

Flight to Insanity

By Michael Schlickman

“It’s a shame they had to kill him,” Keith stated solemnly.

“Why?” Gerry asked. “He outlived his usefulness.”

“Who’s to say we couldn’t have done more tests on him? The wings were just an addition to his body, not anything that would have made him react differently to other procedures.”

I shook my head. These two were always arguing about what should happen to our patients, even if neither of them would have any say anyways. I could never tell which of them was more inhumane though. Gerry wanted all the patients put down when we didn’t need them anymore to save resources. Keith just wanted to keep testing on them. Both options seemed sick to me, but the government paid us well, and I didn’t have much longer on the island, so I did my job anyways.

“Quit it,” I told them. “What’s done is done, no sense in arguing over it.”

“This one is gone, yes, but what about when we run out of patients? You know how Pedersen is, he’ll start picking people that are the least useful here,” Keith protested.

“Don’t worry, we’ll throw you a going away party before you get tested,” Gerry jested.

“We won’t be tested on. And if we do, we’ll probably keep our jobs and our lives. Our experiments have been mostly successful lately,” I told them. They both gave me looks that told me I’m being naive, but I didn’t care.

The patient that was put down was done so by Pedersen’s command. Pedersen was the chief science officer here, put in place by some government official years ago. He convinced the government to give him an uncharted island with a new facility—and plenty of funding—to

conduct his sick experiments on. Any poor soul to find their way to the island was subjected to experimentation. Sure, it was said to be a good cause, but these experiments were sick.

My last patient, the one put down that morning, had arrived in a plane. It was a small one, just large enough for him and some cargo. He had a co-pilot, but he didn't make it through the crash. The plane ended up in the trees, and the co-pilot was impaled by a branch.

There was some new testing going on at the facility, we were messing around with synthetic limbs. Since this man came in on a plane, someone decided it was appropriate to try the new synthetics. So we gave him wings. Big ones, black like a raven's. They were beautiful, and they worked well. He could move them like they were always a part of him, and he could even fly. I always wanted wings like that, and with that success, I thought it might be possible for me to have them some day. Pedersen thought them dangerous, though, so he had my patient exterminated. No one expected those wings to be used so effectively as weapons though. We lost three of our security staff to those feathered additions we made.

That experiment was a complete success, and the patient was even happy with the results. That was a rare occurrence. I was proud to say that my team was the one to do it. But watching my creation get killed seemed to spark something in me. I didn't want to continue. I always wanted a job as a scientist, one that would help people. The government made it sound like that was how my job would be, but it was very different. Now that I'd finally helped someone in some way, they were put down like an animal. That wasn't what I'd wanted.

"Dr. Edgar Ness, please report to Dr. Pedersen's office."

It was the intercom that called for me. I gave quick nod to Gerry and Keith before leaving the break room. It was only a little ways down the hall before I came to a door with 'Dr. Andrew Pedersen' printed onto its glass panel. I knocked out of courtesy before entering.

“Dr. Ness, have a seat.”

I sat. Pedersen was a queer sort of man. He was slim, old, and cunning. He loved his books, and did a lot of research. That much is expected of a C.S.O. However, he was a disturbed man. He had visions of an altered being. He wanted to combine animals and humans to create the perfect being. This man wanted to play God, and he was getting away with it. I wouldn't say that to his face though. The last person to do so was tested on, and didn't make it. Though I suppose that wouldn't matter for me in the long run, anyways.

“Congratulations on that last experiment, Edgar. It went very well.”

“Thank you, but I take it you didn't call me here simply for congratulations? You seem to have something on your mind.”

His stare was cold.

“No, I suppose not. Your experiment didn't only remove a few security guards from our facility. He took a few test subjects out as well.”

“How many do we have left?”

“Not many, and that is all you need to know for the time being. I have discussed the incident with some advisors, and we have come up with a solution to that problem, though it is temporary.”

I wasn't sure I liked where this was going. “And that solution is?”

“Do you remember that experiment from a few months back? Where parts of the human brain were removed and replaced, changing the hormone production and balance in the body?”

“Yes, I believe so. They were trying to reduce the sensitivity of the patients so that they could think more clearly in otherwise emotional situations. Though I'm unsure of how it relates.”

“Another team has perfected—or come close to perfecting—that procedure. We have decided to have them perform it on some of our personnel. We want you to be the first.”

A thousand things went through my head at once, but only one thought came out of my mouth.

“No,” I said firmly.

“What?” He didn’t seem that surprised.

“I won’t do it.”

He sighed. “I was afraid you’d say that. But, you don’t really get a choice in the matter.”

“So you’re going to try to force me?”

“No. You’re going to volunteer.”

“I think you’re mistaken. I said I won’t do it.”

“And I said you will. If you don’t, we will use your team for experiments in Section 14.”

As irritating as Keith and Gerry got, they were my only friends on the island. I couldn’t let them get taken to Section 14. That was where the worst experiments were. Most patients die in agony there, and the few survivors wish that they hadn’t lived.

“Fine. I’ll do it.”

“I’m glad you came to your senses. The procedure will take place tomorrow morning. That is all for now.”

I walked back to my office in a state of defeat. Keith was right, we are going to be tested on. And I’m first. Wonderful.

I had my team come to my office later that day to inform them of the situation. I left out the threat Pedersen had made. Gerry told me the procedure would probably do me some good. He thought I was too sensitive. Keith thought very differently on the matter.

“You have to get out of here,” he told me. “Who knows what they’ll actually do to you.”

“I can’t,” I muttered. “I have to do it.”

“No you don’t. You can just leave. Get out while you can. Make a raft and leave the island.”

I sighed. How could I explain to them that I couldn’t leave without telling them about the threat? I couldn’t think of a way to.

“Pedersen made a threat. If I don’t agree to this, he’s going to do worse things to more than just me. That’s all I can tell you.”

It wasn’t long before I ended up telling them exactly what was threatened. They understood after that. We made our farewells, just in case. We were the smallest team in the facility, but we were among the best. They wouldn’t really take that much of a risk with us, right? They couldn’t. Pedersen said that the procedure was nearly perfected by now, so it might not be that bad.

Although it was Pedersen that said it, and we all knew how deceitful he was.

The following morning, I woke rather abruptly. Guards were ushering me to get ready for the operation. They wouldn’t permit me any food, which was protocol for subjects about to be tested on. I wasn’t up for an hour by the time they put me under.

I woke in a room that was not my own. I had the typical patient apparel on, which was fine. The only things in the room were my bed, a fluid stand, and a heart monitor. The entire room was white, as was most of the facility. There were no windows, and the door was steel painted to match the walls. That was what caught my attention.

I took the IV out of my arm and went to the door. It was locked, but I could hear voices outside. I didn’t recognize either of them.

“Wait, so he’s from a team upstairs? What’s he doing here?” the first voice inquired.

“Yeah. I guess Pedersen had him sent down here. He must have been causing some serious issues to be sent here.”

“For sure. You think he’s up yet?”

“Only one way to find out.”

The door opened before I could get back to the bed. They were startled to find me standing there by the door, but neither called out.

I knew where I was as soon as I saw them. They had the standard grey uniforms of the lower levels, with a small patch on their chest to indicate their section. Theirs was a an image of a syringe, and a 14 in the middle of it.

“Well hello there,” the one said.

“Why am I here?” I demanded. I didn’t sound as intimidating as I’d intended to.

“Well,” the other started, “I was hoping you could tell us that.”

“I was told I was being operated on to help me think clearer during operations.”

“Did they actually say that?”

“Well...no. But they implied it. They told me the procedure they were going to perform. But after they put me under, I woke up here.”

They exchanged a look. “So a test gone wrong, or did they lie?”

I thought it was a rhetorical question, but I answered anyways.

“Well from what I heard, they’re lying to one of us.”

They shrugged.

“No matter,” the one said. “You’re for our uses now either way.”

With that, they turned and left. Of course, they locked the door behind them. Someone brought me food twice a day, just sliding it on a tray through a slot in the door. They wouldn't speak to me. I was left entirely to myself, and eventually I started to talk to myself. I would daydream, and then have complete discussions with myself about the dreams. I decided I was okay like this after a while. I made good company for myself, it seemed. It had been weeks, based on the meals, before my door opened again.

"The less you fight, the easier this will be," the officer said. There were three security guards with him, each wearing the white uniform and armor that was customary for facility security. They escorted me to the Section 14 operation room. The operation room wasn't really used for operations much. Instead, they often modified blood or created serums, injecting it into their patients to study the effects. In my case, it was blood. They had my blood type from my file, so they didn't need to take any previously.

I was stripped nearly naked before they strapped my arms and legs down to the operating table. The metal was cold, but I didn't mind. My room was hot, so it was a nice change. The doctor was wearing the same grey uniforms that the two people I'd initially encountered had worn. He grabbed a jar off of a shelf—which was among several other jars filled with various substances and organs—and sucked some of the liquid into a syringe. The needle wasn't too big, so it didn't hurt much going into my arm. A small pinch and it was over.

For a moment, nothing happened. I just stared at the ceiling, wondering what was put into me. I didn't really care too much, I was just a little curious. I figured I was as good as dead either way.

The first sensation to start was a burning feeling. At first it was very slight, but it started to grow and spread. Down my legs, up my arms, into my head. It was everywhere soon enough.

It intensified, but I wouldn't give them the satisfaction of hearing me scream. After the burning, which must have lasted for several minutes, I felt cold. I don't know what they put in me, but it was messing with my nervous system for sure.

It was about an hour of switching between hot and cold before I felt normal again. The doctor was silent up until that point.

"Have you felt anything unusual?" he asked. I think he could tell I felt normal again. I nodded.

"Anything in particular?"

"Burning. And cold. Not at the same time though."

"Interesting." He scribbled something onto a notepad while muttering to himself. "Hot and cold sensations, hair loss." Then he filled another syringe with another liquid, and injected it into me. This gave more immediate effects.

My body seemed to be tearing itself apart, and this time, I did scream. I couldn't tell what it was doing to me, but whatever it was wasn't pleasant. The doctor continued to watch and scribble on his little pad. He almost seemed amused. I hated him for it, and I decided I'd get him back for it somehow.

I don't know how long that lasted, but I was thrilled when it finally ended. Thrilled and exhausted. That's when I noticed my feet were rubbing up against the bindings that held me down. I must have shifted upward. That or I got smaller. What were they doing to me?

"Alright, take him back to his room. I'm done with him for the time being," the doctor told the guards.

They untied me, which was their last mistake. I had a sudden rush of energy hit me, and a sudden urge to survive. I grabbed a guard's taser and put him to the ground with it. The other

three came at me, but I was faster. They were all down in a matter of seconds. I was never a fighter, how was I so good at it now?

I flung the doctor onto the table and strapped him down. I took a random substance off the shelf, filled one of the used syringes with it, and put it all into his neck. He started to scream, and I left.

I took down another guard in the hallway and stole his armor. They wouldn't suspect me as much in that. I went all the way upstairs by my old office. It was given to someone else, as were Gerry's and Keith's offices. I wondered what happened to them, but I would have to find out later. I was on a mission.

Dr. Pedersen's office was the same room still. I entered, but he wasn't present. The closet across the room was a suitable hiding place I thought. It was there that I waited for him.

While I waited, I daydreamed. I imagined a world without these people, this place. I imagined being on the island alone. I thought I could be happier that way, so I decided to act on it. Everyone else would have to go away, one way or another.

Finally, he came. But he wasn't alone. He was talking to someone. Their voice sounded familiar. I peeked through the opening under the door and recognized both of the people in the room with him. One was Gerry, and one was one of the people from Section 14.

"He's being tested on as we speak," the one from Section 14 said.

"And you know how their tests are," Gerry said. "He won't make it through them alive."

"And we still have the details of his last experiment, those should be helpful later on.

Very good," Dr. Pedersen replied. "You both will be rewarded for this. And I trust your friend was taken care of?"

“Who, Keith?” Gerry asked. “He was never my friend. But yeah, he’s been removed. He took a little trip into the forest and never came back.”

Pedersen laughed. “So he’s MIA and Ness is as good as dead. Job well done. I will call for you both to be promoted by the end of the week.”

I couldn’t take it anymore. I came out of the closet, taser in hand. They all looked a little surprised to see a security guard in the closet, but I think they realized pretty quick that I wasn’t really a security guard at all. They couldn’t recognize me because of the mask, but they don’t typically hire people as small as me.

The Section 14 employee was the first to bolt to the door, but I was faster. He dropped to the ground after the taser was jabbed into his stomach. Gerry tried to fight me, but that didn’t last very long. He was on the ground pretty quickly as well. Pedersen just stared at me.

“What did I do to deserve *this*?” I demanded as I tore off the mask that security often wore. Only then did he recognize who I was.

“You weren’t useful anymore. You would have better uses as a test subject.” He always seemed to stay calm, but I could see now that his hands were shaking slightly. He was inching towards his desk.

“You saw my last experiment. I could’ve done much more, had you kept me. Now, that opportunity is gone.” In an instant, I was standing over him behind his desk. He was reaching for a button to signal security, but he never got to it. He didn’t have the chance to grab the gun in his desk, either. But I did.

“It’s not too late!” he insisted.

“It was too late when you sent me to Section 14.”

One shot was all it took to put the old man down. It was no surprise that security showed up a moment later. The gun wasn't exactly quiet. I can't really remember what happened next, but a while later, I found myself sitting in a back room. It was a large room with a few iron gates. There was one desk, and solid steel doors behind that. This was the area you went to if you wanted to speak with or take a test subject. The steel doors were what I went to next. Behind them was a small elevator.

I started to take the bodies of my previous colleagues and put them into the elevator. Only a few would fit in there at a time, and not easily. It took several trips up and down to get them all down there. Of course, I couldn't put the ones who wronged me down there. I locked their bodies in cells. Gerry and the Section 14 employee were left in cells up here. Pedersen had the privilege of being laid to rest in my Section 14 cell, the very one he gave to me. The rest were put into the cafeteria. Down there, it was dark. Dark and quiet. It was perfect, really. Everyone I collaborated with was here. All my friends, now. We're friends in silence. And I have some new additions, too.

It's been a long time since I was damned to Section 14. I lost count of the days long ago. I was learning to enjoy it here, though. Just me and my quiet little friends, having conversations with each other. Well, I suppose I do most of the talking.

I made a few new friends, recently. Six, to be exact. I don't know where they came from, but they are all with my other friends now. Only one is still talking, he hasn't fully joined the rest yet. It's only a matter of time.

Or, maybe I shouldn't let him go with them yet. I could make him like me. With wings. Perhaps I will.

Or perhaps I will have him help me to get wings of my own.

After all, we should never give up on our dreams, should we?