

Foxworth Terminus  
by J. Drew Brumbaugh

Foxworth Terminus is a work of fiction and while there are some real places mentioned in this novel, they are fictionalized to suit the author. All characters are fictional. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

Cover by .

Copyright 2014 J. Drew Brumbaugh

All rights reserved.

This book cannot be reproduced, scanned or distributed in any printed or electronic form without written permission of the author.

Also by J. Drew Brumbaugh

***Shepherds***

***War Party***

***Ten More***

***Girls Gone Great***

(co-authored with Carolyn B. Berg)

Available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Apple, Kobo or thru my website

[www.jdrewbrumbaugh.com](http://www.jdrewbrumbaugh.com)

Dedicated to my lifelong friend, Bob Benline, who is still influencing my work, despite having gone ahead; to my wife, Carolyn, who is constantly challenging me to write better, flesh out the characters more, and present the whole story, not just the plot; to Sarah for her comments of encouragement; and to my son Jim, who convinced me that this story was worth telling. Also thanks to Yoly Fivas for a helpful beta read that pointed out several areas needing fixed and to Renee Sabreen who provided the inspiration for Ron Jacobs' coffee.

## Chapter 1

Misery may love company but despair seeks solitude. And at that moment, despair consumed Reggie Foxworth. He trudged down the hall toward his office, overwhelmed by a sense of doom. His short-sleeved shirt was wrinkled and stained under the armpits. Head hanging, feet dragging, Reggie moved like a condemned man. He felt like a condemned man.

He avoided eye contact with the stream of coworkers he passed in the hall. The last thing he wanted to do was chitchat. He could not share the pain churning his guts, at least not yet. They didn't know that the project had been terminated. Reggie still couldn't believe it. Everyone else would find out soon enough. Right now, Reggie was trying to deal with the consequences, all of them bad. His emotions raged nearly out of control and he could barely keep them contained.

In one balled fist he gripped the damning directive. The Army was out, the project cancelled and everything he'd spent a lifetime building was being confiscated by the CIA. Project MF2100 was dead.

They had announced the project termination at the monthly planning meeting he'd just left. It had been so unforeseen that Reggie had no contingency plan, really no plan at all. He had expected budget cuts. But he'd never guessed they would end the project altogether. The thought of it made Reggie physically sick. It had been his life for the last fifteen years. Without it, Reggie had nothing, no job, no future, nothing he could even put on a resume.

How many times had he steeled himself for budget cuts that would leave them underfunded? But this. It was worse than the worst-case scenario, which reminded Reggie of his mother. She'd pounded into him to always prepare for the worst. He could hear her now . . . "Okay Reggie, what's the worst thing that could happen? Envision what that might be and figure out how you'll handle it. Then you can handle anything." He wondered what she would say now. This was worse than anything imaginable.

He passed the coffee kiosk midway to his office. Normally he would have stopped and grabbed a cup, but his stressed-out, sour stomach revolted against the thought of caffeine. Others, waiting to get a coffee or latte, turned to watch Reggie shuffle past. He shook his head momentarily feeling sorry for them. They didn't realize it yet but they were all unemployed. Their smiles and greetings went unacknowledged.

"Goddamn idiots," he muttered to himself as he continued down the hallway, referring to the decision makers who had cancelled the project. Yes, he thought, he was talking to himself. A bad habit, he knew, but one born of the necessity to connect with ("embrace," his mother would suggest) his emotions. He was an only child, and as a kid sometimes he talked out loud simply because there was no one to talk to. In high school and later in college, he talked as he worked out his math and biochemistry problems; in the classroom, in the library, in his dorm room . . . it didn't make any difference. Reggie figured that a person was entitled to talk to himself. It was about the cheapest therapy you could get. In retrospect, Reggie thought that perhaps the

habit added to his mystique as the mad scientist. Doctor Reginald Foxworth, brilliant eccentric. More like miserable failure.

Reggie reached his office, yanked open the door and slipped in. His office was small, windowless with a single desk, a worn leather executive chair, two Spartan metal chairs for visitors, and a 4-drawer file cabinet. His PhD diploma hung on one faded blue wall. A painting of some mountains hung on the opposite wall. He didn't know which mountains since the painting had been there when Reggie joined the project. That was it. His office was plain, without decoration, just the way Reggie wanted it.

He tossed the termination notice on his desk and took a deep breath. As he plunked down in his chair, he finally allowed himself to think about the ramifications of the current mess.

He thought back to the beginning. The goal had been to investigate and enhance paranormal abilities in people, specifically soldiers. They'd studied rats, carefully selecting ones who solved the cheese-in-the-maze problems with statistically fewer errors than any other rat. Rare as those rats were, it was their brain chemistry that became the focus of the research. Eventually they discovered that a bio-compound they'd named *rataze*, for *rats in the maze*, appeared in every one of those rats. Isolating rataze and injecting normal rats with it seemed to work, really work. Now, all that research was being trashed. Why?

Before Reggie could sink any deeper into a black funk, the door opened and Jennifer Collins whisked in, red hair flowing around her shoulders, green

eyes flaming. She wore a short-sleeved powder blue blouse and Navy blue slacks. For the first time since they'd met, Reggie was too distracted to appreciate her beauty.

She paused in the doorway studying Reggie's face.

"I guess this morning's meeting didn't go so well?" she said, more statement than question. "I just heard. How can they do this when we are almost there? We're ready for human testing."

"You know that. I know that. The Army knows that. But the CIA, who happens to own this project, apparently doesn't."

"Why not?"

"How the hell would I know? But they aren't kidding around. They're going to shut us down and destroy everything. **Everything.**"

Jennifer plopped down in one of the guest chairs, crossing her legs. She folded her arms across her chest, scowled. "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," he said, "I never saw this coming, haven't had time to think. I wish I knew what to do."

"Can we get funding somewhere else?"

"How? Who?"

"What about one of the big pharmaceuticals? This would make them a fortune."

Reggie shook his head. "Even if rataze works, don't forget, every attempt to synthesize it failed. No matter how we tried to analyze the compound there was always something missing, a link that couldn't be identified."



Jennifer laughed. “Don’t you think we could figure it out with enough cash behind us? Every drug company in the world would love to get their hands on this.”

Reggie had to agree the thought was appealing. Still there was a catch and he said, “Except everything is top secret. Nobody will touch it and we can’t tell anyone about it.”

Silence. Jennifer pursed her lips, thinking. “What about some other government agency? Homeland Security?”

“Even if we could, that takes time and so much of the equipment is custom built. Once it’s destroyed I don’t see how we can recover even if we had the money.”

“How soon are they going to start rounding things up? Maybe we can postpone it.”

“Today sometime. I already tried to stop them, tried to explain in the meeting. They don’t care. They are determined to shut this place down as fast as possible. And it’s not going to take them long. I think they’ve been planning this for a while. Maybe they’ve already started.”

“Are you sure the CIA isn’t just going to change venues and run this project without the Army?”

“Hmm. . .” Reggie pondered the possibilities. “That would be like them. But how could they continue without us?”

“I’d like to think they couldn’t,” shot Jennifer. “But really, they have the drug and all the notes and the equipment to extract more. It wouldn’t be hard for them to proceed without us. Trashing everything is senseless.”

“Yeah,” said Reggie, considering more covert alternatives. Maybe the CIA did believe in the project, so much so that they didn’t want to share.

Jennifer took a deep breath. “If we can’t continue on this project what are we going to do?”

Reggie crumpled up the report and threw it at the wall. “That’s the real bitch. We can’t put anything about this place on a resume. All we can say is that we worked on a classified government project. And when they asked why we left, we have to say the project was terminated?”

“It’s crap. We have to do something.”

The phone rang. Reggie glared at it, angry for any interruption.

It rang again. Reluctantly, on the third ring Reggie picked it up. “Hello.”

“Foxworth, is that you?”

Reggie recognized Captain Packard’s voice, a former rival for Jennifer’s affections. Ever since Jennifer had picked Reggie, Packard had become increasingly antagonistic.

“Who else would it be?”

“You have an hour to gather your personal belongings before I have them start on your office. Don’t take anything out of there before we have a chance to inspect it, and rest assured we *will* inspect everything. Nothing that even

suggests this project ever existed will be allowed off post. And don't think about leaving before security gets there."

"Okay," said Reggie glumly, still wrapped in a mental fog that denied him rational thought.

"And don't try to get into the lab either. It's off limits. We've already started there. Got it?" growled Captain Packard.

"Sure," said Reggie. Packard's sense of triumph grated on Reggie's nerves. "How's this any better for you than for me?" he asked, though he could guess.

"You're history and I'm a lifer. The Army will take care of me. You, not so much," said the captain.

The phone went dead. Reggie replaced the receiver.

"One hour and stay out of the lab," he said looking up at Jennifer's sad face. The thought that Jennifer, too, had just lost everything hurt Reggie more than his own plight. She deserved so much better, he thought. All he managed to say was, "Not much time for farewells."

She slumped down, leaning her head against the back of the chair. "I suppose I should go collect my stuff."

Reggie thought of the few personal things in his office. Compared to the research that was about to be lost, they were meaningless artifacts of a career gone sour. To just pack up and walk away with success in sight – it wasn't like him. He was no quitter. Never had been and he didn't intend to start now.

But what could he do? There had to be something, some way to save the project.

The need to do something festered in his mind. What they needed was a human trial. But how? Who? Slowly a kernel of an idea formed, growing with his swelling anger. Quickly it blossomed into an ambitious plan, a crazy plan. No crazier in Reggie's mind than what the government was doing. The plan was so radical, so out of place in his logical, structured world that it might have been generated somewhere else and imposed upon him.

"What are you thinking?" Jennifer demanded, noticing the mischievous gleam in Reggie's eyes.

"Nothing, nothing at all." His smirk said he was lying. "Don't we have a sample of rataze in the auxiliary lab?"

"Yes. So what?"

"It'll be the last place they go. We could do something with that sample before they destroy it."

"What do you mean? It doesn't have much of a shelf life."

"Enough for what I'm thinking."

"Injecting someone?"

"What else? It's the only way to save the project. Show them that it works."

"There's no time. How would you find a volunteer? And besides it's illegal to test on humans without the proper approvals."

“Approvals we’ll have to do without. You don’t think that would stop the CIA do you? As for who, the list is pretty small because we’ll have to do it right now.”

“It’s too dangerous.”

“We don’t know that.”

“But the rats suffered through the transition.”

“Only temporarily. They got over it and afterward they were different. What changed? That’s what we need to know.”

“It’s too dangerous.”

“It’s the only way.”

“Again, who’s going to volunteer? And on such short notice. It won’t take them long before they’ve confiscated what little is left.”

He stood up. She leaped up at the same time, guessing his plan. She pushed on his chest with her right hand to hold him back.

“Not you.”

“Who else?”

“What about the side effects? Damn it, those lab rats were hurting. How do we know a human would survive?”

“How do we know they wouldn’t?”

“And the fatalities. There were fatalities. Some injected rats died.”

“None of the fatalities were connected to the experiments or had anything to do with the drug. And the pain only signaled the transformation, changes in nerve connections, synapses that were cross-connecting or something.

Connections we can't comprehend. The pain wore off and then the rats were good as new. No, better than new. Don't you want to know what we've found?"

"Yeah, but that was rats. We don't know what it'll do in a human or if it'll do anything." Now she had both hands on his chest, forcing him away from the door.

He allowed himself to be guided back to his chair. Compliantly he sat. She stood over him, a scowl on her face. "Promise me you won't do this."

Reggie squirmed under the intensity of her stare, her green eyes boring into him.

"If I don't, then we'll never know what actually happened to the rats. How they solved the mazes without a single error after the transformation when they messed up repeatedly before the injection. And what about all the work we've done? Lost forever."

"I don't care," she said, "I don't want you doing anything rash."

He knew she wouldn't quit until he agreed.

"Okay," he said softly. "I won't do anything rash."

She bent over, kissed him on the cheek, and then straightened back up. "What now?"

"For me, collect my things and wait for the Gestapo. Then I'm sure it'll be off to security to turn in our badges and all that and then a final inspection before they kick us out."

"I'll grab my stuff and meet you at security," she said turning toward the door.

“Okay. I’ll be there as soon as I can. Captain Packard left strict orders not to leave my office until his men showed up. I can’t guarantee how long it’ll take.”

“Fine. Just don’t leave without me,” she said reaching for the doorknob.

She smiled, a smile that seemed out of place given the carnage done to their careers. Reggie managed a weak smile in response and got up from his chair. He held the door for her and then watched her until she got into the elevator.

As soon as the elevator door closed, he dashed out of the office, running for the stairwell. He hurried down the stairs two at a time until he reached the floor where the auxiliary lab was. It was a smaller lab off the main hallway that he’d been assigned for certain more delicate portions of the research. It was here that he and Jennifer and a few others had done much of their most highly classified work. And it was here where one vial of rataze was stored in anticipation of the now cancelled human trial. More importantly, it had not been logged into the official records yet. With any luck Reggie would get there before anyone else.

