

Anarchy and Petrol Cheers

Daniel Prior Gijón

To Eva Luna; little friend, great person, greater example.

Part I

Chapter 1: The Kidnapping

—Look who's decided to wake up!— exclaimed a distant voice, followed by some guffaws.

—What? What am I doing here? Where am I to start? Who are you? Tony was beyond confused.

—It's curious. I was going to ask you the same question —answered a young redheaded woman.

Who are you and what is the last thing you remember?

For the first time Tony realized that it was in her best interest to look around him. He was in a large room, there was a fireplace and a considerable supply of firewood, although no one had made a fire. Near the fireplace was a large wooden cabinet. On the wall to his left was a kitchen sink with a pair of doors under it.

The young woman who had asked him the question was sitting in an armchair, and she was still questioning him with her eyes. On a sofa, there were three other young people, a not very tall but stocky boy with tousled hair, a slim blond woman with rather long and slightly wavy hair, and, the one closest to him, another incredibly pale man. quite tall, with pronounced bags under his eyes and a medium length of jet—black hair. For whatever reason, he sensed that this was the oldest of the five who were there, including him.

He himself was on another sofa. The others had been nice enough to let him sleep, it seemed.

The same woman who had spoken to him repeated the question.

—My name is Tony, I'm from Madrid, I'm not sure what's the last thing I remember and this is starting to scare me.

—Well, Tony,— she continued, —I'm Martina but I think you haven't understood me, We

need to know a lot more about you. Who are you, what have you studied, what do you do, what is the last thing you remember... Everything counts.

—OK OK. I studied Philosophy and now I work cleaning pots in the *office* of a cafeteria. The last thing I remember is I was going home from work, and I woke up here, there's no more.

They all looked at each other in surprise.

—So you're not a scientist?— Didn't you get a shock? asked the young blonde woman

—No, I'm sorry, I don't understand why I should be a scientist, let alone why I should have been electrocuted.— And you are?

—My name is Rachel. I am a genetic engineer, from Valencia, I was finishing my doctorate. We are calibrating what we may be doing here or who could have brought us here or just where the hell we are. You're a little late to the party, that's all, we're just surprised because all of us are scientists and all of us were electrocuted before we lost consciousness.

—Okay, what about you, Martina? Tony asked.

—I'm an agricultural engineer, from Seville —Tony bit her tongue, her accent was still noticeable from afar—, I work for a business group that seeks to increase its production of agricultural goods, as if that existed... The case, me too I was electrocuted and woke up here.

—Then you guys stay...— Tony went on.

—I am Alexander,— the young man with wild hair answered with impetus. I am a Laboratory Technician, from Barcelona. I have been working in various departments of various hospitals for several years.

—And I'm Javi,— the pale man finished to close. I am a biochemist, from Bilbao, I work as a professor and researcher at the University of the Basque Country.

—But how old are you?— Martina asked.

I turn 29 in March.

—Wow...

—By the way, that's important,— Tony went on, looking at the wall. There's a calendar there, along with a pen tied to a string, it's set to the month of February. I think we can agree that we haven't been kept unconscious for more than a month, but it would still be interesting to make sure what day we live on.

»Because I guess I'm not the only one whose mobile has been taken, right?

—Well. I propose to take a look at the building and the surroundings. All in one?

Chapter 2: Our goal

They finished inspecting the great hall. The only thing that had been left were some blankets between the armchairs and sofas, kitchen utensils and oil in the varnished wooden cupboard and a white and covered glass—ceramic kitchen very similar to a washing machine on the outside, which had not been repaired either. .

A corridor extended from the room in each direction. They took the one from the cabinet and saw that this side of the corridor led to two rooms and semicircular stairs at the back, they took a look inside each one of them and saw that each one was similar; they had a bed, a single bathroom and a closet with some clothes.

They continued down the other side of the corridor, entering another room with a layout very similar to the previous two. Practically opposite there was another door, only instead of being made of wood like the others, it was gray and metallic and, moreover, it was locked.

They headed for what looked like the door that led outside.

You know? Alexander said just before opening it. I find it very strange that the back room had clothes exactly my size.

—Now that you mention it,— Raquel continued, —the next room also had clothes just in my size...

—This is impossible,— Javi finished. Mine not only had clothes in my size, but also some of the clothes were almost identical to others I've owned at some point in my life.

—It's pretty clear,— Tony said, —you already have a room.—

—And we? Martina asked.

—They should be upstairs.— Still, how about we finish taking a look outside while we are?

—Voucher.

The five of them walked out the door.

They were in the middle of nowhere, although it was true that there was no physical barrier that prevented them from leaving there if they wanted to, only leafy forest.

—This is pretty impressive,— Martina said. The building looks like a medieval monastery, but it's as if someone has renovated it from top to bottom. There are solar panels on the roof and lithium batteries. There is also a well—kept orchard that has a bit of everything, take a look:

»We have broad beans, peas, asparagus, onions, green beans, spinach, Swiss chard, strawberries, oranges, plums... With this alone we have enough for the five of us.

—You won't expect us to eat fruit and vegetables, right? Rachel snapped at her.

—You should see it...

—Wait, have we gone crazy?— Alexander said. Who talked about staying here?

—For starters, if we want to leave, we should find out where we are first. —Tony replied. Presumably we've been put here for a reason. Whoever he was, we must be useful to him for one thing or another. Besides, maybe it's even interesting, who knows!

—Oh yes, Mr Know—It—All?— —And can you explain to me what a picnic area looks like here? And more interesting, why do we want a well if the building has running water? — He said pointing to a stone well that was past the orchard.

—The picnic area is also for us to eat when the weather is good. And the well... I think there's only one way to find out.

Tony went straight to the well and the others followed him. When they got there, something caught Martina's attention, and she turned the corner separating herself from the group.

—This is not OK. Nothing good. She—she went right into the garden, past the well, and without a second thought she grabbed several handfuls of different vegetables until her hands were full.

—What happen? Javier asked.

—Come,— he replied, continuing to walk. The other four followed her.

Around the corner from the monastery was a farmyard with a dozen or so chickens, though they seemed very lethargic.

—They must have gone a long time without eating,— Martina said, as she tossed them the vegetables. Believe me, they can be very useful to us.

—Can we go back to the well?— Alexander said impatiently. There was a moment of silence and finally they came back to him.

They peered into the well a little, but there was no way to make out what was at the bottom. There was still a pulley mechanism, so it made sense that there would be a bucket or something similar at the other end.

They tugged on the pulley and finally pulled out a metallic—gray bucket, with some water and five medium—sized keys.

—I think that's pretty clear, right?— Tony said.

The five of them headed back to the building and tried the keys on the metal door.

It opened.

As you walked through the door, there were several light switches. They all lit up. The stairs led down to a kind of basement.

When they got to the end they couldn't believe it. Someone had set up the entire basement as a laboratory.

There were three work tables, the central one having what looked like a single computer with output to five screens.

In the rest of the room there was everything: microscopes, pipettes, glassware, a refrigerator, various devices useful for different techniques and many other materials that the two in the group who were not scientists had not even heard of.

On the central screen of the computer there was a pink post—it, which read, in computer letters:

EGTBPKIZQCFFH.

+1, —2, +1, —3, +2...

—Okay, now what?— Rachel said.

—I don't know, I'm still hallucinating,— Alexander continued.

—Stop,— Martina said, making her way. She took a pen from a nearby drawer and began to fiddle with the pink piece of paper.

—Why don't we just turn on the computer?— Rachel asked.

—Do it if you want,— Tony answered, —but without that password I don't think you'll do anything.— Raquel turned on the computer and put on a bad face when she verified that, indeed, it asked for a password. Of course there was no message, just an empty text box.

—My goodness...— Martina had gone white.

—What's happening? Have you figured it out? Javier asked.

—Yes...

—And good?

—“Gene design”.

—What? Are you sure?

—Yes, yes...— She handed him the paper.

Javi inserted it into the computer and it gave the message Bienvenue, to then start what seemed to be a Linux—based operating system.

—That was...? —Javi said, already very incredulous.

—French, yes, like in Février,— Tony replied. The others looked at him.

—The calendar, it was in French, I just realized.

—What does that mean, what are we in France? Rachel asked.

—If the person who brought us together here has a modicum of decency, that would be his thing.— The weather and the hours of sunshine agree, at least.

—So far, what day is it today? Javi clicked on the calendar.

'According to this it's twenty past six on Sunday, February 17th. Do you think we can trust this?

—I don't see why not. What's on the computer?

—Give me a couple of minutes.

The others waited in silence for Javi to take a preliminary look.

—This must be a joke.

—What happen?

—You remember the password, right?

—Yes, “gene design”, why?

—Voucher. We don't have an Internet connection, but we do have what would be equivalent to all the encyclopedias that have ever been on biology, biochemistry, genetics, genetic engineering... Everything. Do you know what gene editing is?

—Yes, modify the DNA of an organism for some purpose, right?

—Well. Do you understand what the concept of “gene design” means?

—I'm not sure.

—Well, I'm telling you, we're talking about the creation of genetically new organisms.

—You're laughing at us, right?— Rachel finally said.

—Absolutely. Watch this. —Javi opened a program on all the screens with the name “Project I – Eden”.

—Let me see... No, it's impossible.

—What am I missing?— Tony said.

“This project, Eden... It looks like alien technology.

—But are we talking about something real or is it a hidden camera?— I really don't know what to think anymore —Alexander continued.

—If it's a joke, someone has gone out of their way to make it seem very real.— This project only has a thousand pages.

—What's in the other one?— Martina asked.

—Well, it says “Project II – OIL—ER” —Javi continued.

»This one is even crazier.

»Okay, I think I have an idea. I am convinced that someone could not finish this project, whatever it is, and that they have brought us here to do it for them.

»I also hope you agree that doing so is the best way to escape from here, since, although there is no barrier between this building and the outside, we are talking about whoever put us here has done it for middle of the kidnapping.

They all nodded.

»And I think, as the person with the most experience and knowledge in these matters is me, I should be in charge. Are you agree?

They hesitated, but finally they agreed with him.

—Well. Tony, you said you're a philosopher, right?

—Yes.

—Before you said something that I found very interesting, and that is that we are all here for a reason, do you keep it?

—Yes,— she answered firmly.

—Perfect. Why did you study Philosophy?

—The real answer is something very personal. The closest thing I can give here is that I wanted to experience reality more intensely.

—Would you say that your way of understanding things tends rather to the generic or to the concrete?

— To the generic. And in the extreme, too.

—Well. Would you like to coordinate the work?

—But what are you saying, Javier? —Alexander exclaimed.

—I remind you that I am in charge, we have decided unanimously, if we take steps back this could take a long time.

He physically backed away.

—I agree.

—Because you will! He also exclaimed, clapping his hands.

—Alexander, Raquel and you will work in the laboratory. Martina will be in charge of the maintenance of the farm and I, as you say, will coordinate.

—Okay, what do we do in the lab?

—I think a good first step would be to get a rough idea of the magnitude of the problem. For this I want you to study all the documentation and give me a historical summary of what has happened here.

—Term?

—Decide between yourselves.

—A week, guys?— Javier asked.

—Yes,— Alexander said.

—I suppose I have to,— Raquel continued.

—I think we'll have to have dinner at some point... Do you mind if we take care of that, Martina?

She nodded. The two left the lab. They agreed that they were too curious to see what their rooms would be like to do anything else first.

They went up the stairs to the top floor. There were two rooms there, only they opened on the opposite side from those on the ground floor, that is, the orchard and the well. They inspected the bottom one first. It was clear that this had been arranged for her.

They passed the remaining one as well, but only took a quick look. They got ready to organize themselves to prepare some dinner.

Chapter 3: Research

Martina appeared through the door again with more vegetables in a basket. Meanwhile, Tony had set up the folding table that was propped up against the sink in front of one of the sofas, and surrounded by two other armchairs, so that there would be room for the five of them to dine.

Without needing to say much, Tony took a frying pan from the cupboard, poured some olive oil into it, and put it on the ceramic hob.

—I think we're going to have to eat a lot of vegetables while we're here.

—Well, yes,— replied Martina, —at least until the hens start laying eggs again... That may take a couple of days.— In any case, there would be an easy solution to fill that gap, but I think it would not make you very happy.

—Which one?

—Insects. Eat what the earth gives, as easy as that. When I finished my degree, I suggested it everywhere I went, but when I saw that it only served to make them call me crazy, I stopped trying. It's a shame, it's a model with a lot of potential.

—I wouldn't back down... But these guys may. We better leave it between us.

»This is getting ready, why don't you go down and tell them?

A while later Martina came back with the three researchers while Tony had finished setting the table. The four of them were arguing.

—Can we sit at the table and talk about whatever it is?— Tony asked. Perhaps moved by hunger more than anything else, they all obeyed.

—What happened?

—A difference of opinion,— Raquel answered.

—Which one?

—Javi is crazy, Alexander is beginning to be too and I don't want this to take a toll on my health.

—You've seen the same as us,— Javi answered. We've barely scratched the surface, but everything we've seen is more than solid.

»I had never seen this in my life. Not that or anything like that.

—Which doesn't prevent it from being correct, does it?

They finished eating almost in silence. At some point in the conversation this was broken when Alexander asked if there was no way to get bread, to which Tony replied that he had seen flour in the cupboard, and that he himself could take care of cooking it in the oven the next day.

—Well, I'm going to my room and tomorrow will be another day,— Raquel said, as she got up with her cutlery, she went to the sink to clean them and then put them in the drainer and finally went out into the hall .

—Not the worst idea— Alexander said, going to do the same.

—Well, no,— Tony also said.

Tony and Martina remained at the table, they slowly collected their share and went up the stairs.

Once upstairs, they said goodnight and each went to their room.

Tony verified what at first could not be believed. Someone had put a thirty—liter wooden barrel and two half—liter jugs or so next to his cupboard. He lifted the lid and realized right away that it was mead, like the one he used to make when he left his parents' house.

He undressed, found a pair of pajamas in the closet, and went with them to the bathroom. He thought that he would take a shower the next day, that for that night it would be enough to wash a little and make sure that hot water came out. And so it was.

He looked at himself in the mirror, he had his medium brown hair more or less well combed and his month—old beard trimmed. He looked for razor blades, but found only barber scissors instead. I won't need them, he thought.

He started to dry up. At 26, he was a healthy 210 pounds for his six—foot height. The last year doing sports had done a lot of good to his physique.

He put on his pajamas, filled one of the jugs with the mead, and calmly settled down to drink it on the edge of her bed.

The next day, the sound of the corral woke him up, a little before dawn. She looked for clothes, showered and went down to the common room. There she prepared a considerable mass of bread to then put it in the oven. He knew that he risked that if it went

wrong he would have wasted a lot of material, but he didn't think that was the case.

That day also looked like it was going to be cold, so he prepared a small fire with the available firewood, lit it with some matches, and pulled up a chair to stay warm while the bread was being prepared.

Before he knew it, all of his companions had already arrived. He took the bread out of the oven and put it on a wooden board to cool slightly.

—We have bread for a while,— he said. I think it would be a good idea to have bread with oil for breakfast.

The others took his advice, thanked him for his effort, and had breakfast by the fire.

—What's the plan for today, Tony?— Javier asked.

—You three to the laboratory and Martina and I on maintenance. I think we can take this as a general outline until there is some important advance.

When dinner time came, things seemed calmer. Still, no one seemed to want to talk about the progress in the lab, so they talked about more mundane topics.

Martina and Tony went up to their floor. She suggested that they hang out in her room for a while, but he told her to put on pajamas and go to his.

She came in a few minutes later wearing pajamas and he was waiting for her in the same way.

—Don't tell anyone,— Tony told her, smiling, and he filled two jugs of mead from the barrel and went to bed with her.

—Is this booze?—

—Yes ma'am. The good one, too. It's mead, must be about 7 degrees, and I'm sure it's the only drinking alcohol in the building. Don't let anyone find out, can I trust you?

—Yes, of course... Tony... I think you haven't been very attentive, but there's a reason why I wanted to be with you Tonight.

—I imagine, but I'm sorry to tell you that it won't be possible... I'm gay,— she said as he took a sip of his drink.

—Really?

—And so seriously.

—Then...?

—No, there is nothing to do.

—Fuck!She hit the bed with her fist.

—Please calm down, that just means we're not going to have anything romantic.— Nor sexual, of course. But not that we can't trust each other... Something more intimate.

She put her mug down and walked out the door.

The next day did not bring anything especially new, only that the relationship between Martina and Tony had become strained. Even so, each of them gave their best so that the others would not notice.

When night came, it was Tony who went to look for Martina in her room. She had the door ajar, so he was limited to speaking to her from outside her.

At last she came out, half sobbing. He hugged her and invited her back into her room. She accepted.

Tony made it very clear that there was no obligation to drink for anyone. She smiled and filled her mug; he smiled back: they were going to like that dynamic.

Chapter 4: Pitfalls

Finally came the day; a week had passed. The researchers invited both Tony and Martina down to the lab.

When the five of them were in front of the computer screens, Javi spoke:

—Fine,— he began. As you already know, this system has all the academic knowledge that we could wish for. But that is not the most interesting. The most interesting by far are these two programs, called “Project I – Eden” and “Project II – OIL—ER”, respectively. We have followed your instructions and have prepared an explanation following a record and avoiding the technical details that, by the way, are overwhelming, in order to make it more understandable.

»As you might expect, the first project is earlier in time than the second. It consists of the design of a genetically new organism, designed to neutralize plastic waste. Apparently it is a team effort, between four people, three of whom refer to themselves with initials (P. D. and F.) and the fourth, refers to himself as Angel. Apparently the project was canceled for

being unethical and potentially dangerous.

—Yes?

Martina had raised her hand.

—Did you manage to get said organism?

—You have it right there,— He answered, pointing to a test tube. It's been there from the beginning.

—Well. As for the second project, it is something much more delicate. Apparently this Angel got separated and started working alone on something more tricky: another designer bacterium, only this time designed to feed on the oil itself as a target, with which Angel thought the root problem would be tackled. Of course we are talking about climate change, destruction of ecosystems, pollution of the oceans...

—Won't you tell me it's here too?— Tony asked.

—That's the best of it all. No, it's not. At least physically. Let me explain: Ángel had everything theorized: plans, calculations, models. Everything. There is nothing to suggest that it would not work, but for whatever reason he did not materialize it.

»And that's why we're here. They have given us a hell of a manual, and now we must make a decision.

—Okay, but there's something that still doesn't add up to me,— answered Tony. —If Angel had it all theorized, what prevented him from materializing his project?

—We were hoping that you could help us on that point,— Raquel said.

—I don't know, maybe they forced him away somehow, maybe we're his plan B, his ace up the sleeve.

—All this has a curious point. This reminds me a lot of the gymkhana that we used to do in the *Juan de la Cierva*.

—You used to do gymkhanas in your high school. Your teachers must have been super nice

—Martina laughed.

—Actually, it was something like my second high school, a program for the gifted of the Community of Madrid.

—What a coincidence! I went to a similar one in Seville.

—Nothing by chance,— Raquel went on, —in the Valencian Community I used to go to one just like it.

Suddenly everyone looked at each other with worried faces.

—So what? Do we put it into practice or not? Javier asked.

—I would say yes, it may be our only alternative.— But now you do have to choose the term.

—Three weeks.

The following days passed quickly. A climate of coexistence and routine had been reached, Martina and Tony continued to deepen their relationship night after night and the researchers spent almost all day in the laboratory.

Three days before the deadline they had set for themselves, Tony was woken up by screams coming from downstairs.

—Don't you realize what this means?— It was Rachel's voice.

—No, neither me nor anyone else, because if you haven't noticed...

—Do you want to lower your voice?— Alexander interrupted them, we are not interested in being heard. Of course they didn't know that Tony was already eavesdropping.

—Let's see, Raquel —Javi continued—, this is totally new. We have achieved it and that is the important thing.

—No, Javi, that's not important, is it that you have calibrated the consequences?

—Can that even be done?

—Okay, what's the worst that can happen?

—I don't know, how about wars, world economic collapse...?

—Okay, what if not?— How much do you think this fucking planet has left? We're nearing the point of no return, for God's sake, you don't have to be an astrophysicist to see it.

—Guys,— Alexander interrupted them again, —it's late and we're tired.— I suggest that

there be a lengthy discussion on the subject when we are all together. For now, I'm going to sleep.

Each entered his room.

Tony waited with infinite patience for at least an hour to pass, then slipped into the lab.

He found what he expected. On the first table, there was a rack with several test tubes containing what seemed to be oil, he took one that seemed to be half digested and put it in his pocket. He went back to his room.

Chapter 5: The Great Debate

The next morning, at breakfast, Javi took the floor to announce that they had achieved their goal, and that they wanted to start a debate on what was the best idea to do with it.

—What is your position?— Javi asked Tony.

—For now I just want to moderate the discussion.

The position of the parties was clear: Javi was convinced that releasing OIL—ER in the environment was the only way to save the planet, Alexander thought, like Martina, that they did not see a human way to make such a drastic decision and with such unpredictable consequences. Raquel straight up thought that they could be talking about anything from environmental terrorism to a government weapon against developing countries but with large oil reserves.

Tony only limited himself to intervening when tempers got too hot.

—Okay,— he said. I think that is enough for today.

—What do you mean, if...?— Martina said.

—I know very well that it is still early. Even so, I propose that each of you meditate in her room —he answered, emphasizing the possessive— on what was discussed here and not meet again until tomorrow.

For granted, Tony spent the rest of the afternoon drinking a lot of mead and tossing and turning without moving from bed, until hhe fell asleep a bit late at night...

Chapter 6: Unilateral decision.

They met again at the breakfast table, with oil and bread from the day before.

They began to eat heartily and soon Tony broke the silence.

—It's fine. I had an idea. I don't know if it will be good but we will find out soon.

»Long before, I proposed that everything that happens in this building is part of a kind of gymkhana, that nothing is accidental. Well, I want us to meditate on who this —Angel— could be. As far as we know, we could be talking about any person or persons using a pseudonym. I want you to remember, have you had some kind of teacher called Angel, especially in the centers for the gifted?

They all shook their heads.

—Wait,— Martina said suddenly. Perhaps we are not talking about Angel as a proper name, but about an angel.

—That goes from the cherub Lucifer to the archangel who sent him to the abyss,— Alexander answered.

—What was his name?— Tony asked.

—Michael.

— He will not be a middle—aged Mexican with a mustache and a little overweight, right? Rachel asked.

Then everyone except Tony burst out laughing. To then be paralyzed by what had just happened.

—It can't be, are you kidding me? Martina said, more scared than anyone else.

—No. let's not panic, —Tony said. No one here is going crazy, okay? We could be facing a simple parlor trick. I went two Saturdays a month, at least, and I didn't always see him. Maybe they were twins or triplets, or maybe actors in character, or maybe the man had the bloody golden Train card, but let's keep calm.

—Okay, Tony,— Javi continued. So what is this? A secret government project? From a shadow organization? How do we know we haven't been used?

—Oh, that. You can be sure that it is. I did, at least.

—What the hell are you saying, Tony?— Martina was still scared.

—It was last night. A drone was hovering over my window. He signaled me with a fairly powerful red laser and then landed by the well.

—You're kidding us,— Alexander said.

—No,— Martina replied. I also saw that light.

There was a moment of silence after which Tony took the word.

—The fact is that I left a test tube that I had stolen from the laboratory the night before where the drone had landed. And this morning it was gone. It's over.

—You're a wretch,— Martina said, almost crying.

—I couldn't risk it, I had to know that it would be too late, that the damage would already be done.

The sound of a propeller cut the silence.

—That's it...? —Rachel said.

—The drone,— Tony answered.

—And what he's wearing is...?

—A gas grenade.

Part II

Chapter 7: Translation

—So suicide thing isn't such a good idea anymore, huh, champ?

—Where...?

—You're in the infirmary, Anthony, and I'm your doctor.

—'m hungry and I don't feel like working, so let's get down to business, if you'd like.

Tony agreed.

—You have... Eight months left on your sentence. It doesn't seem like a big deal, but it still leaves room for doubt. We don't know what the heck you've taken, whatever it is is unusual and therefore doesn't show up in the analytics. I'm not going to work it out too much either, so tell me,

»Were you trying to get out of the way or just get high?

—I don't remember doing either. What day is it?

—You've been in a coma for about month.— But tell me, suicide or drugs?

—Neither one nor the other. Don't think badly of me, they could drug me without me realizing it... To try to rape me. Or poison me to kill me for who knows why.

Does not you believe me?

—I'll be back tomorrow,— the doctor said after taking some notes.

Soon after, a nurse came to change his IV drip. She unbuttoned the top button of her pink polo shirt. Pink, it was the most beautiful color that could exist, she thought. She didn't need more.