

The Lizard of Ozzzz.com

A Silicon Valley Tale



by Mary Lauren Karlton

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*Dedicated to the many victims of
electronic privacy invasion and abuse
and to those committed to the defense
of our digital liberties.*

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Prologue

“But the wicked witch isn’t dead yet, Mommy!” wailed Kirsten.
“We can’t do anything until she’s dead!”

“Girls, will you get off that computer and listen to me! Your dinner’s stone cold and you’re three weeks behind in your homework. If you’re not down here in five minutes, I’m coming up to get you!”

Charlotte Meyerstone clicked the off button on the intercom in her kitchen. She took ten puffs from her cigarette and smashed the butt into the stainless steel sink before storming up the thickly carpeted stairs to the playroom.

Kirsten and her younger sister, Amanda, were huddled together over the computer. Kirsten shoved the mouse into Amanda’s hand. “Here, Amanda, you kill her before Mom gets here.”

Amanda grabbed the mouse, frantically maneuvering the pointer all over the computer screen. “Kirsten, I can’t, she’s moving too fast. Look, she’s laughing at us. And those flying blue monkeys keep getting in the way. I can’t. I can’t kill her!” Tears of exasperation washed over the front of the little girl’s pink tee shirt.

“Kirsten, maybe you should put on the red shoes. That witch is scared of those things. Get the shoes, Kirsten! C’mon, before Mom gets here.”

Charlotte appeared at the playroom doorway. “Oh, girls, it’s not that damn Ozzzz.com site again! Shut that thing off now, I say!”

“Mommy, we can’t go till she’s dead! We can’t. She won’t leave us alone. Please, please, help us kill her,” cried Amanda.

Charlotte collapsed into the bright blue beanbag chair in the corner of the room. “Girls, I don’t think I can. I just don’t think I know how to kill her!”

“The 21st century technologies — genetics, nanotechnology, and robotics (GNR) — are so powerful that they can spawn whole new classes of accidents and abuses. Most dangerously, for the first time, these accidents and abuses are widely within the reach of individuals or small groups. They will not require large facilities or rare raw materials. Knowledge alone will enable the use of them.”

Wired Magazine, April 2000, “Why the Future Doesn’t Need Us” by Bill Joy

Chapter 1

Boys ‘n the Wood

“It’s a beautiful thing we’re creating, Avi,” said Sam. “And I’ve found a way to make the idea irresistible to him.”

Avi, steadfast and unshakable like Mount Sinai, stood next to Sam, shoulder to shoulder in a clearing encircled by the old-growth Northern California redwood trees that shrouded the secrets of the Woodlands Club. The two men were a few hundred feet from the lodge. It looked like everyone had cleared out after breakfast. They wanted to make sure that the dining hall was empty, that there would be no eavesdroppers around during their meeting with Portell.

Bob Portell appeared at the appointed time and swung open the huge wooden doors, disappearing inside.

“Wait. Let’s give it a few minutes,” said Sam.

Avi nodded. Sam glanced at him. The eight-inch scar that ran down from the top of Avi’s ear to the base of his neck bulged like a

swung open the massive doors carved with the emblem of The Woodlands Club—the raptor eagle with a small furry creature in its talons.

He spied Bob Portell hunched over his coffee at the far end of one of the six thirty-foot long redwood tables in the dining hall. Everything was in place. Sam noted that Carmelita was on duty. He walked over to her and slipped his arm around her waist, whispering words that evoked a reassuring nod, a wink and a knowing smile from her. *Done deal.* She would wait on their table, as they

It looked like the breakfast crowd had indeed cleared out. They were probably in the grove or at the amphitheater participating in the annual Spring Rites competitions and festivities. Good thing, too, thought Sam. *We don't need any of the other global moguls nosing in on this. If they want it, they'll have to bleed their bank accounts, and then some, to get it.*

Sam savored the whole scene. He had finally made the grade. Sam was now fully integrated into the elite corps after a decade of persistently hammering the top echelons of the global-corporate elite with his mantra about the power of the technologies he was promoting. For one week in the spring, during the equinox, Sam walked among the best of breed—billionaire CEOs, sheiks, prime ministers, media moguls, superstars, intellectuals and leaders of fringe terrorist groups who converged upon this pristine redwood grove north of San Francisco to hatch their schemes, to seal deals, and unabashedly share their ruthless machinations with their like-minded brethren. And now Sam was one of the stars.

mountain ridge on a topo map in the unforgiving glare. That man is raw chutzpah, thought Sam.

“Yah, Sam, and we’ll make it impossible for that bastard to resist. We’ll have him on his knees, groveling, in no time. My gun is loaded.” The Israeli fighter pilot adjusted the black patch over his left eye and patted his bulging chest. “And you, Sam?”

“Avi, I’m stoked.” Sam was jazzed, feeling optimum, at his peak after a ten-mile morning run through the serpentine trails of the Woodlands complex, a round of Zen longevity calisthenics, and then, of course, last night with the club’s head hostess, Carmelita, his Caribbean Queen. And what a hostess she was! *Mmmm. Mmmm. That creamy dark chocolate skin!*

Sam paused for a moment to check his watch. Perfect timing. Ten minutes late. Late enough to let Portell know who was really running this gig, but not too late to let the pretentious fool think that Sam was jerking his chain. Sam knew he had to tread carefully. But he also knew that he was clever enough to have Portell

that Sam couldn’t afford to miss. This was the proverbial brass ring. Sam wanted it so bad, it made him ache, and he would use every trick he had acquired in the course of his business career to one up Portell. Of course, if things got rough, he could always count on Avi to put it all back on track. In Sam’s mind, there was only one agenda, as always—his own.

Avi and Sam approached the entrance to the Woodlands main lodge, a sprawling robust structure hewn from stones and logs, where most of the meals and strategy sessions took place. Sam

Sam and Avi sat down on the long, picnic-style bench, strategically flanking Bob Portell. *Geez, for all of his billions, you'd think he'd hire an image consultant! The guy's a bloody disaster! That unironed L.L. Bean flannel shirt has got to go! And those hideous baggy chinos! Get a clue, Portell!* Ever since Sam had known him from the garage shop days, Bob couldn't get over the rumpled geek look.

Sam waved to Carmelita, who took the cue and waltzed up to the trio and leaned over, inches away from Portell. Her cloud of African curls brushed against Bob's cheek while she recited the brunch specials. Sam chuckled as he watched Bob slide a few inches away from her.

"So, Mr. Portell, what's your pleasure?" Carmelita smiled, laying her hand softly on his shoulder. They were practically nose to nose.

"Oh, uh, a cheese omelet with gourmet cornbread."

Bob twitched uncomfortably, relieved when Carmelita had finished taking everyone's orders and finally removed herself from his personal space.

Good girl! thought Sam. *Check out Portell's body English! Got a problem with kinky hair, boy?*

Bob collected himself. Sam enjoyed baiting Portell. With Portell's bid for the presidential seat, any revelations about his family's involvement in the genetic purification movement during the forties and fifties could spell disaster for the liberal vote.

“Let’s get down to business,” said Bob.

“Bob, it’s ready to go. Yah, in only thirty days we’ll be pressing all their buttons until they crack. I can’t imagine anything more elegant. It’s the subtlety that is so appealing to me!” Avi smiled.

“All right, all right, guys. Let’s cut to the chase,” snapped Bob, wiping his mouth with his sleeve. “Don’t waste my time. You say that you can engineer a shift in mass consciousness with this technology. That’s all I care about.”

“Bob, you saw the prototype. It’s a masterpiece. It burrows down into their minds and souls, and they won’t even know what hit them. What do you not understand about global domination?”

“Yah, what’s your problem anyway?” Avi jumped up from his seat and pounded the table with his fist, rattling Portell’s coffee cup. “Can’t you recognize beauty when you see it? It’s a revolution in communication, Goddamit! Primal-speak over the ‘Net. It doesn’t matter who they are, where they come from, or what their IQ is! Don’t you get it?”

“Avi, get a grip, my man! Bob, you will be all over it. It’s a one-shot deal too. No programming, no deprogramming. Ever! Your word will rule. Your message bites will be sucked into the reptilian brains of the populace, and you, of all people, know how that handy piece of anatomy works. You’ll have them licking your boots in nanoseconds!”

“You guys know that I’m from Missouri,” said Bob. “Show me. Results talk, bullshit walks.”

“Bob, I’m telling you, you’ll be all over it. I’m testing it out on the Ozzzz.com site as we speak. You’ll be lord and master of the cyber class in no time.”

“Yah, guaranteed! And if it doesn’t work, we can still resort to the old kamikaze tactics. Direct hits have always appealed to me!” quipped Avi.

“Avi, stop being such a damn yahoo!” responded Bob. “Okay, Sam. I want to hear how you’re going to pull this off, and then maybe I’ll consider it.”

“It’s already in the works. We’re ready to roll with Ozzzz.com,” explained Sam. “We’ve already got over a million subscribers. The site’s been running for a few months, and we’ve got the metrics. We’re golden, I’m telling you.”

“Can’t you see it now! The new tagline: ‘Move beyond mind share to mind control.’ It’s beautiful! So beautiful!” said Avi.

“Okay, I think I get the picture. So you prove your point. Then what? Why should I give a shit?” asked Bob.

“The ‘then what,’ Bob is in your hands. You’ll have the whole world in your hands, bro’! Just imagine what this could do for the head of state. Taste it, Bob! Taste it! Hail to the chief!”

“All right, I’ll back you up on this exercise, but to actually spread this stuff over the Internet globally, I’ve gotta see results. Stats. Numbers. Concrete evidence. Get it, Sam? I’m not a dreamer, I’m a billionaire.”

“We’re on, my man. Hey, look, guys, I have to run. There are some new hires coming in. And there’s one in particular I want to snag—smart, and quite a babe too.”

“Keep me posted. And, hey, Sam, next time, could you get this place to assign a different waitress to us, like that little blonde over by the bar. This one gave me the willies.”

“Bob, you’ll get every damn thing you need and want, on my word. You understand my MO,” Sam reassured him. “And, by the way, you might consider drawing on some talent in the industry to fill some of those key cabinet posts, if you get my drift.”

“Yah, if Henry Kissinger could do it, why not me?” bellowed the Israeli. “Hey, for Americans, you fellas are not such schlemiels!”