

DEVLIN'S DESCENT



ROGER
DALE
TREXLER

© 2009 Roger Dale Trexler.
All rights reserved.

**Chapter 24:
“God Says No”**

The men at the bottom of the ventilation shaft were no match for Devlin and Daniel. The Little Man had not given them the headsets that blocked Devlin's mental powers. *Why?* Well, to Devlin, the answer to that was obvious — The Little Man wanted the final battle to be his. Still, he had left guards at the bottom of the shaft. He didn't want to make Devlin's descent into his lair too easy, did he?

So, when Devlin arrived at the penultimate level, he peered down and saw the shadows of two men, both armed, guarding the ventilation shaft. There was a small grid; similar in design to the one he had pried open topside, covering the vent. That gave way to some sort of air conditioning unit that was close, but not exactly attached, to the vent. It was a strange construction, but Devlin wasted no time thinking about it. He had more important things to think about.

He waited until the men moved away from the vent, then slid down the ten or so feet.

Daniel followed, but stayed out of the light.

"I can't go in there alone," he whispered.

Devlin nodded. He understood. The brilliant light confused the dead. Daniel was able to circumvent that by existing within a host. He knew what had to be done.

"Get inside me," he told his son. "Hurry."

The men were coming back.

It took only a second for Daniel to crawl inside his brain. Then, the men were upon him and Devlin saw that they did not have headsets.

Less than a minute later, both men lay dead on the floor.

Collateral damage, Devlin thought. *They were just in the wrong spot at the wrong time, working for the wrong asshole.* Still,

he felt an iota of remorse for them. It lasted only a moment, however, then he used the tire tool to pry open the vent cover.

He stepped into The Little Man's world.

It had been months since he had stood in the brilliant lights of The Little Man's underground complex, but it seemed like only yesterday. In a way, it was a familiar, easy feeling. He felt at home there.

But, he didn't brood in it long. There was too much to do.

He headed through the room that circulated air throughout the complex. It was a large room, and the machinery purred with a mechanical perfection that belied its years. For, Devlin could tell that the system was ancient. Probably World War II or earlier. There were modifications throughout the system but, basically, it was the same system that had been installed when the underground lab was created.

For that, Devlin was thankful. He knew everything mechanical and electrical that was needed to fuel the underground lab lay within this room. He followed the machine that circulated air until it ended. Another machine began beyond it; its use unknown to Devlin.

He turned and ran to his right. He heard a "pop" and fell to the ground as a bullet whizzed by his ear.

He turned and saw three men, each of them dressed in white uniforms coming toward him in the light. All three men wore the headsets that The Little Man had created to block Devlin's mind powers. *The Little Man must have changed his mind*, Devlin thought.

Devlin got to his hands and knees and scurried into the machinery. He didn't stop until he was well beyond the men.

Then, he sat and listened.

He heard the sounds of footsteps coming toward him and he dug the tire tool out of his belt loop again. He shrank back into a little alcove in the machinery and held his breath as one of the men walked by. *Good*, he thought. *They've split up. Di-*

vide and conquer.

He stepped out of his hiding place and brought the tire tool down on the man's head. He did no damage to the man; that was not his intent. He did, however, destroy the headset that he wore. Sparks flew from the apparatus as the man turned, his gun at the ready.

Devlin wasted no time. He reached into the man's mind and found the ugliness that lay within. As usual, it wasn't hard to find.

The man screamed.

His compatriots came running, and that was all Devlin needed. When they rounded the corner, Devlin made their partner shoot them. Then, he made the man put the pistol in his mouth and pull the trigger. His body slumped to the floor, and Devlin walked out of his alcove and took the weapon. He placed it in his pocket, using it as a holster. He hung the tire tool back in his belt loop and went on his way.

The electrical junction box was far more modern than Devlin would have thought. It was enclosed in a caged area, and Devlin used the tire tool yet again to pry the lock off. The wire mesh door swung open, and Devlin stood before the only thing that kept the underground lab from becoming an asylum.

"You sure you want to do this?" Daniel asked.

Devlin nodded as he took a step closer to the electrical box. "Yes," he said, "the dead need to be set free."

"Okay," Daniel said. "But don't say I didn't warn you."

Devlin didn't take note of the boy's cryptic remark. Instead, he took the tire tool out of his belt and stuck it behind one of the metal conduits that ran out of the fuse box. He grabbed the handle with both hands and pried.

For a second, nothing happened. Then, ever so slightly at first, Devlin began to move the conduit.

He released his grip, got a better bite on the conduit, then pried again.

Seconds later, sparks began to fly as he ripped the wires from the circuit breakers they were connected to.

He pried harder and tore the conduit from the wall. He put the tire tool back in his belt and grabbed the conduit. He jerked it as hard as he could.

More sparks flew.

And the lights went out.

Seconds later, emergency lighting came on as a claxon sounded. The room took on an eerie glow in the diminished light, and Devlin saw the ghosts of electrical engineers as they moved about the room.

They turned and looked at him.

“Go home,” he said. “You’re free.”

But, even as he said it, he saw the thing coming out of the darkness toward them. It, too, had a ghost aura about it, but there was something horribly, horribly evil about it.

Devlin realized what it was.

Death.

Comic books and movies had always caricatured Death as a hooded figure with a scythe. It was nothing of the sort. Devlin felt a chill run down his spine as he watched the thing. It looked like something the Egyptian’s had created statues of — a man-like body with the head of a dog. Its snout opened wide as it grabbed one of the ghosts and literally sucked it down into itself. It let out a howl as it consumed the soul of the long-dead technician, then turned and looked at Devlin.

Devlin saw its mouth widen into a grin. “Thank you,” it said in a voice that sounded like breaking glass. “I’ve waited sooooo long for these souls.”

Then, it chased down another and consumed it in the same fashion as the first.

The thing slapped its stomach and belched gleefully. Then, it disappeared into the catacombs of the room.

“We’ve got to go,” Daniel said nervously. Devlin looked at his side. The boy had slid out of him while he’d watched Death take the souls of the dead. Devlin realized at that moment that Daniel was one of the dead, and that Death would be coming for him soon.

“All right,” Devlin replied.

They ran toward the door and exited through it.

The emergency lighting was mixed with the red claxon lights to make the hallway a pinkish mélange. Devlin saw the dead souls walking up and down the halls, most of them disoriented and confused by their newfound sentience. They had been trapped so long in the brilliant light that they knew nothing else.

Behind Devlin, the Egyptian tomb god emerged. He grabbed the closest spirit to him and consumed it. The others ran, but Devlin knew it would catch them soon enough. It headed off in the opposite direction, chasing its prey.

Devlin looked down at Daniel. "This way," he said.

They moved through the hallways unimpeded. If there were other employees of The Little Man still residing within the complex, they were elsewhere at the moment. That made sense to Devlin. The Little Man and he were going to have their confrontation. There was no stopping it now. It was a party that no one else was invited to.

But, first, Devlin had to make one stop.

And it was a stop he dreaded far more than his confrontation with The Little Man.

Devlin guided Daniel through the hallways. Once in a while, they would glimpse the Egyptian tomb god as it crossed in front or behind them in a hallway that ran perpendicular to the one they traveled. He was always preceded by the dead; running for their lives, so to speak.

They came to a room that Devlin was far too familiar with. It was the room where he had had sex with Emily, a room where the military types watched as people were tortured to death by The Little Man.

Devlin paused outside the door. He felt warmth on his hand, and looked down. Daniel was holding his hand. "It's all right, Daddy," he said. "You can do this."

Devlin smiled and nodded at the child.

Then, he opened the door.

It was darker inside than the hallway, but Devlin could make out the shape of his wife, Caroline, on a surgical gurney.

He cringed as she said: "Patrick?"

Her voice was weak.

"Yes," he said.

He walked into the room and paused ten feet from her. She was covered in a thin sheet up to her breast. He midsection was coated in blood; a coppery smell filled the room.

"Caroline?"

She reached out her hand and Devlin walked to her, took it. Her hand was cold.

They looked at one another a moment, then Devlin lifted the sheet and saw what lay beneath.

He gasped.

Caroline began to cry. "I fucked up," she said.

"Yes," Devlin nodded. "You should have kept your pants pulled up while I was at work," he told her. It was something he had wanted to tell her for a long, long time. He had even envisioned the moment, giving Caroline her comeuppance. But, now, now that he stood in front of her, the words came out hollow. He still *felt* their meaning, but time had softened their delivery.

He had loved her, but that love was gone now.

Now, he felt only pity for her.

Caroline cried harder. "I'm dying, Devlin," she said, half pleading. "Help me."

He thought about it a moment, but the moment was cut short by the appearance of a man. Or, rather, the ghost of a man standing in the doorway. Devlin didn't need to be told who he was — the resemblance to The Little Man was uncanny. The ghost was Malcomb Carlsrud.

Devlin let him speak first. "He's waiting for you," Carlsrud said as he stepped into the room. "My grandson is waiting on you, and you must stop him."

"Where is he?"

"In the arena," Carlsrud said.

Devlin nodded. *The arena*. The place where he kept all his genetic monsters. It seemed a fitting place to put an end to things. Devlin had killed the beast in the tunnel with a tire

iron, but he doubted he could get that lucky again. Still, he would have to try. And, if he died in the process, at least he died with his boots on.

He looked back up at Carlsrud and saw the Egyptian tomb god standing behind him. Carlsrud saw the look in Devlin's eyes and said: "Don't worry, it won't hurt.... much."

Then, he turned to the tomb god. The thing smiled. "I've waited a long time for you," it said. "I'm going to savor this moment."

"Whatever," Carlsrud replied. "Just get to it, would you?"

The thing let out a laugh that sent shivers down Devlin's spine. It was like nails scraping across a chalkboard. "As you wish," it said. "As you wish." It grabbed Carlsrud by the shoulders and slammed its mouth down onto his head. Carlsrud screamed out, but it only lasted a second. Then, his head was inside the Egyptian tomb god's throat and his body was being pushed inside like an anaconda sucked down its prey. The god reared back. Carlsrud's legs hung in the air a moment, then he slid inside.

It left its snout in the air, its eyes closed, relishing the moment. There was a look of ecstasy on its face. "So long," it said. "I've waited so long." It turned and looked at Devlin. It smiled. "Thank you," it said.

Then, the beast turned its eyes on Daniel. "You're an odd one," it said as it stepped forward. "A spirit born of his mind." It looked at Devlin. "But, then, there are so many strange things that have gone on here over the years. It doesn't surprise me." It stepped forward another step. "I will enjoy consuming you as well."

Devlin stepped in front of the child. "You can't have him," he said.

The Egyptian tomb god cackled with laughter. "You think you can stop *me*?" It said. "I was here when the Earth began, and I will be here when it is a dying ember in space. I am eternal.... that's why they worshipped me."

"I need him," Devlin told the monster.

The beast opened its mouth. "Ah, The Little Man?"

"Yes."

"You will kill him if I let the boy survive?"

"Yes," Devlin said.

"Then the boy may go with you," it said. "But do not think that the child will not be mine. I am the keeper of spirits, and he belongs to me."

Devlin looked down at Daniel. Daniel said, "I'm not afraid, Daddy."

"I am, son," Devlin replied. "I'm afraid of being alone in this world."

"You won't be," Daniel said. "I will always be a part of you."

Devlin turned back to the beast and was startled to find that it was standing in front of him. Its hot breath blew on him; it smelled like decay. "Then we have a deal?" it asked. "I let the boy survive until you bring me the spirit of The Little Man?"

"Yes," Devlin replied, "We have a deal."

"Excellent," the Egyptian tomb god said. "The spirits of the conceited and the murderous are the most tasteful.... and The Little Man will be delicious."

It cackled with laughter.

Behind them, Caroline groaned. "Devlin?"

The Egyptian tomb god pointed its finger at Caroline. "That one," it said. "She is almost ready for me. Death will be a blessing for her."

Devlin walked to her side. This was something he had never really planned on. Caroline had betrayed him but, now that he stood over her dying body, he had nothing but pity for her. She had made this bed for them both. Devlin would lament her for the rest of his days, but there was a hollow triumph for him in the fact that she dying without her lover by her side. He wondered if he would have been there had he not killed him; the thought brought him more than an iota of pleasure.

Still, she had been his wife. Try as he might to wish that

away, he couldn't. He had married her, made love to her, and hoped for a future together.

All that was gone now.

And she was dying.

He took her hand into his. Neither of them said a word; they just looked into each other's eyes. There was no need for words. What had passed had passed. This was the present, their now, and try as either of them might, there was nothing that could change the past.

"I loved you," Devlin told her.

A tear rolled down her cheek. She sobbed. Her entire body shook as she cried; and, try as he might, Devlin cried, too.

Death watched and said nothing.

A massive fit of pain ran through Caroline and she screamed out. Devlin held her hand tighter.

"In my hand," Caroline said. "Take it."

She gasped one more time, then died.

Death walked up to her.

Devlin reached out and touched him. He was cold, so very cold. "Be gentle with her," Devlin told him.

"She would not wish the same for you," Death replied.

"You don't know that."

"Perhaps," replied Death.

"Be gentle to her, anyway," Devlin said. "I loved her."

Death nodded. "As you wish," he said. Then, he bent down over Caroline and placed his mouth mere inches from hers. Devlin heard the beast begin to suck and a mist rose from Caroline's body.

Her soul.

Devlin thought he heard her voice saying, "I'm sorry, Devlin," but he couldn't be sure of it. He hoped that was what he had heard.

Death drew back and licked his lips. "She was sweet," he told Devlin. "So very sweet."

"She was my wife," Devlin replied.

The beast looked at Devlin and Daniel. "Go now," it said.

“And remember our agreement—you kill The Little Man.” It grinned wide. “I will look forward to consuming his soul.”

“And I’ll look forward to you doing that,” Devlin replied. He turned and looked at Daniel, then back at the monster. “You’ll be gentle to him when the time comes?” Devlin asked.

The monster nodded. “His soul is of little interest to me,” it said. “But, The Little Man,” it snickered and it sounded like broken glass scraping together, “I will take my time with him.”

Devlin stood there a moment and regarded the dead husk of the woman he had once loved. It seemed like a dream to him now, their time together. Now, there was only the realization that she was dead and he still had a task to do.

He bent and kissed her forehead. “Rest in peace,” he whispered.

He turned and started toward the door.

“Aren’t you forgetting something?” Death asked.

Devlin turned. The thing had moved from one side of the surgical gurney to the other in the space of a heartbeat. It reached out and drew Caroline’s left hand from under the sheet. Her fingers were closed but the monster opened them.

Two vials of Green Pus fell onto her bloody stomach.

“She saved these for you,” Death told him. “Perhaps there was still some love in her heart after all?”

Devlin didn’t reply. He walked to the gurney and took the vials off her stomach. From the color of the liquid inside, he could tell that it was undiluted. He looked down into Caroline’s face one last time.

“Maybe,” Devlin said.

Death let out a chuckle, then said: “Take pride, Devlin. Without love, death can be meaningless.” It grinned again, then headed toward the door. “Take pride in the fact that you knew love in this life.”

Devlin stood over Caroline.

“The Little Man meant one of those vials for her,” Daniel

said. "You know that, don't you?"

Devlin nodded. "Yes."

He looked down at her again. She had suffered in death so that he could kill The Little Man. Perhaps, he thought, there had been some love for him in her heart still yet?

He wondered.... but he knew that he would never know. Not on this plane of existence, at least.

Caroline was dead.

He bent forward and kissed her temple again. "Goodbye, my love," he said.

Then, he turned and walked away, leaving the dead husk of his wife behind him and his destiny with The Little Man just ahead.