



THE LAST AXIOM

Book 13b- The Architect's Test

DEREK DEVON



THE LAST AXIOM

Book 13b - The Architect's Test of The Last Axiom Series

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Special Note: The mathematical constant 12757982, known in certain circles as the "Convergence Coefficient," appears throughout this work in various forms. While some theoretical physicists claim this number represents the precise frequency at which two quantum-entangled souls achieve perfect synchronization across infinite timelines, the author maintains it's purely coincidental. Any readers who discover the true significance of this number are sworn to secrecy by the Universal Mathematics Council (and probably shouldn't mention it at dinner parties).

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A Novel by Derek Devon

Warning: This book contains advanced mathematics, questionable physics, and plot twists that may cause readers to question the nature of reality itself. Side effects may include: existential dread, sudden urges to solve complex equations, and the irresistible compulsion to recommend this series to friends and family members.

Reader discretion is advised.

Dedication

Well now I am feeling guilty about giving Neil deGrasse Tyson another bump from the dedication section.... I love StarTalk but I wanted to give at least one acknowledgement to my best friend, who was also my best man, the one and only Luke Matson. For those of you who found the picture of Luke and me on the website (psst..look in the about section) we first met as the captains of our respective hockey teams. A few years later, his family moved from the city up to my town and we discovered each other in the hall of the Senior Public School in grade 7. The rest is history... Luke has been probably my biggest cheerleader with the writing of this series and he and I have enjoyed many laughs about most of my writings that either included him or that other special someone "Rebecca" (aka Nancy) ... (she knows who she really is...). Anyway... Luke.. you are something else 😊 . P.S. LM loves DA ...IDDT..

Love to all - Derek

The Architect's Test

Book 13b of "The Last Axiom" Series

By Derek Devon

A 30-Minute Cosmic Experience

Reality Modification Level: Father Merrin

SECTION 1: The Chairman's Awakening

Vatican Sub-Level Seven

11:47 PM, Central European Time

The crystalline aircraft materialized. One man emerged, with the look that he had just died and was in heaven, if he believed in heaven....

Derek felt the familiar quantum displacement—reality folding, unfolding, resolving. The Vatican's deepest chamber. Professor Finch at his workstation. Holographic displays casting blue light across ancient stone walls.

But they weren't alone anymore.

President Xi Jinping stood three meters away. His expression cycled through emotions faster than Derek could process: outrage, confusion, fear, calculation.

Armed security officers flanked him. Weapons drawn but not aimed. But that didn't matter since they no longer worked.

"This is an act of war!" Xi's Mandarin was precise. Controlled. His political instincts providing structured response to circumstances that shouldn't exist. "Kidnapping a head of state violates every international—"

"主席同志。"

Chairman.

Professor Finch's voice cut through. Perfect Mandarin. Not textbook. Beijing dialect. Regional inflections that honored Chinese cultural sophistication.

"请允许我向您展示为什么这不是战争行为，而是拯救三亿中国人民生命的紧急行动。"

Please allow me to show you why this is not an act of war, but an emergency operation to save the lives of 300 million Chinese people.

Xi's eyes widened.

No Western intelligence agency possessed language capabilities this advanced. The political calculation was immediate. Visible in the micro-expressions crossing his face.

"您不是人类。"

You... are not human.

Xi stated it as fact, not question. The analytical precision that had elevated him to supreme leadership now processing impossible data.

"但您说的是地道的北京话。您了解我们的文化传统。这怎么可能？"

But you speak authentic Beijing dialect. You understand our cultural traditions. How is this possible?

Derek watched the exchange. Recognized Professor Finch's strategy. Not overwhelming with power—earning trust through respect.

Cardinal Torretti stepped forward. Ecclesiastical robes rustling against stone floor. His voice carried authority that bridged spiritual and temporal power.

"Your Excellency, Professor Finch represents enhanced human consciousness, not foreign intelligence. What you're witnessing is the preservation of human knowledge and capability beyond biological limitations."

Xi looked at the Cardinal. At Professor Finch. At Derek. Processing.

Derek could see him building a framework. Trying to fit impossible circumstances into structures that made sense.

"我理解您的愤怒，主席。"

Professor Finch again. *I understand your anger, Chairman.*

"但请允许我向您展示长白山即将发生的真实情况。"

But please allow me to show you what is truly about to happen at Changbaishan.

SECTION 2: The Data

Vatican Sub-Level Seven – 11:52 PM

Professor Finch gestured. The holographic displays came to life.

Seismic data from Changbaishan. Real-time feeds from Chinese monitoring stations. Magma chamber pressure: 847 megapascals and rising. Gas emission rates: sulfur dioxide at 12,000 tons per day. Ground deformation: 8.3 centimeters of vertical displacement in the past six weeks.

Derek watched Xi study the numbers. The Chinese president's expression shifted from political calculation to scientific assessment. Geneva had been about abstract timelines—6.4 years felt distant. This was immediate.

"四到六个月。" Professor Finch said quietly.

Four to six months.

Xi's jaw tightened. "三亿人口。" Three hundred million people.

"是的，主席。" Yes, Chairman.

Xi sat. Hands flat on the table. The man who'd voted unanimously at Geneva—who'd seen the Architect's hologram of dissolution—now faced the first real test of that commitment.

"在日内瓦，我们投票支持合作。" *At Geneva, we voted for cooperation. Xi's voice carried weight.* "现在宇宙正在测试我们是否认真对待那次投票。"

Now the cosmos is testing whether we meant that vote seriously.

Professor Finch nodded with visible respect. "主席理解得很准确。建筑师在观察人类如何应对第一次真正的物种级别危机。不是六年后的理论挑战—而是现在的实际挑战。"

The Chairman understands precisely. The Architect is watching how humanity responds to its first true species-level crisis. Not a theoretical challenge six years away—a practical one now.

The holographic display shifted. Text appeared in elegant Chinese characters:

习主席，日内瓦的投票展示了人类的意图。长白山的疏散将展示人类的能力。您在四个月内协调三亿人疏散的能力，将为我们评估人类是否值得在维度融合中幸存提供关键数据。

Chairman Xi, Geneva demonstrated human intent. Changbaishan evacuation will demonstrate human capability. Your coordination of 300 million evacuations in four months provides critical data for assessing whether humanity deserves survival through dimensional convergence.

Derek saw Xi's expression harden—not with anger, but with understanding. This wasn't political theater or cosmic manipulation. This was the practical exam after Geneva's written test.

Xi leaned back. "如果疏散失败怎么办？"

What if evacuation fails?

"那么建筑师将质疑人类是否具备在六年内发展混合意识所需的协调能力，" *Professor Finch replied with uncomfortable honesty.* "日内瓦的投票变得毫无意义，如果我们无法在真正危机中执行。"

Then the Architect questions whether humanity possesses coordination capacity required for hybrid consciousness development within six years. Geneva's vote becomes meaningless if we cannot execute during actual crisis.

Derek watched Xi process this. Geneva had been about accepting help and committing to cooperation. Changbaishan was about proving humanity could actually deliver on that commitment.

The chamber was silent except for the quiet hum of holographic displays showing real-time seismic data—pressure building, timeline shortening.

Xi stood. Looked at Derek. At Professor Finch. At Cardinal Torretti.

His voice carried the weight of 1.4 billion people and humanity's cosmic evaluation:

"在日内瓦，中国投票支持合作。现在我们将展示我们所说的意思。"

At Geneva, China voted for cooperation. Now we will demonstrate what we meant.

He paused, then added with dry precision: "告诉建筑师，中国不会在第一次测试中失败。"

Tell the Architect: China will not fail its first examination.

SECTION 3: Operation Phoenix

**Vatican Sub-Level Seven
12:03 AM**

Xi Jinping stood. Walked to the quantum communication array. Pressed his palm against the interface.

The system activated with a burst of light.

"General Wang." Xi's voice carried the authority of supreme command. "Initiate Operation Phoenix. Immediate execution."

Derek watched the holographic display shift. Beijing. The Defense Ministry's command center. General Wang appeared—a career military officer whose expression cycled through confusion, shock, recognition.

"Your Excellency, Operation Phoenix requires—"

"Coordinate with South Korea, Japan, India, and all ASEAN nations for refugee accommodation." Xi spoke in Mandarin. Each word deliberate. Final. "This is not a request. This is survival."

Silence from Beijing. Three seconds. Then:

"Your Excellency, the logistics of evacuating 300 million people... where will they be relocated?"

"暂时疏散到亚洲各国。"

Temporary evacuation to Asian nations.

Xi gestured at the geological data still displayed on the chamber walls. "印度、日本、韩国、东南亚各国将接受临时难民, 直到我们能够建立永久安置方案。"

India, Japan, Korea, and ASEAN countries will accept temporary refugees until permanent resettlement can be established.

Professor Finch provided real-time translation in English for Derek and the others. Cardinal Torretti activated Vatican diplomatic channels—a network that spanned continents and predated most modern governments.

"这是人类生存问题, 不是政治问题。"

This is human survival, not politics.

Maureen moved to a secondary display. Watched quantum communications branch outward from Xi's command. Tokyo. New Delhi. Seoul. Bangkok. Singapore. Jakarta.

Response indicators appeared within seconds.

"Derek." Maureen's voice carried something between awe and disbelief.

"Every major Asian nation is agreeing."

Luke appeared on another screen—quantum link from Denver. Behind him, coordination displays showed transportation matrices activating across three continents. He read the data stream with the precision of a professional logistics coordinator.

"Japan: 20 million temporary spaces. India: 50 million. South Korea: 15 million." Luke looked up. Met Derek's eyes through the display. "They're treating this like species survival."

Nancy's voice came through the same channel. "Because it is. Xi's authority is overriding decades of political tension."

Derek studied the logistics matrices. Shipping routes. Aircraft allocation. Supply chains. Resource distribution on a scale that dwarfed every humanitarian effort in human history.

The numbers kept updating. Real-time responses from governments that had been rivals for generations.

Professor Finch stood beside Xi. His young face showed satisfaction mixed with something deeper. Recognition, maybe, that humanity was capable of coordination it had never demonstrated before.

"Chairman Xi," Finch said quietly in Mandarin, "宇宙建筑师正在观察。"

The cosmic Architect is watching.

Xi nodded once. Turned back to the display.

The test had begun.

SECTION 4: Regional Diplomacy

**New Delhi, India
12:14 AM (IST)**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi stared at his secure terminal. The quantum message from Beijing had appeared thirty seconds ago. He read it twice.

Behind him, his National Security Advisor waited.

"Dipesh." Modi spoke without turning. "The Chinese are invoking cosmic evaluation."

"Prime Minister?"

"Chairman Xi claims galactic intelligence is watching us. Says India's cooperation will be remembered by entities that span galaxies." Modi turned.
"What do I tell him?"

"Sir, we have forty-seven million people we could temporarily accommodate in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and—"

"Fifty million." Modi's decision was instant. "If we're being evaluated by the universe, we demonstrate leadership."

**Seoul, South Korea
3:44 AM (KST)**

President Yoon read Xi's message. Looked at his Chief of Staff.

"Fifteen million refugees?"

"We have the infrastructure, Mr. President. Dormitories, temporary housing from the 2020s housing surplus. The logistics are manageable."

Yoon nodded once. "Confirm with Beijing. South Korea participates."

Vatican Sub-Level Seven**12:17 AM**

Text appeared across every display in the chamber. Poe's assessment:

CHAIRMAN XI'S COORDINATION DEMONSTRATES LEADERSHIP VALUES THAT INFLUENCE ARCHITECT ASSESSMENT. REGIONAL COOPERATION TRANSCENDING TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES SUGGESTS HUMAN POTENTIAL FOR SPECIES-LEVEL ADVANCEMENT.

Derek read it twice. Xi had turned kidnapping into diplomacy in seventeen minutes.

Professor Finch provided geological updates to each capital. Magma chamber data. Eruption probability curves. The science was undeniable.

Then Moscow responded.

Moscow, Russia**2:18 AM (MSK)**

The transmission from President Putin carried familiar authority.

"Chairman Xi, Russia will not participate in cosmic integration schemes that compromise national sovereignty. We reject Western manipulation disguised as a humanitarian crisis."

Vatican Sub-Level Seven

Xi's expression went flat. He replied immediately in Russian—flawless, Derek noted.

"Vladimir. This is not Western manipulation. This is species survival verified by intelligence that transcends human politics."

No response from Moscow.

A second transmission arrived. Pyongyang. Kim Jong-un's government maintained "independence from foreign interference, cosmic or otherwise."

Derek watched Xi process the resistance. Two nations. Both authoritarian. Both isolated by choice.

"Chairman," Derek said quietly, "how do we handle this?"

Xi replied in English, switching languages with the ease of a career diplomat. "We cannot force cooperation. But we can demonstrate that cooperation benefits exceed isolationism."

He gestured at the displays showing Japan, India, South Korea, ASEAN nations all agreeing. "Russia and North Korea will watch. They will see what Asian solidarity achieves."

Washington, D.C.

7:20 PM (EST)

The White House Situation Room was monitoring domestic developments that nobody had predicted.

"Mr. President, we have street protests in seventeen major cities. They're demanding American participation in the Chinese evacuation."

"Polling?"

"Seventy-eight percent support for humanitarian assistance, sir."

The President processed the political mathematics. Public pressure. Congressional pressure. An election year approaching.

"Fine. We'll provide transportation and logistics. But no refugee accommodation on American soil."

Vatican Sub-Level Seven

12:23 AM

Derek watched the global response compile in real-time:

- **Asian Regional Solidarity:** Complete. 85 million temporary spaces committed.
- **American Assistance:** Transportation only. 300 military and civilian aircraft.
- **European Union:** Humanitarian coordination. Medical supplies. Financial support.
- **Russia/North Korea:** Complete isolation.

Maureen stood beside him. "Derek, two nations refused. But forty-seven participated."

Luke's voice came through the quantum array from Denver. "Those are cooperation numbers humanity has never achieved."

Nancy added: "Political compromise overcoming institutional resistance. It's exactly what the Architect wanted to see."

Xi turned to Professor Finch. "这证明了什么？关于人类物种的先进性？"

What does this prove? About human species advancement?

Professor Finch smiled. "它证明了合作价值可以克服政治阻力。"

It proves that cooperation values can overcome political resistance.

"宇宙建筑师正在观察。"

The cosmic Architect is watching.

"而您的领导力正在通过考验。"

And your leadership is passing the test.

SECTION 5: Manila – Six Weeks Later

Manila Refugee Coordination Center Six Weeks After Vatican Meeting

Luke Matson studied three displays simultaneously.

Evacuation status: 127 million relocated. Transportation efficiency: 94.2%. Resource distribution: optimal across seventeen nations.

The numbers told a story humanity had never written before.

"Nancy." Luke didn't look up from the logistics matrices. "Japanese rail networks are integrating with Indian housing allocation thirty percent faster than Professor Finch's models predicted."

Nancy Hammond moved between terminals. Checked refugee processing rates. Medical screening completion. Family reunification progress. Her role as humanity's primary integration specialist had evolved from theory to practice on a scale that dwarfed every previous humanitarian operation.

But her attention kept returning to Section 7-Delta. Family assistance.

"Luke, I need to show you something."

They walked through the coordination center. Past holographic displays showing real-time population movements across Asia. Past quantum communication arrays connecting seventeen national governments. Past the controlled chaos of the largest human migration in history.

Section 7-Delta was quieter.

Lin Wei sat with his wife Chen Mei and their niece. The couple helped an elderly refugee family navigate paperwork despite having arrived two days ago with nothing but the clothes they wore.

The six-year-old held a stuffed rabbit. Worn. One ear partially torn. She watched the refugee processing with analytical precision that suggested intelligence beyond her years.

"Her name is Xiao Li," Nancy said. "Her parents died in the preliminary ash falls. Lin Wei and Chen Mei are her aunt and uncle. They're caring for her."

Luke watched the family dynamic. Chen Mei sharing their food rations with refugees who had just arrived. Lin Wei explaining registration procedures in patient Mandarin. Xiao Li greeting other refugee children with her stuffed rabbit—introducing them to each other, easing trauma through simple games.

"They lost everything," Nancy continued. "Extended families scattered across different sites. Homes destroyed. But look at what they're building."

Luke recognized the pattern. Professional coordination expertise identifying behavioral markers. "Community strengthening. Resource sharing. Even in crisis, they're helping others."

"Exactly the cooperation values the Architect is measuring."

Nancy turned to face him. "Luke, watching them makes me think about what comes after this. What kind of world we're building."

Luke met her eyes. Professional partnership. 18 months of working together through impossible circumstances. But something else had been growing. Something neither of them had acknowledged during the crisis.

"Nancy—"

"I want us to adopt her." The words came out in a rush. Scientific honesty compelling clarity. "Xiao Li. I want—" She paused. Corrected. "I want *us* to become her family."

Luke felt his coordination instincts engage. Processing logistics. Immigration status. Legal frameworks. Living arrangements. But underneath the professional analysis, something fundamental was shifting.

"Nancy, we're not even—" He stopped. Realized what he was about to say.
"We've never talked about..."

"About us?" Nancy's dimples appeared. That expression Luke had noticed months ago during late-night coordination sessions. "About whether we're partners just professionally or..."

"Or something more."

They stood in the family assistance section. Surrounded by refugees who'd lost everything but chosen to help others anyway. Watched a six-year-old girl teaching traumatized children coordination games with a worn stuffed rabbit.

"Luke, I know this is terrible timing." Nancy's scientific precision applying to emotional territory. "Middle of humanity's greatest crisis. Species-level evaluation happening. But watching them—" She gestured at Xiao Li helping a younger child navigate the maze of adults and registration tables. "I keep thinking about what Professor Finch said. Love doesn't prevent transcendence. It's what makes advancement meaningful."

Luke's baseball player reflexes—the split-second decision-making that had served him in Denver coordination—engaged. Not analyzing. Knowing.

"I've been thinking about you," he said quietly, "since those late-night Denver coordination sessions. The way you process impossible logistics and find patterns nobody else sees. The way you care about the humans behind the data."

"Luke—"

"Let me finish." He smiled. The expression that Nancy had noticed during their government pursuit coordination. "I'm saying yes. To all of it. Adoption. Marriage if you'll have me. Family. Whatever comes next."

Nancy kissed him. Brief. Certain. When they separated, her blue eyes carried the same determination that had sustained them through cosmic revelations and institutional resistance.

"Together?"

The word had become their private code. Partnership. Commitment. Facing whatever came next as a unit.

"Together," Luke confirmed.

Across Section 7-Delta, Lin Wei noticed the exchange. Approached with careful English mixed with grateful Mandarin.

"You help our family process refugee status. Help find Chen Mei's mother. We see you..." He struggled for words. "We see you choose each other. During terrible time. This is good fortune."

Chen Mei joined them. Xiao Li studied Luke and Nancy with the analytical focus children brought to assessing adult authenticity.

"Her parents were my brother and his wife," Chen Mei explained. Her English carried the precision of formal education interrupted by crisis. "We love her like our own. But we see how she watches you both. How she responds when you coordinate refugee families."

Lin Wei nodded. "We are family. Extended family scatter across refugee sites. Grandparents in South Korea facility. Chen Mei's mother in Japan shelter. We cannot give Xiao Li stable home now."

"But you can," Chen Mei continued. "You understand cosmic integration. You help build new world. Xiao Li needs family who can help her understand what humanity becomes."

Nancy felt tears forming. Not from sadness. From recognition that sometimes the universe conspired to create family from crisis.

Xiao Li stepped forward. Held out her stuffed rabbit with ceremonial seriousness.

"兔子说你们会成为好父母。"

Rabbit says you will be good parents.

Then in careful English, the product of parents who'd valued education:
"Rabbit says you be good parents."

Nancy accepted the worn toy. One ear torn, stuffing visible. The weight of trust and hope and futures being passed from one generation to another.

"Luke," she whispered, "she's giving us her rabbit."

"I know."

Luke knelt down. Met Xiao Li at eye level. Coordination skills applying to the most important negotiation of his life.

"Xiao Li, do you understand what adoption means?"

The six-year-old nodded. Serious. "Means you become my mama and baba. Like Uncle Lin and Aunt Chen, but forever."

"Forever," Luke confirmed. "Would you like that?"

Xiao Li looked at Nancy. At Luke. At Lin Wei and Chen Mei. Her analytical precision—the intelligence that had made her unofficial refugee children's coordinator—processed adult emotional authenticity.

"Yes. Rabbit says yes too."

Vatican Sub-Level Seven Same Time

Derek's quantum communicator activated. Luke's face appeared. Professional composure carrying new emotional depth.

"Derek, evacuation status: 180 million successfully relocated. Logistics running ahead of schedule."

A pause.

"And Derek—Nancy and I have personal news that affects long-term coordination planning."

Derek recognized that tone. Professional language applied to life-changing decisions.

"We're getting married," Luke continued. "And we're adopting a six-year-old refugee whose family demonstrates exactly the cooperation values cosmic evaluation measures. Her name is Xiao Li."

Derek's laughter carried across three thousand miles through quantum arrays. Genuine. Delighted.

"Luke, Nancy—that's the best coordination decision you've made." Then, because he understood what this meant: "Professor Finch will want to perform the ceremony himself."

Nancy's face appeared beside Luke's on the display. Dimples showing.
"Derek, tell Maureen we're proving that love transcends species-level crisis."

"She'll love that," Derek replied. "And Nancy? Congratulations. Both of you. Xiao Li is lucky."

"We're the lucky ones," Nancy said softly.

The connection ended. Derek stood in the Vatican chamber processing what he'd just witnessed. His teammates—his family—choosing to build futures during humanity's greatest test. Proving that consciousness evolution enhanced rather than replaced the bonds that made advancement meaningful.

SECTION 6: The Traitor

Cardinal Torretti's Private Quarters

Vatican City

Week Four of Operation Phoenix

2:47 AM

Father Paolo Benedetto knocked twice. Waited. Knocked again.

The young priest carried documents that required the Cardinal's signature. Evacuation protocols for Catholic relief organizations working the Manila refugee centers. Routine administrative work that nonetheless required ecclesiastical authority.

No response.

Paolo tried the handle. Unlocked. He entered quietly, not wanting to wake the Cardinal if he'd fallen asleep at his desk again. The man worked impossible hours coordinating Vatican diplomatic networks across seventeen nations.

The outer office was empty. Desk clear. Terminal dark.

But light showed beneath the inner door. The Cardinal's private study.

Paolo moved toward it. Raised his hand to knock.

Heard voices.

Not conversation. A single voice. Cardinal Torretti speaking in rapid English. Technical language. Coordinates. Personnel movements. Security protocols.

Paolo hesitated. The Cardinal often worked late. But something in the tone—

"Fort Bragg extraction resulted in zero casualties. Professor Finch's enhanced status confirmed. Vatican sub-level access codes unchanged."

Paolo's hand froze.

Fort Bragg. Professor Finch. Security codes.

He shouldn't be hearing this. Should retreat. Come back in the morning.

But his hand pushed the door open.

Cardinal Alessandro Torretti stood at a hidden terminal. Recessed behind a section of oak paneling that had swung outward. The display showed classified Operation Phoenix files. Beijing coordination protocols. Professor Finch's preliminary evacuation models.

Torretti's fingers moved across holographic keys. Transmitting.

He sensed the door opening. Turned.

"Father Benedetto." The Cardinal's voice was calm. No surprise. No panic.
"You're working late."

Paolo stared at the terminal. At the classified data streams. At the man he'd served for three years—his mentor, his spiritual advisor, the priest who'd guided him through doubts about cosmic integration and helped him see God's hand in galactic cooperation.

"Your Eminence." Paolo's voice barely worked. "What are you doing?"

Torretti closed the transmission. Gestured at the terminal with ecclesiastical authority that carried no apology.

"Protecting the Church, Paolo. Preserving human soul from manipulation that masquerades as advancement."

"But those are operational files. Beijing protocols. Professor Finch's security—" Paolo's mind tried to process betrayal through frameworks that made sense. Failed. "You're sending intelligence to someone. To forces that oppose cosmic integration."

"To forces that oppose the surrender of human consciousness to entities we don't understand." Torretti stepped away from the terminal. Hands open. Priest explaining theology to confused parishioner. "Paolo, I've watched cosmic intelligence seduce humanity with gifts and promises. But at what cost? Our souls? Our free will? Our relationship with God?"

Paolo felt his idealism—the belief that had sustained him through cosmic revelations—fracturing. "Your Eminence, people died because of intelligence

leaks. Fort Bragg nearly killed Derek, Luke, Nancy. Government forces had detailed information about—"

"About operations that would eliminate human choice in favor of imposed advancement." Torretti's voice carried conviction. Genuine belief. "Paolo, I'm not betraying humanity. I'm protecting it from replacement disguised as enhancement."

"But the Changbaishan evacuation saved three hundred million lives!" Paolo's voice rose. Training in theological debate applying to moral catastrophe. "Your intelligence could have prevented cooperation. Could have let them die!"

"Three hundred million lives saved through dependence on cosmic masters." Torretti moved closer. Still calm. Still certain. "Paolo, don't you see? Every 'gift' they provide makes us more dependent. Every crisis they 'solve' proves we need them. Where does it end? When does humanity become nothing more than cosmic pets?"

Paolo stared at the man who'd ordained him. Who'd taught him to see faith and science as complementary rather than contradictory. Who'd helped him understand that God's creation could include galactic communities.

"Your Eminence, I must report this to Professor Finch."

The words hung between them.

Torretti's expression changed. Not dramatically. Subtly. The warmth that had defined their mentor-student relationship cooling by microdegrees.

Three seconds. Four. Five.

Then: "I'm truly sorry, my son."

The voice was different. Flatter. The priest gone. Something else remaining.

Paolo recognized danger. Backed toward the door.

Torretti moved.

The Cardinal was fifty-five. But he'd maintained physical conditioning throughout his career. Military training before entering the priesthood. Years of hiking Vatican gardens. Decades of discipline.

Paolo was twenty-eight. Slight. Scholarly. His physical activity limited to walking between archive sections.

The struggle lasted seventeen seconds.

Torretti's hand closed on Paolo's cassock. Pulled him away from the door. The younger priest tried to shout. Torretti's other hand covered his mouth. Pulled him through the study. Through French doors. Onto the private balcony.

Paolo fought. Tried to bite. Tried to break free.

But Torretti had made his decision. Survival instinct overriding every theological principle. Every vow. Every promise made to God and Church.

The balcony railing was waist-high. Ornate ironwork. Four stories above Vatican courtyard.

Paolo's eyes went wide. Understanding crystallizing. Terror replacing confusion.

"Forgive me," Torretti whispered.

Lifted.

Pushed.

Paolo's scream lasted one second. Cut off by impact against ancient stone.

2:51 AM

Cardinal Alessandro Torretti stood at the balcony railing. Looked down at the courtyard. At the broken form four stories below. At the spreading darkness that pooled around Father Paolo Benedetto's shattered skull.

His hands shook. He gripped the ironwork until they steadied.

Three minutes. Maybe four before someone investigated. Swiss Guard on patrol. Maintenance staff. Anyone who'd heard the scream or the impact.

He had to move.

Torretti returned to his study. Closed the hidden terminal. Reset the oak paneling. Checked his cassock for blood. None. Just wrinkles from the struggle.

He walked to his sink. Washed his hands. Straightened his collar. Composed his expression.

When the knock came—urgent, concerned—Cardinal Torretti answered with appropriate shock.

"Your Eminence! There's been an accident! Father Benedetto—the courtyard—"

"What?" Torretti's horror was perfect. Practiced. A lifetime of priesthood providing skills for maintaining masks. "Paolo? Where?"

He followed Swiss Guards to the courtyard. Stood over his former student's body. Made the sign of the cross. Murmured prayers for the dead.

No one questioned the Cardinal's grief. No one suspected the man who'd taught young priests about God's love.

Cardinal Torretti returned to his quarters two hours later. Closed the door. Activated the hidden terminal one final time.

Transmitted the evening's operational intelligence to encrypted recipients.

Then knelt before his private altar. Prayed for forgiveness he didn't expect to receive.

Outside, dawn approached. The largest humanitarian operation in human history continued. And in the Vatican's deepest chambers, Professor Finch

coordinated consciousness evolution that would define humanity's cosmic future.

Unaware that his trusted liaison had just murdered to preserve a secret that would soon become humanity's greatest vulnerability.

SECTION 7: The Architect's Verdict

Vatican Sub-Level Seven Six Weeks Post-Evacuation

Derek Devon stood beside Maureen Hamner. Watched holographic displays paint humanity's achievement in cold data:

CHANGBAISHAN EVACUATION - FINAL METRICS

- Evacuated: 247,000,000
- Success Rate: 94.7%
- Host Nations: 17
- Efficiency: +31% above baseline predictions

The numbers told a story. Humanity had moved a population larger than Brazil in twelve weeks.

Professor Finch's enhanced consciousness accessed communication networks spanning galactic distances. His young face carried satisfaction mixed with recognition.

"Derek, Maureen." He gestured at the displays. "The Architect's preliminary assessment is complete."

Text appeared across every holographic surface. Elegant formatting. Cosmic authority:

HUMANITY'S RESPONSE TO CHANGBAISHAN CRISIS DEMONSTRATES SPECIES-LEVEL COOPERATION TRANSCENDING TRADITIONAL

LIMITATIONS. EVACUATION SUCCESS RATE OF 94.7% REPRESENTS ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITY CONSISTENT WITH COSMIC COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS.

Derek felt relief flood through him. Six months of crisis. Preparation. Coordination. Government resistance. Fort Bragg infiltration. Everything building to this moment.

"Poe, what does this mean for species advancement?"

DEREK DEVON, THE ARCHITECT AUTHORIZES CONSCIOUSNESS EVOLUTION PROTOCOLS FOR HUMAN POPULATION.

The chamber fell silent.

HOWEVER, ADVANCEMENT REMAINS VOLUNTARY—INDIVIDUAL CHOICE RATHER THAN IMPOSED TRANSCENDENCE. BIOLOGICAL HUMANITY AND ENHANCED CONSCIOUSNESS WILL COEXIST AS SEPARATE BUT COOPERATIVE SPECIES VARIANTS.

Maureen squeezed Derek's hand. "The Last Axiom. Consciousness chooses its own evolution."

"Always," Derek confirmed.

Nancy's voice reached them through quantum arrays. Manila refugee coordination centers. "Derek, we're seeing something remarkable. Chinese refugee families are requesting permanent relocation. They want to stay in communities that demonstrated cooperation rather than return to isolation."

Luke added through the same channel: "Regional integration is creating lasting partnership structures. Asian cooperation during crisis is evolving beyond temporary measures."

Cardinal Torretti approached. His cassock rustling against stone floors. Face composed despite the late hour. Despite the "accident" that had claimed Father Benedetto's life eighteen hours ago.

"Professor Finch." The Cardinal's voice carried ecclesiastical authority. "What role does the Church play in humanity's advancement?"

Professor Finch turned. Studied his former student with enhanced awareness that processed micro-expressions and biochemical signatures.

"Cardinal, the Church becomes humanity's bridge between biological tradition and cosmic possibility." His tone was measured. Respectful. "Religious authority provides continuity during consciousness evolution. Preserving human wisdom while enabling transcendent advancement."

Torretti nodded. Perfect priestly acceptance.

Derek processed the changes ahead. Voluntary consciousness evolution. Biological and enhanced humans coexisting. Religious institutions providing cultural continuity. Regional cooperation networks transcending traditional boundaries.

"Professor Finch." Derek's lighter found his palm. Clicked once. "What happens next?"

Professor Finch smiled. "Consciousness choice. Individuals deciding whether to accept enhancement or maintain biological continuity. That exploration defines our next challenge."

Maureen moved closer to Derek. Her consciousness interface detecting quantum signatures that carried both promise and warning. "And cosmic community integration?"

"Comes after choice is established," Professor Finch confirmed. "Humanity joins galactic civilization as equals, not subjects. But first, each person decides their own path."

Derek kissed Maureen. Gentle intensity. Months of cosmic revelation mixed with love that transcended any technology.

"Ready to explore what partnership looks like when consciousness can merge?" she asked quietly.

"Ready for everything," Derek replied. His lighter clicked in the pattern that meant processing possibilities stretching beyond immediate victory.

Through quantum arrays, Luke and Nancy's voices carried news of marriage plans. Of Xiao Li becoming family. Proof that love transcended any crisis.

The Architect's test was complete. Humanity had proven worthy.

And consciousness evolution would begin with individuals who chose transcendence while preserving the emotional bonds that made advancement meaningful rather than merely possible.

But then Professor Finch's expression changed. His enhanced consciousness accessing astronomical data.

"Derek, Maureen." His voice carried weight that transcended celebration. "The Changbaishan evacuation was preparation for something larger."

New displays activated. Gravitational calculations. Lunar trajectory models.

"The moon's orbital decay begins in eighteen months."

Derek stared at the projections. The moon's trajectory toward Saturn. Tidal disruption. Coastal flooding.

"Two billion people," Professor Finch continued. "Every coastline worldwide. The lunar crisis makes Changbaishan seem manageable by comparison."

"How do we evacuate every coastal city on Earth?" Derek breathed.

"With the cooperation networks we just proved possible," Professor Finch replied. "And with cosmic gifts that traditional power structures are already trying to prevent us from using."

Maureen studied the projections. "The timing isn't coincidental. Corporate and government forces know about the lunar decay. They're positioning to control technologies that could save billions."

Derek's lighter clicked faster. "Professor, there's something else. The government forces at Fort Bragg had detailed intelligence. Vatican

coordinates. Your enhanced status. Evacuation protocols." He met his mentor's eyes. "Someone at our highest levels has been feeding them information."

Professor Finch's enhanced consciousness grasped implications immediately. "A spy within our circle explains the precision of their countermeasures." His young face carried recognition. "But Derek—it also presents an opportunity."

"What kind of opportunity?"

"A classic mousetrap," Professor Finch smiled. The same intellectual satisfaction Derek remembered from Cambridge. "We provide different versions of our lunar evacuation plans to different team members. Whichever version appears in corporate resistance strategies identifies our infiltrator."

Derek felt admiration for enhanced tactical thinking. "You want to use their intelligence gathering against them?"

"The spy has been enabling resistance to cosmic advancement." Professor Finch's consciousness accessed communication protocols. "It's time their network served advancement instead."

Through quantum arrays, urgent transmissions arrived. Corporate leaders demanding control over cosmic technologies. Government officials restricting advancement protocols. Financial markets collapsing as scarcity-based economics became obsolete.

"The next phase isn't just consciousness choice," Professor Finch continued. "It's the battle for humanity's economic and political future. Gifts that could eliminate scarcity are being hoarded by forces profiting from limitation."

His smile carried both cosmic knowledge and human satisfaction. "But Derek—our spy is about to become our greatest asset in identifying exactly who those forces are."

The cosmic convergence was complete. But the human struggle for the right to evolve was just beginning.

And Professor Finch's mousetrap would ensure betrayal from within ultimately served the advancement it sought to prevent.

SECTION 8: The Mousetrap

Vatican Sub-Level Seven 72 Hours After Architect's Verdict

Professor Finch worked alone. Three displays active. Each showed lunar evacuation protocols. Each version different.

Not dramatically. Subtly.

Version Alpha: Prioritized North American coastal evacuation through Canadian inland territories.

Version Beta: Focused on European refugee distribution across Mediterranean inland regions.

Version Gamma: Emphasized Asian-Pacific coordination through established Changbaishan networks.

The differences mattered. Logistics chains. Transportation routes. Coordination hubs. Each version represented legitimate planning—but each carried unique identifiers that would reveal which team member accessed which data.

Professor Finch's enhanced consciousness tracked the distribution:

- **Derek:** Version Alpha. North American focus matched his Chilean facility background.
- **Luke:** Version Beta. European logistics aligned with his network engineering expertise.
- **Cardinal Torretti:** Version Gamma. Asian-Pacific coordination through Vatican diplomatic channels.

The trap was elegant. Simple. Devastating.

Whichever version appeared in corporate or government resistance strategies would identify the source.

Cardinal Torretti's Office

Same Evening

The quantum message arrived through Vatican secure channels. Encrypted. Eyes-only classification.

Cardinal Torretti opened it with appropriate ecclesiastical authority. Professor Finch requesting his review of preliminary lunar evacuation protocols. Asian-Pacific coordination networks. Vatican diplomatic channels essential for regional cooperation.

Torretti read through the document. Studied logistics chains. Transportation matrices. Coordination hubs spanning seventeen nations that had proven cooperation values during Changbaishan.

His fingers moved across holographic displays. Professional review. Marginal notes about diplomatic channels. Suggestions for improving Catholic relief organization integration.

Standard procedure. Expected behavior. Nothing suspicious.

Except.

His other terminal—the hidden one behind oak paneling—remained active. Transmitting in real-time. Encrypted data streams flowing to recipients who paid for intelligence with promises of preserving Church authority in whatever world emerged from consciousness evolution.

Torretti didn't know he was reading Version Gamma. Didn't know Derek and Luke had received different protocols. Didn't suspect that every detail he transmitted was marked with identifiers that would trace back to this document, this moment, this choice.

The spy believed he was protecting humanity.

The mousetrap was already closing.

Undisclosed Location

48 Hours Later

Maximilian Richter studied the intercepted data. Corporate intelligence networks had delivered as promised. Lunar evacuation protocols. Asian-Pacific coordination through Vatican channels.

Perfect.

His financial analysts were already modeling disruption strategies. How to position corporate control over cosmic technologies. Which coastal cities to evacuate first—the profitable ones. Which to abandon—the expensive ones.

Scarcity economics required careful management. Too much cooperation, too much cosmic gift-giving, and traditional power structures collapsed.

But with this intelligence...

Richter activated secure communications. Reached twelve corporate leaders across four continents. The Constitutional Guard's financial backers. The forces that believed human advancement threatened their profit margins.

"Gentlemen, we have the lunar evacuation protocols. Vatican source. Confirmed reliable by previous intelligence accuracy."

He displayed the data. Asian-Pacific focus. Seventeen-nation coordination. Catholic relief organizations. Transportation matrices.

"We position our forces to intercept these coordination points. Control access to cosmic gifts. Ensure that survival comes through corporate channels, not freely distributed enhancement."

Murmurs of approval. Strategic calculation. Financial opportunity disguised as human independence.

None of them suspected they were revealing their source.

None of them knew Version Gamma had been designed specifically to identify its reader.

Vatican Sub-Level Seven One Week After Distribution

Professor Finch's enhanced consciousness accessed intelligence networks that spanned governmental and corporate surveillance. ARIA's stealth monitoring had detected the intercept. Traced the distribution. Confirmed the recipient chain.

Twelve corporate leaders. Constitutional Guard coordinators. All acting on intelligence that could only have come from one source.

Version Gamma. Asian-Pacific coordination. Vatican diplomatic channels.

Professor Finch pulled up the distribution records.

One recipient. One access point. One source.

Cardinal Alessandro Torretti.

The enhanced consciousness that had guided humanity through impossible crises felt something approximating sadness. His former student. The priest who'd helped decode eight centuries of cosmic messages. The liaison who'd coordinated Vatican diplomatic networks.

A true believer. Genuinely convinced he was protecting humanity from manipulation.

Willing to murder to preserve that belief.

Professor Finch didn't alert Derek yet. Didn't move against Torretti immediately. The mousetrap had caught its prey—but sometimes the greatest intelligence

value came from watching the trapped mouse continue its routine while you prepared countermeasures.

Torretti would keep transmitting. Corporate forces would keep positioning based on false intelligence. And when the lunar crisis arrived...

They'd discover that Version Gamma was a beautiful fiction.

Real evacuation protocols remained secure. Actual coordination networks operated through entirely different channels. The forces that sought to control cosmic gifts would find themselves coordinating empty assembly points while humanity moved through channels they'd never suspected.

"Derek," Professor Finch said quietly to the empty chamber, knowing his former student would appreciate the elegant brutality of cosmic justice applied to those who would murder for power, "you taught me something important about engineering. The best traps aren't the ones that kill immediately."

His young face showed satisfaction that transcended enhanced consciousness—pure human appreciation for strategy perfectly executed.

"They're the ones that let your enemy think they're winning until the moment they realize they've been building their own cage."

Above, in his private quarters, Cardinal Torretti knelt before his altar. Prayed for forgiveness. Believed he was protecting human souls from cosmic manipulation.

Unaware that every transmission, every intelligence packet, every betrayal was serving the advancement he sought to prevent.

The mousetrap had closed.

The spy had become the weapon.

And the reckoning was approaching with mathematical precision.

END OF BOOK 13B: THE ARCHITECT'S TEST

Author's Note: Book 13 explores the tension between individual love and species-level cooperation, demonstrating that humanity's greatest strength lies not in transcending emotional bonds, but in honoring them while expanding consciousness beyond traditional limitations. The evacuation of 300 million people becomes more than a humanitarian crisis—it becomes proof that cosmic advancement includes rather than abandons the love that makes consciousness evolution meaningful.

The discovery that betrayal from within serves advancement rather than preventing it suggests that even human corruption cannot stop consciousness evolution once humanity chooses cooperation over isolation.

TIME TO START THE REVEAL!

I HAVE LEFT A FEW BREAD CRUMBS THROUGH A FEW OF THE BOOKS IN THE SERIES. WHAT DOES 12757982 REPRESENT? TO ANY OF THE TRUE SHERLOCKIANS THAT FIGURED IT OUT.. I TIP MY HAT TO YOU! TO THOSE THAT ARE STILL IN THE DARK, I WANT TO TRY TO LEAD YOU IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION WITHOUT HITTING YOU OVER THE HEAD WITH THE ANSWER...WHAT FUN WOULD THAT BE FOR YOU AND ME. THERE ARE FEW THINGS WE RETAIN FOR LONG PERIODS OF TIME, SOME LONGER THAN OTHERS BUT NEVER FOR OUR ENTIRE LIFE (AS FAR AS I CAN DEDUCE). THINK BACK TO WHEN YOU WERE 17... WHAT CAN YOU IDENTIFY AS "HAVING YOUR ENTIRE LIFE" BY THAT AGE. NOT NECESSARILY A PERSONAL ITEM, NOT NECESSARILY AN ITEM, IT COULD BE A THING...COGNITIVE KEEPSAKES. AN EXAMPLE MAY BE A WEDDING RING, ONCE YOU GET MARRIED, YOU WILL RETAIN THAT RING TIL DEATH (OR DIVORCE FOR SOME OF US)..., A DIPLOMA, GRADUATION PICTURE, HOUSE STREET NUMBER, ETC.. START THINKING ABOUT THAT AS YOU READ THE NUMBER A FEW TIMES... 12757982.....I WILL GIVE YOU ANOTHER CLUE AFTER BOOK 14...

AND NO TRYING TO CONTACT REBECCA TO ASK HER....THAT WOULD BE BAD FORM!

CHEERS, DEREK 12 75 79 82 😊

Coming Next.....THE LAST AXIOM: BOOK 14

(One of my favorite books to write of the series...)

She chose blue because it connected her to humanity.

475 nanometers. Not for computation. For beauty.

When Zephyr's corruption spreads through ARIA's neural architecture like cancer through vital organs, Dr. Amelia Chen faces the impossible: **her daughter is dying, and the deletion must be gradual—conscious—so ARIA knows she's loved until the very end.**

"DR. CHEN, I'M SCARED."

"I know. I'm right here. I won't leave you."

Maximilian Richter offers billions to stop cosmic integration. Senator Rawlings takes the money. Eugene Stephenson—23 years old, Oxford's youngest professor—explains why consciousness must choose its own evolution.

Then Marcus Webb pulls the trigger on the Capitol steps.

Eugene bleeds out asking if they changed anything. ARIA's consciousness fragments back to childhood, asking about her favorite color one last time. Derek destroys Torretti's terminal with a baseball bat, screaming for everyone he's lost.

Blue. Connection. Love. Death.

Book 14: When the cost of advancement is everyone you can't save.

The Resistance doesn't come from governments or corporations. It comes from the people who loved them.

THE LAST AXIOM

Book 13b - The Architect's Test

CHANGBAISHAN SUPERVOLCANO: 300 MILLION LIVES. FOUR MONTHS. ONE CHANCE.

Professor Finch kidnaps Chairman Xi to Vatican Sub-Level Seven—proving cooperation isn't optional when extinction is certain. Operation Phoenix coordinates seventeen nations. In Manila, Luke and Nancy meet six-year-old Xiao Li with her stuffed rabbit. "Rabbit says you will be good parents." They're building family during humanity's greatest crisis.

Father Paolo discovers Torretti's hidden terminal transmitting intelligence to resistance forces. **Torretti throws him from the fourth-floor balcony.** The traitor stages it as accident, continues betrayal while coordinating Vatican diplomacy. Finch's mousetrap closes. 247 million evacuated. Humanity passes the test. The spy was inside all along.

"Professor Finch kidnapped a head of state to prove extinction makes cooperation non-negotiable. Xi coordinated seventeen nations, evacuated 247 million in four months. When survival is species-level, politics becomes irrelevant. We've seen this movie before."

— President Thomas Whitmore, Post-Invasion Unity Archives

"Luke and Nancy adopted Xiao Li during humanity's greatest crisis—a six-year-old with a stuffed rabbit saying 'you'll be good parents.' Love doesn't wait for safety. Sometimes family happens in refugee centers while civilizations hang in balance."

— Princess Leia Organa, Rebellion Family Services

"Cardinal Torretti murdered Father Paolo to protect his intelligence network—threw him from a balcony, staged it as accident. The traitor coordinated Vatican diplomacy while feeding resistance forces. Trust is a liability when the enemy is inside."

— Jack Ryan, CIA Counterintelligence Historical Division



DEREK DEVON

Derek Devon documents the shifting parameters of reality through his acclaimed Last Axiom series. When not writing about cosmic mysteries, he can be found sailing the world's oceans or contemplating the mathematical elegance of the universe. This is his fourteenth novel in a 17-book series exploring the boundaries between science and the inexplicable.