

ZeeTec Incorporated

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'So this is what it's all about.' I picked up the thin black tile which had been placed in front of me and flexed it back and forth, watching the numbers on the meter it was connected to change as I did so.

The man smiled at me. 'It sure is.'

I watched the numbers again. It was impressive, electricity being generated with no moving parts, nothing to wear out, nothing to break. Yet there was an obvious problem. 'But that's hardly anything. You couldn't even electrocute an ant with that.'

'Ahh yes.' I saw a glint in the man's eyes. 'But it's all about scale. That's just a few square centimetres. Imagine how much you'd get if you had a square kilometre of the stuff.'

I did a quick mental calculation. 'That would be enough to power an entire city.'

'Now scale it up again to 100 square k.' His eyes gleamed with anticipation.

I thought about it for a moment. 'That could power the whole country!'

'Exactly. And with no moving parts, there'd be almost no running costs once it's all set up. We could under cut almost everyone else: solar, gas, coal, wind, nuclear; they'd all be way more expensive. We'd have a complete monopoly on power. We'd make a fortune.'

I could understand his enthusiasm, yet I could see a problem. 'In theory, yes, but you seem to be forgetting something. To generate the electricity, you need to have something bending the tiles.'

'I know, but we've got the perfect solution to that, too. We use people.'

I shifted uneasily. 'Then you'd have to pay them. No one's going to work for free.'

He grinned. 'Now, that's where you're wrong.' The man turned and headed for the door. 'Come, I'll show you.'

I followed him out into the narrow corridor and down a flight of stairs to where there was a security door with a yellow biohazard warning sticker on it. The man pulled out a ID card and swiped it through the reader. The door buzzed and he pushed it open. Seeing my hesitation he laughed. 'Don't worry, there's nothing dangerous in here, not for you at any rate.'

Nervously I stepped inside and followed him as he set off once more until we came to a glass window set into the wall. He stopped in front of it and pointed inside. 'There. That's where we get the power. We created the technology ourselves and we own the patent. No one else can do it; just us.'

Curious, I peered into through the re-enforced glass and saw to my horror that there was an elderly man shuffling around inside. He was naked and hairless, and there was a strange green tinge to his skin. The floor was covered in the same black material I'd been shown upstairs. A digital display on the wall showed how much electricity was being generated by his movements.

I stared, aghast. 'You can't use old people like that!'

The man smiled at me. 'That's the beauty of it. He's not just old: he's dead!'

I recoiled. 'But if he's dead, how's he still moving?'

'A simple little microchip placed on the back of the neck, sending signals into his spinal column. Get it in the right place, and program it correctly, and you can get a body to do most simple tasks. There's a tiny solar panel on it which gives it all the power it needs. You need to get them fresh, of course, before rigour mortis kicks in, but after that it's pretty easy. You irradiate them to kill off all the bacteria in their body, then fill them with a special fluid which stops them rotting and which can carry oxygen to the muscles. Next, you inject this strain of algae we came up with just under their skin. It makes them look a little odd, but it lives there quite happily, generating enough oxygen and sugar from light to keep the muscles going. Humans don't really need much when all they're going to be doing is shuffling around.'

I was horrified, not just by what I was being shown, but also by the excited tone being used to describe it. 'But surely it's illegal to do that with a corpse ...'

'It used to be, then last year we got the law changed. Cost us a lot of money and favours, and it was hard to keep it quiet, but it was worth it.' He pointed through the glass. 'This is now an officially acceptable way to dispose of human remains. It's called a living burial. Sounds nice doesn't it? That's why we chose the name. It's just two words slipped in as an amendment, but it means we can do this to any body we want as long as we have the next of kin's permission.'

I frowned. 'How on earth did you get that?'

'Well, in his case, his body was donated for research, but we've got others; come I'll show you.' With that he turned and moved further down the corridor. As he walked, he carried on talking. 'Remember that other law which was changed last year? You know, the one that caused all those protests and riots, but that was passed anyway?'

I nodded. The Body Ownership Law was a simple enough piece of legislation, but it's implications were mind-bending. It's supporters claimed its intension was to provide more organs for medical

transplants and research, a righteous enough aim, but it seemed overly heavy-handed. Under this law, the moment you died, your body passed into state ownership. If your family had enough money, they could buy it back, but if they didn't, then the state could do anything it wanted with it. In effect, it meant that after death, only the rich now had the right to their own bodies; for the poor it was the final degradation after a lifetime of poverty.

'You see, we were behind that, too. We've got the contract for disposing of the bodies the government doesn't, and that's most of them. At the moment, we're still cremating them and sending the ashes back to the families, but as we get the facilities built, ones like this one, we're shifting over to living burials.'

He paused to swipe his card through another security door before opening it and stepping through. 'Here, you can see for yourself.'

I followed him and gasped. I was standing on a metal gantry that lined the walls of a room which was about half the size of a football pitch. Bright lights shone down onto a sea of naked humans, each with the same strange green hue as the old man I'd seen minutes before. I could only see the small chips sticking from the necks of the nearest ones, but I presumed they'd all been fitted with them because there was a constant milling as they shuffled around, bumping into each other and off the walls.

I ran my eyes over them: Men and women, young and old, black, white, Asian. All naked, their hair removed, their skin green by the algae they'd been injected with. Each had a bar code stamped across its back. The man explained its purpose. 'Just in case we ever needed to identify a specific individual. You know, sometimes a rich person's body ends up here by accident, sometimes it takes a family a while to get enough money together to buy a loved one's body back. We need to be able to return them if that happens. After all, you wouldn't want a relative to end up here if they didn't have to, would you?'

I looked back at the milling people. Some were so fresh, they looked like they could be sleep-walking, but others had clearly been in the room for a long time. These were the ones with missing fingers, or even arms, snapped off when they collided with the walls or each other. Some had other wounds, too, and these oozed the thick blue liquid which had been used to replace their blood. A few had ragged and roughly sewn up incisions where organs had been removed before the bodies had been sent here for disposal, but all had the same dead, lifeless eyes and slowly nodding head, set in motion as their bodies lurched around aimlessly.

They were so densely packed that I could only catch the occasional glimpse of the black tiles, just like the one I'd held in my hands, which lined the floor and the lowest five feet of the walls. High above them, a large display showed exactly how much electricity was being generated by these re-animated corpses and it was

phenomenal. My companion saw me looking at the meter. 'It's enough to power this entire neighbourhood!' There was excitement in his voice. 'This is our new vision for cemeteries for the 21st Century. Up above, we have a nice green area, with a few trees and plaques and things like that for the relatives to visit, but they won't know that below, we have rooms like this, hundreds of them, all generating electricity which we can then sell cheaper than anyone else and still have massive profit margins. And there's no carbon dioxide produced, that means we can say it's green so our customers get a happy feeling from thinking their doing something good for the world.

'Once we get a room like this up and running, there's almost no on-going costs since we generate vastly more electricity than is needed to power the lights. We need to change the occasional bulb and of course they,' he waved his arm in the general direction of the mass of people shuffling below us, 'wear out eventually, but it's easy enough to throw in some more to replace them. We don't even need to remove the old ones because ... well look.' He pointed to where the badly-damaged corpse a teenage boy shuffled unsteadily as it was jostled by those surrounding it. After one collision too many, he fell, but none of those around him noticed; they just kept on shuffling, buffeting his body within their feet. Within minutes, the teenager's head had become detached from the body and was being kicked around the room by the others as if they were playing a grotesque game of football. I looked back at the body: it was quickly being broken apart by the constant movement all around it. 'That's the beauty of the system, no matter what, they just keep on going until they fall apart, and that can take years. The whole floors on a slight slope and we can flush it out whenever it looks like things down there are getting a bit choked up with broken parts. Each time we do that, we strain out the chips so we can re-use them and all the rest is ground up and used as fertiliser in the gardens up on the surface.

'Now we've proved the technology, and we've got all the laws we need in place and all the government contracts to supply the bodies, we're ready to go nationwide.' He turned to me. 'That's where you come in. We're offering a small number of hand-picked investors the chance to get in on the ground floor, and that's why we invited you here for this exclusive behind the scenes tour. We want to offer you the opportunity to invest.'

I stared out at the horrific vision for the future which ZeeTech Incorporated were trying to sell. A vision where only the rich were allowed to rest in peace after they died. The rest would be forced to work on, continuing to line the pockets of people who already had too much money while getting nothing in return. It was a modern form of slavery. but yet it wasn't illegal because the dead have no rights. It was all being carried out behind the scenes: all the public would ever see would be the well-maintained and landscaped grounds above, they'd never be allowed in here; they'd never get to see how the bodies of

their loved ones were being exploited for corporate gain. I could see the company was going to make a fortune, as long as they could keep what they were actually doing with the bodies they were contracted to dispose of hidden from the public.

I smiled and shook the man's hand, knowing what my role in the company's future would be as I heard a voice in my well-hidden ear piece. They'd received my transmission and they had already posted the video the web. I knew exactly what the camera hidden in my left contact lens had captured during my tour of the facility, and now, so would everyone else.