

CHILDREN OF APIS

BOOK 2: Territories Clash



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ELLIOT *(Northeast Territory)*

THE CROWD IS standing in the parking lot behind the headquarters building, nervously awaiting the so-called public trial to start. The trials have turned out to be a weekly occurrence over the past month. It's hard to believe the year 2085 is almost half over. We've already seen a full year's worth of bloodshed, and it's only the 20th of June. Here we are standing on a warm Wednesday afternoon, waiting for General Taggart to emerge onto the platform. I try to appear calm, but my heart is already racing, and a cold sweat is beginning to break out. Being the long-time head of communications on General Taggart's staff should provide me with a sense of security, but the man has a way of making everyone edgy. Finally, the door opens, and the general steps out, followed by five prisoners sandwiched between two guards. The

prisoners are shackled together by their ankles, which forces them to drag their feet as they slowly amble forward. The guards herd the prisoners, so they form a line facing the crowd. The murmurs in the crowd slowly die off until a palpable silence descends over the parking lot. General Taggart confidently walks up to the front of the platform to address the audience. For a sixty-year-old man he's in great shape. His chiseled features, coupled with his intense stare, demand the rapt attention of everyone in attendance.

"You all know the reason that you have been assembled here this afternoon. A cancer has wormed its way into a small percentage of our population. The only way for our community to flourish is to excise the tumor at its source. The prisoners standing before you today possess information vital to uncovering the whereabouts of this cancer. I will once again attempt to obtain information concerning the resistance group contaminating our community. Each of these prisoners will have an opportunity to walk off this platform a free man in exchange for the information they possess. Hopefully, this will be the last time you have to witness this event."

As if on cue, the rear door opens, and another guard emerges carrying the glass container of pills. A small table on wheels is standing to the left of the general, and it is here the guard places the bowl. The bowl primarily contains Apis pills, but there's a rumor going around that it also holds pills containing poison. General Taggart pushes the table across the platform and positions it in front of the first prisoner in the line.

"You have been charged with conduct detrimental to this community. You have been found guilty of assisting a rebel group which has plans to

undermine the longstanding laws of this territory. The compassion of this territory's leadership once again provides you an opportunity to make amends. Do you accept the olive branch provided, or will you continue to be obstinate?"

The first prisoner continues to stare defiantly ahead as he reaches into the bowl to acquire his pill. All eyes are riveted to the spectacle taking place on the raised stage. Upon retrieving the capsule, the prisoner slowly raises it to his mouth. There is a momentary hesitation as he holds the pill in front of his open mouth. I can see the apprehension and anguish in his eyes from my vantage point in the third row. A collective gasp is heard from the crowd as he pops it into his mouth and swallows his sentence. Beads of sweat appear on the prisoner's brow as he waits to see if this is the day that his number comes up. Eventually, it becomes evident the rebel has just consumed a normal Apis pill and the general moves on to his next victim.

A similar exchange is repeated with the next two criminals, only resulting in the same outcome. The tension in the crowd begins to recede as the general approaches the second to last prisoner. She is a young, freckle-faced girl of barely twenty years of age. I overheard a fellow member in the audience say she'd been caught painting the now infamous seven on the back of the general's vehicle. Apparently, the humor had been wasted on him, since the girl has been the participant in two other public trials to this point. While the previous captives exhibited some defiance, abject fear is apparent on the young girl's face as the general repeats his directive. It's obvious that if the girl had any knowledge of a resistance movement, the information would have spilled out

already. With the instructions completed the girl just stares pleadingly into the man's eyes. He heartlessly nods toward the container, which is standing ominously in front of the girl. Resignation appears on the girl's face as she slowly reaches into the bowl to select her pill. Her hand hesitantly rises out of the bowl and inserts the capsule into her mouth, where it remains for a few seconds before she eventually swallows it.

General Taggart waits for a few seconds to see if anything happens, before turning toward the next prisoner. Suddenly, the girl begins thrashing back and forth. Two guards rush toward her from behind. White foam begins to flow out of her mouth as she collapses back into the guards' arms. Her body convulses violently for a few more seconds until the shaking gradually subsides. The guards unshackle the girl and swiftly carry her limp body off the platform and through the rear door of the building.

With a brief shrug, General Taggart turns to address the last prisoner. The young man's eyes display stark fear. The crowd is deathly quiet following the recent spectacle. I wearily turn away from the stage and start to weave my way through the crowd. My head is spinning, and I feel nausea enveloping my body. I can barely hear the general's statements, through the ringing in my ears. My vision begins to blacken around the edges, and I realize that I'm about to pass out. I focus my attention on the back of the crowd as I start pushing my way through the throng of people. I lose any fear of drawing attention to myself as I frantically try to free myself from the mob of onlookers. The rising bile in my stomach is mixed with a sudden distaste for my fellow community members.

How can they continue to watch this spectacle? How can they just stand there and watch the killing of innocent neighbors?