. The cell door is open.

Metal-frame bed, metal toilet, metal sink. A scratched metal surface above the sink - a makeshift mirror.

LOMAX - late 40s, razor-fit and analytical - sits on the edge of the bed. He wears gray prison fatigues and studies a magnetic chessboard on his lap.

A shimmering, 3-D hologram, suspended in mid-air above the bed, rotates slowly: a youthful Lomax, a young woman, and a smiling girl with bright red hair, all on a park bench. A chessboard rests on the bench between Lomax and the girl.

A female voice murmurs inside the cell. The seductive tones of a CELL COMPANION.

CELL COMPANION (O.S.)

The duty of every citizen is to
defend against the enemy within.

DOC, a fellow inmate in his 60s, hobbled and world-weary, limps into the cell. Lomax glances at him and nods.

DOC

"Reflections on the 30th
Amendment." A classic.

LOMAX

Careful. Sarcasm is now a Level
Three offense.

DOC

As it should be. To quote Our Dear
Leader, 'Sarcasm is the tool of
saboteurs and fifth-columnists.'

He winks at Lomax and gestures at the board.

DOC (CONT'D)
I don't get it, Lomax. You can't
win playing against yourself.

Lomax resumes his study of the board.

LOMAX
I can't lose, either.

Doc gestures at their surroundings.

DOC
You sure about that?

Lomax moves another piece on the board.

LOMAX
What do you know? Checkmate.

DOC
So escape is impossible.

LOMAX
That's stalemate, Doc. And you're a
real ray of sunshine.

DOC
Glad to help.

Doc heads for the door.

LOMAX
See you tomorrow?

DOC
Depends on my social calendar.

Doc raises a hand and exits.

CELL COMPANION (O.S.)
Our Dear Leader implores us never
to forget that the price of freedom
is eternal allegiance.

LOMAX
(quietly, to himself)
Duly noted.

He quickly resets the chessboard.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC - DLE HEADQUARTERS - DAY

A squat, anonymous building surrounded by concrete barricades and armed officers in DLE uniforms.

A massive sign at the main entrance bears the engraving "US DEPARTMENT OF LOYALTY ENFORCEMENT HEADQUARTERS."

Each officer bears a barcode-like ID grid, one inch by two inches, extending from the underside of the left jawbone to the collar bone.

The ID grids identify the officers as SYNTHETIC LIFE ENGINES, also known as SYNTHETICS or by the derogatory term SLEEGS.

Apart from their ID grids, the officers are indistinguishable from humans.

INT. DLE HQ - HALLWAY - NIGHT

A sterile, harshly-lit hallway.

INT. DLE HQ - HALLWAY - OUTSIDE REGENERATION CHAMBER - NIGHT

A windowless door labeled '5B17 - REGEN.'

INT. DLE HQ - REGENERATION CHAMBER - NIGHT

A darkened room filled with several rows of ReGen stations: Platforms set at 45-degree angles to the floor, equipped with semi-enclosed headrests at the upper end and footrests below.

Most stations are occupied. Each occupant, man or woman, is a synthetic, identifiable by ID grid.

In the middle of the front row - CLAIRE, early 30's. Her eyes are open but unseeing. The headrest at her station pulsates with alternating red and yellow flashes of light.

EXT. THE THIRD KINGDOM - THE GREAT PLAIN - DAY

A vast, featureless plain. A dark, foreboding sky, tinged with eerie shades of red and yellow. At the edge of the horizon, a vast cloud of dust. ECHOES of fierce combat.

SUPER: THE THIRD KINGDOM

EXT. THE THIRD KINGDOM - OASIS - DAY

Claire and a 30-ish man, HELM, both dressed in drab grey uniforms, sit beside a BUBBLING fountain, surrounded by gently swaying palm trees. The dark sky looms above.

Here, the ECHOES of combat are faint.

Claire's shirt sleeve bears the silhouette of a chess piece - a Red Queen. HELM's sleeve features the silhouette of a Yellow King.

HELM

Stay with me, Claire. Don't leave.

CLAIRE

I don't think Vitruvius would approve of that idea.

HELM

We'll find the ocean. Where the sun falls out of the sky.

Claire LAUGHS.

CLAIRE

There's no ocean here, and the sun never sets.

An A Major chord begins to CHIME, drowning out the faint sounds of combat.

HELM

No - don't go. Not yet.

Claire strokes his cheek.

CLAIRE

I have to, Helm.

The A chord grows louder.

INT. DLE HQ - REGENERATION CHAMBER - NIGHT

At Claire's ReGen station, an A Major chord REPEATS itself until Claire regains full consciousness.

CLAIRE

(softly, to herself)
Helm.

The headrest's pulsating lights grow dim.

INT. DLE HQ - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

TAYLOR, mid-40s, intense and brooding, sits at one end of a long conference table and drums his fingers.

Claire, now alert and confident, sits to Taylor's right. Both are dressed in dark suits.

A frozen holographic image hovers above the table: A man, NORD, late 40s, dressed in black clothing and a ballcap with the image of an upside-down American flag.

A caption below the image reads, "OSKAR NORD."

CLAIRE

Nord released an ARB communique at zero five hundred hours Eastern.

TAYLOR

Let's see it.

Claire gestures. The holographic footage stirs into motion.

NORD

(on holographic footage)
The Armed Resistance Brigade
demands the immediate release of
our comrades.

Images of a man and woman, both in their late 20s, appear in the hologram. Claire gestures again and the video freezes.

CLAIRE

Evans and Murphy - ARB's tech
experts. In custody pending trial.

TAYLOR

I know where those assholes are. I
want Nord.

CLAIRE

Fugitive teams are running down
every lead. It's only a matter --

TAYLOR

(cuts Claire off)
-- of time. So everyone keeps
telling me. Proceed.

Claire gestures again to unfreeze the video.

NORD

(on holographic footage)
Free our brother and sister.

(MORE)

NORD (CONT'D)
 Otherwise, an American city will
 suffer on the Fourth of July.

Another gesture from Claire. The image freezes.

TAYLOR
 A week from today.

Claire processes for a split-second.

CLAIRE
 Six days, fifteen hours, and forty-
 seven minutes, Eastern.

TAYLOR
 I already have a calendar. Tell me
 something I don't know.

Claire gestures and a second holographic image replaces the
 first. This one depicts a younger Lomax seated across a metal
 table from a younger Nord in an otherwise empty room.

LOMAX
 (on holographic footage)
 Incitement to riot. We have you
 dead to rights. That's five years
 federal time.

NORD
 (on holographic footage)
 It wasn't so long ago that you
 could express an opinion without
 getting arrested.

LOMAX
 (on holographic footage)
 Don't try to make this about
 politics.

NORD
 (on holographic footage)
 Everything is about politics,
 Lomax. Or don't they teach you that
 at DLE school?

Claire stops the holo.

CLAIRE
 Lomax. The one Investigator who's
 dealt directly with Nord.

TAYLOR
 Make that former Investigator. And
 current federal inmate.

CLAIRE

I know. That's where you come in.

Taylor stares at the holographic image.

INT. FCI CUMBERLAND - LOMAX'S CELL - DAY

Lomax paces in his cell, an open book in his hands. He MUTTERS inaudibly, under the insistent, alluring drone of the Cell Companion's voice.

CELL COMPANION (O.S.)

Dissent is an attack on our
nation's fundamental values.

A uniformed corrections officer (CO), DEACON, appears at the open cell door. An ID grid is visible on his neck.

DEACON

Attention, Inmate.

Lomax stops pacing.

DEACON (CONT'D)

Failure to heed a Cell Companion
broadcast is a Level Two offense.

LOMAX

I'm multi-tasking.

DEACON

Someone has signed in to see you.

Lomax makes a low WHISTLING sound.

LOMAX

A visitor. It's been a long time.

Deacon processes for a split-second.

DEACON

Your most recent --

LOMAX

(cuts in)

I don't want to know.

DEACON

Understood.

Deacon motions for Lomax to come with him.

INT. FCI CUMBERLAND - VISITORS AREA - DAY

A large, bright room with tables placed at regular intervals. Inmates in prison fatigues meet with individuals or small groups. Friends, parents, wives, children.

Lomax and Deacon enter. Lomax spots Taylor and walks to the table where he's seated. Lomax remains standing.

LOMAX

Taylor. I didn't expect to see you.

TAYLOR

You know how the Department is.

LOMAX

All too well.

Lomax looks around for Deacon. He's ready to leave.

TAYLOR

How would you feel about a change of scenery?

Lomax hesitates, then sits down across from Taylor.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

I'm a section chief now.

LOMAX

Let me guess - you kept raising your hand, they kept promoting you.

TAYLOR

It's all coming back to me.

LOMAX

What is?

TAYLOR

What a pain in the ass you can be.

(pause)

No one in the Department knows Nord like you do.

LOMAX

Once upon a time, maybe. I'm a little out of the loop these days.

TAYLOR

Five years ago, you told me Nord framed you for murder. I thought you'd want to help bring him down.

LOMAX

When something sounds too good to be true, it usually is.

TAYLOR

This could mean a reduction in your sentence. Maybe even a commutation.

LOMAX

What is it you're not telling me?

TAYLOR

I don't sense a lot of trust.

LOMAX

The catch, Taylor. What is it?

Taylor stands and gestures to a corrections officer.

TAYLOR

This isn't your show, Lomax. Change your mind, you know how to reach me. You got twenty-four hours.

He walks away.

EXT. PAC/RIM APPLIANCE CORPORATION - DAY

A walled-in cluster of buildings. A sign in front of the entrance reads PAC/RIM APPLIANCE CORPORATION.

INT. PAC/RIM APPLIANCE - WAITING ROOM - DAY

SYDNEY, mid-20s, alert and intelligent, sits in a sparsely-furnished waiting room. She has bright red hair.

Rodriguez, early 30s, a slick and carefully-groomed man, opens the door to an inner office.

INT. RODRIGUEZ'S OFFICE - DAY

Sparsely-decorated, with muted colors and sleek surfaces.

Sydney sits across a glass-topped table from Rodriguez. A name plate on the table reads J. RODRIGUEZ.

He studies a clear plastic tablet in front of him.

RODRIGUEZ

Personnel has reviewed your application. It seems everything checks out.

SYDNEY

Excellent. Thank you.

RODRIGUEZ

I'm curious about your interest in Pac/Rim Appliances.

SYDNEY

I'm ready for a new challenge.

Rodriguez takes another look at the tablet, as though he might have missed something.

RODRIGUEZ

You were a virtual environment architect at Vitruvius.

SYDNEY

Correct. Until last month.

RODRIGUEZ

You designed regeneration interfaces for sleigs - sorry, synthetic life engines.

SYDNEY

That's right.

RODRIGUEZ

Sounds pretty challenging to me.

He hesitates.

RODRIGUEZ (CONT'D)

We make interactive consumer appliances. Talking, uh, toasters and so forth. I'm assuming you already know that.

SYDNEY

Pac/Rim feels like a real growth opportunity for me.

Rodriguez isn't sure he's heard correctly.

RODRIGUEZ

A growth opportunity.