

MUTANT JEAN

AGENTS OF DISRUPT

BOOK THREE

TOM WOOD

© Tom Wood 2019

All rights reserved

Tricksters Media Publishing

agentsofdisrupt.com

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

for all the dreamers in the world

IN A FUTURE SO BRIGHT

Aycee is an artificial super-intelligence who manages Big City from the cloud.

FEAR is the villainous syndicate who is always cooking up a cockeyed scheme to take over the world.

Only DISRUPT stands in their way.

Originally called the Department Involving Secret Really Unusual Powerful Technologies, nobody could come up with a better name so it stuck.

The Agents of DISRUPT are a special breed who are always on the lookout for new talent who can help save the world.

Which brings us to:

A BIRD-SHAPED AIRSHIP HOVERS in the evening sky above the neon-drenched skyscrapers of Big City. Gigantic holograms of fish, dragons and ballerinas move through the spaces between the buildings. Huge jumbotrons advertise everything a heart could desire. Riches, power, freedom! And everywhere, advertisements for The Games of Life.

The tops of the super high-rises of downtown try to touch the clouds. The tallest of all is FEAR Tower. Bright red, it is capped by a hologram of flaming red letters that spell its name.

Fifty blocks away from the center of downtown, a twenty-something woman and a tween-age boy look down from a landing pad that is nearly a hundred stories above the street below. The landing pad is attached to the side of a skyscraper. The woman and boy stand across from the opening to a three-car-wide garage door that cuts a dark rectangle into the side of the building. Several sleek jetpods crowd the landing pad.

The street at ground level cuts a swath through the dense city landscape to create a sixty-block long skyway through the skyscrapers. The two observers watch as two groups of flying jetbikes race toward each other from each end of the urban canyon.

The boy says, "Jean, what happens when they meet?" He has an eerily calm demeanor and wears a gray jumpsuit with black sneakers. His facial features are finely rendered, as if carved by a master sculptor.

"Watch closer Trace, this part of the gamespace is called the in-flight fight. You have to tap your mind into the game program to see the virtual overlay." Jean wears a matching gray and black outfit, speaks with the same calm demeanor, and is modeled by the same talented sculptor.

Their calmness is interrupted when the crowd of partiers on a balcony nearby bursts into cheers as the two teams of flying jetbikes approach each other. Dressed in evening finery, they are several steps up the social ladder.

Jean looks at the partiers, at the expensive jetpods parked nearby on the landing pad where she and Trace stand, then at her own beat-up jetbike out near the edge, and finally down to her plain gray jumpsuit.

Trace mindnets, *You're feeling bad again. Don't feel bad.*

Jean nets, *Just wait. When we win the game we'll be there on the balcony instead of here by the garage.*

Trace concentrates on the two teams of flying jetbikes. *I can see it now. They're wearing ancient armor, yes?*

Jean turns her attention to the gamespace. The scene shifts within her mind's eye, and now she's looking down into a giant hallway lined with stone walls in the place where the buildings actually stand. It's the virtuality of the game. The game players who ride the flying jetbikes wear virtual holograms of armored suits. They all hold virtual lances that point at the oncoming team. Each jetbike has an overlay of a virtual running horse. It's a group joust.

Jean nets, *Now see if you can put yourself into the mind of one of the players. See what they see and feel.*

Trace closes his eyes, and for a brief moment he's inside the mind of one of the players. He sees out through the eye-holes of the armored suit as if he's the one wearing it. He can feel the loping motion of the jetbike as it mimics the gallop of a horse.

A man's voice says, "Sorry that took so long, I don't usually keep cash handy."

The world snaps back to reality, and it's just Trace and Jean on the landing pad. One of the partiers walks out from the darkness of the garage. He wears fine clothes and is the epitome of high society, except that his skin is slowly turning blue.

Jean says, "Sorry to be specific about that, but I don't want these transactions on the record. You understand."

Blue man hands her a packet of paper credits. "Back alley mutations. From a B-K no less. I can see how that would go over with the authorities."

Trace scowls and walks toward the other end of the landing pad.

Jean feels his hurt, then says to blue man, "It's hardly back alley. I designed the mutations myself. The effect will last twenty-four hours and then take about five to fade away. Be sure to give each guest their matching vial." She indicates with her head toward the group of partiers on the balcony. "Each vial is DNA matched to the hair samples you gave me, so it won't work if you mix them up."

He looks at his blue hands. "What other party favors do you sell?"

"If you want something more permanent, like elf-ears or cat-eyes, you have to come down to my shop. Those take a few days."

"Are they reversible too?"

"That's up to the customer."

Several screams of laughter burst out from the partiers. Jean notices a rainbow of not-seen-in-nature skin colors wash through them. "It looks like you did well."

Blue man looks across the airspace that separates the landing pad from the party balcony. He focuses in on one woman in particular who is now also bright blue. "So did you my friend, so did you. But, life calls. Have a good evening."

He turns away and goes back inside the darkness of his garage. After a few seconds, the door that separates the garage from the apartment clicks shut.

Jean says, "Rich people, always looking for some new thrill."

Trace turns around and walks toward her. "Will we be rich? When we win the games?"

"Not like this rich, but we'll be a lot better off than we are now. You ready?"

Trace stops a short distance away from her. "He called us B-K. Will it always be like this? Getting called out?"

Compassion washes over Jean's face as she moves toward Trace and takes him in her arms. "I'm sorry. Some people are just jerks."

Trace is distraught. "We're always going to be different, aren't we? B-Ks. Brad-Kims. Mutants. Clones."

The partiers let out another set of laughing screams as they react to their changing skin colors.

Jean says, "Being different is what everybody wants. They even pay good money to get it."

Trace shakes his head. "Not like this. I didn't choose this. It won't go away in the morning."

He buries his face in Jean's jumpsuit below her sternum and quietly cries.

Jean places a hand on his head and waits for the moment to pass.

The bird-shaped airship slowly circles overhead.

The clouds part to let the full moon shine through.

The neon jumbotrons flicker.

The partiers party on.

Trace takes in a deep breath and lets it out.

Jean pats his head. "Feel better little brother?"

He nods into the fabric of her jumpsuit. Then a muffled, "You can't tell the guys I cried on my big sister."

She smiles. "Your secret is safe with me."

He pulls away and looks up at her with a sheepish smile as he wipes away the last of his tears. "It was just, it made me mad."

"He's an idiot. Sometimes they don't realize what they are saying. I want to get us to a place where they can't hurt us anymore. That's what winning the games is all about. But first, we need to get moving. We've got someone to meet at the pre-games. Maybe they're our ticket."

Trace looks over at their beat-up jetbike. It's orange and bulky with a jetpack on each side and plenty of rust everywhere. "You sure we can win with that?"

"It'll have to do. It's just for the pre-game qualifier. If we get teamed up, we move way up to the new tech." She indicates with a hand toward the urban canyon where the flying jetbikes were competing earlier.

Trace walks over to their old jetbike. It sticks out in sharp contrast to the sleek silver jetpods nearby. "Can I fly it from here?"

Jean is encouraged by that as she walks toward him. "You sure you can wrangle that dinosaur?"

"Yeah." He climbs into the front portion of the seat. "It just needs taming."

Jean climbs on behind him. *Use your mind like we practiced. See the city in two ways — as it is in reality and as it is in its connections.*

I know, I know. Trace grabs the handlebars and closes his eyes. What he sees is all black for just an instant. Then the city reappears in his mind's eye. But instead of the physical walls, streets and rooftops, what he 'sees' are all the linked devices that are connected to the internet of things. Because the devices are distributed throughout every building, they create a network that is shaped like the urban landscape itself. Each type of network is a different color. Red for security, blue for mechanical systems controls, green for communications, and a host of other colors. All intertwined to eventually give shape to the buildings and streets.

Trace keeps his eyes closed. *I could drive this way, the networks are so bright.*

Jean closes her eyes and also 'sees' the networks. *You could, but we'll be competing in a space that is network deficient, so you still need to see the real world.*

They open their eyes and see both the real buildings and the network of devices mapped on top. Without moving a finger, Trace uses his mind to start the jetbike. It bellows a cloud of smoke as it roars to life. When the rusty orange jetbike lifts off the landing pad, Trace gets a mischievous look on his face as a plan springs to mind.

To Jean's dismay, they slowly glide backward through the air like the jetbike is out of control. "Careful!"

The bottom of the jetbike scrapes across the roof of one of the sleek jetpods, leaving a distinct scratch.

They both look down at the damage.

Trace says, "Oops."

Jean groks to his intent. "Bad boy, Trace. I like it, but bad boy."

"You ain't seen nothing yet. Hold on."

He points the jetbike toward the party balcony and aims it at the airspace just above their heads. Using his mind, he guns the jetbike into full throttle.

Blue man leans in for a kiss with blue woman just as the orange jetbike rockets over their heads.

All the partiers are stunned as a smelly cloud of smoke descends on them all.

Trace and Jean disappear into the city lights.