

Green Light, Red Light

by Stephen L. Burns

"Anything that improves our security, we should do." Right?

Jools Watkins looked up the circuit diagrams he'd been studying when the door to his quarters opened. There was no knock beforehand, no asking permission to enter. Or, for that matter, way for him to leave.

Special Security Projects Director Thomas Olds stood in the wide doorway, flanked by two hard-faced men in dull blue suits. Both men had their jackets open, and hands on their sidearms. Their eyes were cold and watchful. Like Jools was a danger to anyone.

Jools sighed wearily, raked his short dreadlocks away from his face, and settled back in his chair as the security men entered and took up position on either side of him. The one on his right put his hand on Jools's shoulder in a silent command to remain seated.

Olds entered then. His face, which usually wore the tightly bland, faintly smug look of a functionary whose connections were solid and stock was rising, had taken on a haggard sag over the past two days. His mouth was set in grim determination, and when he stared at Jools hatred showed in his eyes. His suit was brown and nondescript, his tie a darker brown. The only color about him was the enameled metal American flag pin at his lapel.

"I've come to give you one more chance, Watkins," he said, trying to sound friendly and conciliatory, but failing.

"No," Jools replied calmly. "You've come back again looking for one more chance. Sorry. I'm not going to change my mind."

Olds took another step closer, jaw working as he tried to keep control of his anger. "I'm still in charge here. I can move you to some place a lot less comfortable." A hard stare. "I can make you a lot less comfortable."

Jools only shrugged. His quarters were okay, in a cold, impersonal, government-issue sort of way. He had his books, his computer, a passable bed, and a very good coffee maker. He could continue his work. His real work; the work Olds had forced him to put aside in favor of a project for the government. That project was completed. Olds was furious at and terrified by the way the project had worked out. Hence the threats.

Growing up as a skinny, geeky, half Black, half Cambodian kid in one of LA's worst neighborhoods had schooled Jools in how to deal with bullies and gangies. Olds, for all his suit and tie and lapel pin and Yale education, wasn't all that different from the BloodBoyz and Ruby Dragons he'd dodged on the streets. Only Olds was part of a federally funded gang, one that considered the whole USA its 'hood, and its strong arm tactics justified by the Holy Grail of National Security.

Jools shook his head. "That's not gonna happen, no matter what you say or do. You're not operating in a vacuum any more. The Attorney General and the Director of the FBI are watching."

Olds's smile was humorless, pitiless. "I don't see them here in this room, Watkins. It's just you and me. I know you can modify the SafeScan. Do it."

"Not a chance. It does exactly what it's supposed to."

"You know what it does wrong. Modify the signature firmware. Say it was too sensitive. Say the signature was a bit off. Say nothing at all." His voice rose and rang with appeal. "Just do it."

"I won't make it less effective."

"It's not effective, it's _wrong!" _

It was Jools's turn to smile. "Actually, it's perfect."

Olds closed his eyes a moment, mouth pursed tight, then stared at Jools again. "So I can't change your mind."

"Not a chance."

"Very well. Prepare to accept the consequences." His gaze flicked to the men guarding Jools. "Put this traitor on his feet."

They grabbed Jools under the armpits and hauled him to a standing position. Then they kept him in place by tight grips on his thin arms.

Olds unbuttoned his suit coat, reached inside. Withdrew an automatic pistol. Jools felt a chill, and the hands on his arms clamped tighter.

Olds worked the gun's action, chambering a round.

"Uh, sir," the suit on Jools's left said uncertainly.

Olds ignored him. Satisfied that the weapon was loaded, he looked Jools straight in the eye. "Last chance. Will you modify the SafeScan?"

"Olds, you can't just -- "

"_Will you?" _

Jools licked his lips, took a deep breath and prepared to reply, knowing that his life hung on his answer.

* * *

Two days earlier, he and Dr. Edie Blake, his partner in developing the SafeScan, were to demonstrate it before some heavy hitters from Washington. Olds had ordered them to wait in a small room two floors up from their lab space, giving the brass time to get settled in and briefed. The room's only amenities were two hard chairs and a carafe of lukewarm coffee.

Jools didn't so much pace as wander aimlessly -- and continuously -- around the room. Worries about how the SafeScan would perform weren't making him restless, he had absolute faith in what they'd built. His main concern was that after this demonstration he and Edie would finally be allowed to go back to the work which had gotten them dragged into the world of top secret, hush-hush, government-funded R&D.

Edie, who had worked with Jools as medical consultant for the past seven years had gotten shanghaied at the same time and wanted out just as badly. Over the nine months they had been "guests" of the government, her case of grandchild withdrawal had reached nearly epic proportions.

"Think this will really be our ticket home?" she asked as she brought Jools a refill of his coffee. This was the second refill, and the third time she'd asked that question in the last hour.

Jools smiled down at her and took the cup she offered. While he topped six and a half feet tall, she was barely five feet even. They made a great if mismatched team: him tall and rail-thin, skin the color of tarnished copper, dreadlocked; and her short, white, round, and old enough to be his mother. "It should be. It damn well ought to be."

"I know the SafeScan won't let us down, but I'm not so sure about Olds," she grouched. "That man's nucking futs."

Jools laughed. "You've got to quit using those fancy clinical terms, Edie." He gave her a significant look. "Maybe we'll get some pudding out of this gig."

She nodded, showing that she knew what he meant by this odd turn of phrase. "I sure think we've earned some dessert. Could be tricky, though -- "

The door opened, and Sgt. Sandra Zubin, a juicy brunette who acted as one of the

project aides, stepped inside. She had a clipboard clutched to a chest which had drawn Jools's wistful gaze many times. "They're ready for you, guys."

"Then I guess we better be ready for them," Jools said, throwing Zubin a wink before putting down his coffee cup and taking Edie by the arm. "Come on, sugar. We're on."

"Yeah," she grumbled. "Dog and pony time."

They had never been told where they were, exactly, or seen much of the massive windowless building which housed their and the other projects under Olds's control. Their lives and their movements had been tightly circumscribed and compartmentalized. The floor where the demonstration was to take place was the closest to new scenery they'd seen for months.

Zubin led them down an aggressively nondescript corridor to a set of wooden double doors guarded by soldiers. These guards stepped aside, allowing them to enter.

They found themselves in a room almost long and high-ceilinged enough for a basketball game. The government officials waited for them at a long oak table just to their right. Opposite the table on the far side, just left of center, stood the SafeScan. To its left was a door guarded by a man in a blue suit. The right side of the room was home to a small cubicle walled off floor to ceiling with thick bullet-proof glass, a red light over the door. Beyond that was a larger roped-off area with a green carpet on the floor and over three dozen folding chairs. A green light marked the entrance to that area.

Jools turned his attention to their audience. Olds was there, of course. This was his show. He'd been the one who dragged the two of them into the program, structured the demonstration which would soon commence, invited the others who shared the table with him. Those invitations had been strictly A-List. Jools recognized every face at the table.

Olds began his pitch, clearly in his glory sharing a table with so much juice. "As you know, in my capacity as Special Security Projects Director I have several programs underway, some so secret even I don't know about them." He paused for laughter, and was rewarded with one or two polite chuckles.

"This is Mr. Jools Watkins, and his assistant, Dr. Edie Blake. For the past several months they have been working on a very special device. One which will make our lands and skies a much safer place in the future. Mr. Watkins, please begin."

"Sure," Jools said. It didn't escape his notice that the introductions only went one way. Not that it mattered. The people up there with Olds would be recognizable to any halfway well-informed citizen.

Sitting on Olds's right, and casually dressed in jeans and a denim shirt, was U.S. Attorney General Stella Luvadis, the tough and plain-spoken former State DA and judge from Montana. Sitting next to her was a balding, mousy man who looked more like some rumped, absent-minded math professor than one of the nation's top lawmen, FBI Director Morton Stone. On the other side of Olds was the only black at the table, FAA Safety Czar Nate Freeman. He too was dressed casually in slacks, shirt, and FAA windbreaker. Beside him slouched the blue-suited, portly figure of famous -- and to many, infamous -- White House insider Senator Howard Little.

Olds had ordered Jools to begin the demonstration by giving a brief talk about himself and how the SafeScan had come into being. As if otherwise he might have started off with a puppet show and maybe a short bit of kung-fu breakdancing.

"Okay, as I'm sure you've already been told, I'm an inventor. I design, build, and patent non-invasive sensing and testing devices for use by the medical profession. This lovely lady is my second in command and medical consultant, Dr. Edie Blake. One of my most recent projects was an attempt to come up with a scanning device capable of detecting

and diagnosing the sort of neurological disorders which at present are generally found through second-hand means, and only after fairly severe symptoms have begun to appear. The disorder which led me in this direction is schizophrenia. With that disorder, the earlier it is diagnosed and treatment begun, the better the sufferer's chances at leading a normal life."

No glazed eyes yet, so he continued on. "Toward that end, I created HoBACT, the Holographic Brain Activity Composite Tomograph, a sort of super 3D EEG." He shaped a sphere with his hands. "Neural activity in the brain can be thought of as a sort of three-dimensional matrix in which there are established pathways, detours, shortcuts and dead-ends. It might help to think of it as a city. Were you to observe it at night from above, you could easily see which roads and sections are busy, which are nearly dark and idle. You could see how the traffic moves, and from that extrapolate how the city works. To image brain activity, HoBACT uses hundreds of exquisitely sensitive opposed sensors to take a new kind of 3D snapshot of this activity. Then using special software and a high-speed processor, that snapshot is compared to a database of normal snapshots we call signatures, the differences -- if any -- isolated and compared to a second database of predetermined pathologies. This is kind of like the way your computer's virus checker works. Some day, when this activity composite is better understood, decoding these signatures may lead to more targeted cures."

Senator Little had begun fidgeting during this part of Jools's explanation. Now he interrupted. "That's all just fine and dandy," he drawled. "But how's it lead to a security device?"

"To understand that, you need to understand how both sets of signatures were created. Dr. Blake and I tested over a thousand volunteers, some chosen because they suffered from already diagnosed conditions. For instance, once we'd tested a handful of verified schizophrenics, we had a signature which would allow the computer to identify a similar signature in an undiagnosed subject. The same for Parkinson's, and Alzheimer's. Rigorous conventional testing of the subjects afterward allowed us to verify the positives, some of whom had no known symptoms up to that point. That same testing allowed us to build up a library of signatures which could be considered normal. Over time we built up quite a catalog of maladies which HoBACT could identify."

Senator Little looked unimpressed -- and like most of that had gone right past him. "Again, that's just dandy. I still don't see how you-all got to the point where you could build something _useful_."

Jools and Edie exchanged a glance, her lips silently forming the word _boob_. When he looked back toward the table he saw that both Attorney General Luvadis and FAA Safety Czar Freeman were eyeing Little like an ill-behaved chimp at a tea party.

"HoBACT will be _extremely_ useful as a diagnostic tool, Senator," Jools answered patiently. "It was only in the course of pinning down the signature for OCD that we accidentally strayed onto the track which led to the development of the SafeScan."

Olds opened his mouth, but AG Luvadis spoke first. "OCD is Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, right Doctor Watkins?"

"Yes ma'am -- though I'm just barely a mister. Edie -- Dr. Blake -- has enough degrees for both of us. Anyway, we thought we had OCD pretty well nailed down until a certain subject came along."

"_Eldridge Elias Petty_," Olds put in quickly, as if not wanting to let Luvadis beat him to the punch again. The others at the table all nodded in recognition of the name.

"Yes, though when we tested him we only knew him as Subject K-75. We were

running the testing on two tracks at this point. One track was the testing of subjects with known, well-verified conditions. The other track was blind. By that I mean we had no idea if we were going to find any sort of disorder. When we tested Petty, the readings revealed a distinctly abnormal signature which was in some ways similar to OCD, and yet in others quite different."

Freeman nodded in understanding. "This was a pattern you hadn't seen before, right?"

"Yes sir. Dr. Blake is a certified specialist in, among other things, clinical psychiatry. She conducted tests and interviews with Petty. He exhibited none of the classical physical manifestations of OCD, nor any other particular pathology, although there were indications which pointed to either very slight -- or very well hidden -- sociopathic tendencies. We might never have figured out what those readings meant if he hadn't attacked one of the other volunteers."

Olds weighed in again before Jools could continue, no doubt to keep everyone aware that this was his show. "One of the other subjects was a young woman. When she showed up looking sick one day, a third subject asked her what was wrong. The woman admitted that just the day before she'd undergone an abortion." His distaste for the term and procedure was more than clear.

"Yes, she had," Jools agreed in a far kinder tone. "It turned out that she had been raped on three separate occasions by her building's super, and he was systematically terrorizing her to keep quiet. While she never dared go to the police, she did assert her right to choose not to carry the pregnancy created by this rapist to term. Petty heard her admit to the abortion, and went -- "

"Apeshit," Edie supplied with a grin, getting a laugh from everyone but Olds.

"My learned colleague is correct. Petty attacked the woman, screaming at her that she was a murderer and beating her quite severely before staff and some of the other volunteers were able to intervene. Some of you already know what happened next. The police came and arrested Petty. When his fingerprints were run, they matched evidence collected at the scene of five different bombings. Bombings of family planning clinics. Bombings which killed seven and wounded over two dozen others."

"Acts which were committed across state lines," FBI Director Stone said. "We helped Ms. Luvadis build the case against him. Stella informed me that her office was going to, and I quote, 'Squash him like a shitbug in a pair of vicegrips.'"

"Actually," Luvadis said demurely, "I decided not to go that easy on the little bastard."

This by-play had caused Olds to scowl. "We are straying from the subject here. It turns out that they had not isolated some variant of OCD, but stumbled on something else entirely."

A pause for dramatic effect, then the big announcement. "What we have in the SafeScan is a way to detect and identify fanatics."

That got everyone's attention. The hijackings and plane crashes of 9/11, the anthrax spread in its wake, the bombings and hostage-takings in the four and a half years since; all were the work of fanatics, most of whom had remained unsuspected until they commenced their murderous work.

"You can really spot fanatics?" Stone asked Jools, both hope and disbelief in his voice.

"Yes," Jools answered. "As easily as someone trying to pass through a metal detector carrying an anvil."

"So you what, contacted the government?"

Jools allowed a bit of his anger and resentment to show. "Yeah, right. Somehow my private communications with some colleagues about how such a thing could be possible ended up in government hands. My contact with the government began when Olds here turned up with a platoon of soldiers and kidnapped Edie and myself."

"You were not _kidnapped._" Olds snapped.

Jools spread his hands. "Well, you haven't sent a note to my mother demanding money for my return. Yet, anyway -- though with any more big corporate giveaways you may have to. Since then we've been kept incommunicado, and surrounded by armed guards. We are not here voluntarily. If I'd been asked nicely, I'd have gladly built the SafeScan. Instead we were given no choice in the matter."

"National Security doesn't leave _any_ of us much choice," Olds shot back, clearly furious that Jools had dared air his discontent in public.

"Mr. Watkins, Dr. Blake," AG Luvadis said, her expression sympathetic and her tone placating. "My office has received more than a few complaints that Mr. Olds's tactics have all too often been rather..." A brief glance in his direction. "_Heavy-handed_." There are voices calling for stricter oversight, mine among them. I have noted your complaints, and I promise you they will be addressed. Still, we have reached a day when you have a device to show us. One which we are told may do much to increase the safety of our citizens. I for one hope that it may also ease some curtailments of rights and privacy enacted by those who give our status as a nation at war greater weight than our status as a democracy with a Bill of Rights and certain protections."

"So do we," Jools said, bowing in her direction, a gesture she acknowledged with a small smile and nod.

Olds let out a theatrical sigh. "Have we heard enough bleeding-heart stuff? Good." He pointed at the guarded door on the far left side, thirty or so feet beyond the SafeScan. "The test subjects, fifty of them, will enter through though that doorway. All will be led to and through the scanner. Those it flags as dangerous will be placed in the smaller red-marked high security holding area. Those who pass the test will go into the green area beyond. The identity and sex of each subject will be concealed. Are you ready to begin, Mr. Watkins? Or must we endure more whining?"

"We're ready." Jools and Edie made their way over to the SafeScan. Jools spoke softly, for her ears alone: "It's going well so far, don't you think?"

She snorted. "No threats of a firing squad, anyway."

The SafeScan wasn't much to look at, just a plain metal and plastic arch about as high and wide as a standard doorway. It didn't look all that different from a walk-through metal detector.

Jools turned back to face those at the table. "The SafeScan is completely self-contained, with the sensors, processors and signature firmware built inside. All it needs to run is ordinary house current -- and less than 500 watts at that. Which means portable, rechargeable models would be easy to construct."

"Excuse me, Mr. Watkins," Freeman from the FAA called. "How hard is this device to operate and maintain? Is it something airport security personnel can cope with?"

"Maintenance consists of keeping it plugged in. As for use, you see that there are three big LEDs on the side of the scanner. The amber is lit now, showing that it's ready. The green light is an all-clear. The red light is an indicator that a fanatic has tried to pass through. If that happens, the light flashes and a warning buzzer sounds. In real-world applications it might be better to use a silent alarm to security."

Freeman nodded, pleased by what he was hearing. "That sounds easy enough. How

long does this whole process take?"

"Only a second. Here, I'll show you." Jools went around and walked through the arch at a normal pace. The green light came on, stayed lit for several seconds, faded. "Not only is it bi-directional, it's fast enough to handle a lot of people moving through it at a pretty good clip." He turned and speed-walked back through. Once again the green light lit and faded.

"If by chance someone does go through too quickly for the test to be completed, it will let you know." He gathered himself, then ran through as fast as he could. This time the amber light flashed, and a chime sounded.

"That's fantastic," Freeman breathed. "Utterly fan-damn-tastic."

Edie drew herself up. "We, sir, prefer the term _spiffy_."

He beamed at her. "I'd say it's _way_ spiffy, ma'am."

"Dr. Blake and I will show you the sequence of operations, step by step. Edie?"

"Sure." She approached the arch, halting just before entering.

"A proximity sensor registers her approach, taking the device off standby. It goes to standby if unused for more than ten minutes, in order to increase the life of its components. Warmup takes less than a second. Now as she enters the arch -- " Edie took a step forward. " -- the sensors begin to scan her, a dedicated chip adjusting for her changing position inside the sensor field." Almost as soon as she entered, the light flashed green.

"The scan goes to the processor which matches it against the signature for a fanatic. If a match does occur, a second scan is instantaneously run to confirm the first. Two positives set off the warning. As you can see, she passes. She may be crazy about her grandchildren, but she's not a fanatic."

That earned Jools a laugh from everybody but Olds.

Senator Little leaned forward, lips twisted into a conspiratorial grin. "I don't suppose that thing could be made to sniff out Democrats, Liberals, and commie types?"

"I'm afraid not," Jools replied, smiling back. "Though fine-tuning the signature for sociopathy might help identify some of the real heavy-duty flat-Earth Conservatives."

"Hell," Luvadis murmured, "That's easy. Just mention gun control, welfare, or the UN and watch for mouth foam."

Olds glared first at Luvadis, then Jools. "If we can dispense with these pathetic attempts at humor, we can begin. Would that suit you, Mr. Watkins?"

He shrugged. "Hey, we've been ready all along."

"Very well." Olds gave a nod to the armed guard standing by the far door. "Have them bring in the test subjects."

Jools wasn't sure what to expect. Olds had set up this part of the demonstration. All he and Edie knew was what Olds had said earlier: that the sex and identity of each subject would be concealed, and since there were some genuinely dangerous people mixed in with the rest, they would all be manacled and guarded.

He took a step back in horrified surprise at his first glimpse of the sorry parade which began coming through the doorway. Beside him Edie gasped, then hissed, "What _is_ this shit?"

Each of the test subjects was covered all the way down to their ankles by a heavy canvas sack. Leg-irons with only a handspan of chain between them were locked around the ankles of each, forcing them to move with a slow, uncertain, shuffling gait made even more tentative by each being effectively blind. Each was escorted by a soldier who guided and controlled their charge by grasping one canvas-covered upper arm. In each of the

soldiers' free hands was a pistol.

Stella Luvadis was the first to speak up, her voice ringing like a hammer on steel. "Mister Olds! You had better explain the meaning of this sick performance."

Olds met her gaze, looking genuinely puzzled. "This is supposed to be a blind test, Ms. Luvadis. Some of the people in that group have committed acts of terrorism. I have no intention of letting any of them get loose."

"Yes, but -- "

At that moment one of the shrouded figures lost its balance, staggering sideways with a wail and falling heavily. In an instant the soldier guarding that prisoner had his weapon pointed at the rounded knob at the top of the sack, and bellowed, "On your feet! NOW!"

"Don't ... hurt me!" The voice was muffled, shrill with fear. "I'm just ... a volunteer!"

Jools and Edie acted as one, both going to the person on the floor. Edie dropped to her knees beside the supine form. Jools got right in the face of the soldier. "Back off," he growled. "Now."

The soldier stared back, lips peeling back from his teeth. "You back off, sir. Both of you." The person inside the canvas sack huffed and gasped, clearly hyperventilating.

"Tell this guy to back off!" Jools yelled at Olds, gaze still locked with that of the soldier.

No answer from Olds.

"Stop this!" Stella Luvadis demanded. "Make him stand down!"

"One more warning, sir," the soldier said. "Step back."

Edie had dug around in her pocket and pulled out her pen knife. She flicked the blade open with a practiced motion, then brought the blade down toward the canvas so she could cut a hole and free the prisoner's face.

When the soldier saw what she was doing, he swung his gun to point at Edie's head. "Drop the weapon! NOW!"

Edie stared back up at him, her round face determined. "Don't be an idiot. This person needs air, and right now."

"Olds!" Luvadis's voice was sharp enough to make even the soldier blink. "Stop this shit this instant!"

"Stand down," he said tonelessly a few seconds later.

The soldier stared at Edie a moment longer, and after one final glare in Jools's direction, raised his weapon so it was pointed at the ceiling and stepped back.

Jools knelt beside Edie, and together they carefully worked a hole in the canvas, widened it, exposing the pale, frightened looking face of a young man with red hair and beard.

"You're okay, son," Edie said soothingly as she and Jools cut more of the canvas away. Soon his whole head and chest were exposed. Stuck to the front of his shirt where a name-tag would go was a large green label reading CLARK DAVIES/VOLUNTEER.

Jools read it aloud, then turned back toward the table. "Nice going, Olds," he said, his voice thick with sarcasm. "You almost got an innocent civilian shot, and you let a gun point at Edie."

Olds stared back, cold and unrepentant. "Take that subject out of line and begin testing."

"Did you hear what he just said?" Luvadis demanded.

"I heard."

"And?"

"And nothing. It was my intention for this test to be conducted in the most secure

manner possible."

"What just happened doesn't _disturb_ you?"

"The fact that someone was able to smuggle a bladed weapon in here is what disturbs me."

Eddie had just helped Davies sit up. "I didn't smuggle anything in here, you pompous dickhead," she growled over her shoulder. "I've carried it every day I've been here, and for years before you dragged me to this goddamn place." She nudged Jools. "Help me get this guy up."

Together they helped Davies to his feet, then steadied him as they walked him over to a seat in the green area.

"Somebody get that bag and those cuffs off that poor bastard," Nate Freeman said, glaring at the soldier who had been in charge of Davies. "Then we better either get this misbegotten test run, and fast, or pull the plug and get those frigging sacks off before someone suffocates."

"Agreed," Luvadis said. "Mr. Watkins, Dr. Blake. Could you please run the subjects through the SafeScan without further delay? And once they have gone through and are in their proper area, I want no delay in their guards freeing them from those bags."

"Taking charge, Stella?" Olds's voice was soft, but the menacing edge in it was unmistakable.

Jools got a very good look at the "Steel Montanan" Stella Luvadis who had faced down every inquisitor and detractor at her confirmation hearings the year before. Outcry over the excesses of her predecessor had led to his recall, and another ultra-right wing candidate was not going to make the cut. A life-long independent put up as a compromise candidate by moderates on both sides, but who did not have full party backing from either, it was her implacable and unshakable dignity, self-possession, and integrity which had gotten her through.

"I was brought here to witness the demonstration of a device which would, I was told, help increase the security of our citizens. Instead I've been treated to the sort of cruel, ugly, demeaning, ill-conceived spectacle worthy of some amoral fringe group. This loathsome display must be concluded, Mr. Olds, and concluded now. Any more delay, or threats of violence, and my office will assist every subject involved, terrorist or not, with bringing every charge and lawsuit I can think of against you and your program."

Jools didn't wait for Olds to respond. He turned back to the ragged line of prisoners snaking out the door. "Please begin leading these people to the archway. Dr. Blake will call out the determination as to whether they go to the green or red section. Once you have them in that section, release them from those damn bags, and get the hand and leg cuffs off the volunteers."

The lead soldier gave Jools the ghost of a nod, then raised his voice. "Detail, please follow Mr. Watkins's orders. Take them through fast, but easy. Let's move." Then he began shepherding his prisoner to and through the arch.

"Green," Eddie called.

Jools nodded to the next soldier. "Okay, your turn."

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The test subjects were herded through the SafeScan at least as quickly as they could have gone through an airport metal detector. By the time the last one had passed through, nine had been sequestered inside the section walled off with bulletproof glass. Forty-one, including Davies, were now unguarded, unbagged, and unmanacled in the green area.

The name and record of each identified as a fanatic were read off as their bags were removed. Among the nine were four convicted members of various terrorist cells, all of whom had committed acts of violence. The SafeScan had also red-flagged a glaring, heavily tattooed skinhead who had killed three black women and two Pakistani boys, a man who had set fire to several gay bars, a man who had molested and killed five children, a Muslim immigrant responsible for the hit and run beating of over thirty unveiled women, and a woman who had poisoned nearly two hundred dogs.

Jools recognized a few of the people in the green area who wore tags reading VOLUNTEER as staff members from Olds's program. From the expressions on their faces he guessed that most had been as much volunteers as he and Edie.

"There you have it," Olds said, sounding extremely pleased with himself. "You may have qualms about the way I chose to demonstrate the SafeScan, but you must agree that the results speak for themselves."

Nate Freeman was the first to speak up. "I've got to admit I'm impressed," he said. "Were we to check not only all airline passengers, but all staff, and use it to control access to baggage areas and airfields, we could cut the threat of hijackings and bombings way the hell back."

"Precisely," Olds agreed. "SafeScan could be used to screen access to government and public buildings, and to the areas around embassies and military bases, both here and on foreign soil. People attending events where the President or other high-ranking officials were to appear could also be checked."

"There's got to be a downside," Senator Little opined gloomily. "Everything these egghead types come up with has one. Usually it's price. So what's the deal, Watkins? They're gonna cost a million bucks apiece or something, right?"

Jools shook his head. "I've only run a rough cost analysis," he replied, trying to keep from responding to Little's snide tone and slur. "I estimate that the first units will run somewhere around seventy to eighty thousand dollars each. Once the component parts and the device itself goes into mass production, and barring it becoming some overpriced pork barrel project, the price should drop to somewhere between ten and twenty thousand each."

"Huh. How does that compare to metal detectors? Is it more?"

"No," Nate Freeman answered. "It's less. Plus metal detectors are fussy damn things, either too sensitive or not sensitive enough."

"Sensitivity isn't an issue with the SafeScan," Jools explained. "While the pattern for fanaticism isn't exactly the same in everyone, it does have certain markers unseen in other pathologies. Certain pathways are missing -- one of them may even be the conscience -- and others are overdeveloped and follow aberrant routes. We have a base of fanatic signatures, and I believe our model can identify all variants."

"Can it throw false positives?" FBI Director Stone asked.

"It hasn't so far, and we've tested it on all sorts of people. A devout nun or priest won't set it off. Nor will a golf nut, computer gamer, or sex or gambling addict. Only someone whose belief in something is so strong that all other moral or ethical considerations mean nothing will fit the signature." A hard look at Olds. "Either someone is a fanatic, or they're not."

Olds stared back, first scowling, then his eyes widening as he understood Jools's veiled accusation.

Nate Freeman stood up and bowed in Jools's and Edie's direction. "I know you folks were dragged into developing this thing, and for that I apologize. But you've created one

hell of a tool here, one that can help make the world a lot safer. There may not be a Nobel Prize for Public Safety, but there sure as hell ought to be."

"Thanks, sir," Jools replied. Beside him Edie grinned.

The whole time Olds had been staring fixedly at Jools, then the SafeScan. He tore his gaze away, licked his lips. "Now you can see why I felt it necessary to not let the niceties get in the way of the SafeScan's development."

AG Luvadis shook her head. "Civil rights aren't _niceties_."

Freeman looked from Luvadis to Olds, then back toward Jools. "Whatever the case, we owe you an enormous debt of gratitude. Your machine is the answer to a prayer."

Jools smiled back, then launched the offensive he and Edie had discussed in those rare moments when they were sure no one was listening in. "Thanks. Want to give it a try?"

"Sure. Why not?"

The FAA man made his way around from behind the table and approached the SafeScan, his steps slowing and halting just before stepping inside the arch. "Will I feel anything?"

"Not a thing," Jools assured him.

"That's right," Edie agreed. "The dizziness, impotence, and inability to pronounce the word 'garage' will pass in seconds."

"I'm sure glad to hear that." He strode through the arch, his broad shoulders hunching ever so slightly as the unseen fields read him.

"You get a green light, Mr. Freeman," Edie announced.

Freeman chuckled. "That's good. Wouldn't want to get barred from the places my job takes me. Though to tell you the truth, a bit of a break would be nice."

"Anyone else?" Jools said, asking the room at large but looking straight at Stella Luvadis. She stared back, then her eyes widened slightly and she smiled.

"I believe we should _all_ try it," she said as she stood.

Morton Stone looked up at her a moment, then got to his feet. "Come on, gentlemen. Don't let Stella show everyone that she's got more balls than we do -- though she probably does, anyway."

Luvadis went through the SafeScan wearing an odd half-smile, as if daring the device to finger her. It didn't. Stone walked through like a tourist, craning his neck to examine the underside of the arch on his way through. Senator Little went through more cautiously, each step placed as if he was walking on hot coals. In each case the red light remained dark.

That left only one person who had not passed through the SafeScan. Luvadis faced the table and put her hands on her hips. "Well, Olds, you're the only virgin left."

He gave her a tight smile. "Thanks, I'll pass."

"What's the matter? Chicken?"

"I've already been through."

Jools shook his head. "No you haven't."

Olds's mouth tightened. "Certainly I have."

"Bullshit," Edie announced. "I've seen every test result this thing has ever given. You've never been through it. Probably never thought you would ever _have_ to go through it. Guys like you just assume you'll never have to put up with the same security squeeze the rest of us suffer."

"Even if you have been through," Luvadis said softly, the voice of sweet reason. "Then why not go through it again?"

Olds only shook his head.

"Come on," she continued. "What's the problem? Too lazy to get up and walk all the way over here?" Her gaze sharpened, and her mild tone turned flat and hard. "Or have you figured it out?"

"Figured _what_ out?" Senator Little demanded in an aggrieved tone, looking from one to the other.

"That the SafeScan would pick him out as a fanatic."

Luvadis's accusation hung in the air, waiting for some answer. Stone watched Olds with bemused interest. Freeman crossed his arms and waited impassively. Senator Little looked confused.

"Please," Olds said at last with a false heartiness. "This demonstration is over. You all have places to go and people to report to. I trust you will testify to how well this program has succeeded."

"I'm in no particular hurry," Nate Freeman said. He turned toward FBI Director Stone. "How about you, Mort?"

"I've got time. And I do find it odd that Mr. Olds is refusing to subject himself to a technology he himself had a hand in developing. A technology he expects us to push. What do you think, Senator?"

Little shook his head and held up his hands, refusing to take a position or even get involved.

Stone didn't seem surprised by Little's inaction. He gazed thoughtfully in Olds's direction, sighed. "In times like these my bureau has to guard against the traps of expediency and overzealousness. Because even in times of war there are lines which should not be crossed. And there are people more inclined to cross those lines than others, people whose dedication or patriotism has become something unhealthy and all-consuming. I went through Mr. Watkins's device without a problem, but I have to wonder if old J. Edgar could have. I too have heard many things about you and your methods, Mr. Olds. I tended to discount them as the usual nay-saying and backbiting. But having seen you in action, I have to wonder if perhaps you have lost sight of those lines which we in office have a duty to observe."

"I am a patriot," Olds said coldly.

"Oh, I have no doubt of that. Timothy McVeigh was one as well. So tell me, sir, are you afraid to prove that you are one of us, not -- " He pointed to the slumped, glowering figures behind the bulletproof glass. " -- one of _them_."

"These accusations are ridiculous. I refuse to respond to them."

"No," Luvadis said. "Your resistance to subjecting yourself to a test designed to keep this country safe is ridiculous."

Olds appealed to Senator Little. "Please, Senator. Can't you do something about this nonsense?"

Freeman never gave the man a chance to answer. "If the good Senator doesn't report to the White House that the head of this project steadfastly refused to undergo a test designed to weed out those dangerous to society, then I will. And I'll make damn sure the President understands that the Senator omitted that bit of information in his report."

"As will I," Stone agreed.

"Got a good fix on the way the wind is blowing, Howard?" Luvadis asked, one eyebrow raised in inquiry.

Little nodded glumly. "Go through the fucking scanner, Thomas. Not doing it is going to look bad. I got you this job. I won't have you making me look bad."

Olds stared at his former ally, shoulders slumping as he realized that he'd just been left to twist in the wind. Then he squared his shoulders up again and forced a smile, one bereft of humor or pleasure. "Very well. Let's get this stupidity out of the way. Some of us have real work to do."

He stood up and slowly made his way around from behind the table. When he approached the SafeScan his back was straight, his jaw set, his eyes hooded.

"Right through here, sir," Edie said sweetly.

Olds ignored her and marched into the SafeScan.

The red light flashed and the alarm bell sounded almost instantaneously.

* * *

Failing the test was not a sentence; no mechanism had yet been created for dealing with those who failed. All Luvadis and Stone could do was warn Olds that they were watching, and that it was likely his tenure as Special Security Projects Director was nearing an end. Little slunk off in a hurry, probably to polish up his deniability.

Less than an hour after the last of the witnesses to the demonstration left, Olds confined Jools and Edie to their respective quarters. In the two days since, he'd made several visits to Jools, each time demanding that the SafeScan's warning signatures be changed so that he and others like him would not trigger the device.

At first this latest visit had been much like the others, different only in the amount of time Olds had left with the theoretical leverage to get those changes made.

But when he pulled out a gun, his demands and Jools's refusal to meet them became something else altogether.

Olds had chambered a round, face stiff and still.

"Sir," the blue-suited security man on Jools's left said uncertainly.

Olds ignored him. Satisfied that the weapon was loaded, he looked Jools straight in the eye. "Last chance. Will you modify the SafeScan?"

"Olds, you can't just -- "

"_Will you?_"

Jools licked his lips, took a deep breath.

"No," he said softly.

Olds pointed the gun at Jools's forehead. "America _needs_ me. America needs people _like_ me."

"Mostly to clean up the messes people like you caused in the first place," Jools answered quietly. "There's always a crash when madmen are allowed to drive."

"I'm not _crazy_. I'm someone who loves this country, and gives his all for her benefit. You're the one who's crazy, refusing to back down."

Jools shook his head. "I got a green light. I'm a man of principle, not a fanatic. There's a big difference."

Olds flicked the gun's safety off. "Back down. Don't make me do this."

"I can't."

The barrel of the gun was just inches from Jools's forehead. Olds's voice rose to a wail. "_You're killing America!_"

Jools closed his eyes. He knew he should be feeling afraid, but only felt numb. SafeScan would save lives, and save them in a way the man who had forced him to develop it had never foreseen or intended. It would not be changed.

"_You're killing my country!_" Olds screamed one last time, this declaration followed by a single gunshot.

Jools jumped at the shot and flinched when blood splattered his face. He opened his

eyes in time to see Olds crumple and fall to the floor. He sighed and wiped his face on his sleeve.

"And saving mine," he said.

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