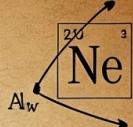


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# THE LAST AXIOM

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DEREK DEVON



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# The Constants

Book 4 of "The Last Axiom" Series

*By Derek Devon*

**A 30 - Minute Cosmic Experience**  
**Reality Modification Level: Integrated**

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## First Section - "Physics, Friendship, and Other Failing Systems"

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Patrick "Rod" Alpaugh had measured the thirteenth green at Riverside Golf Club with the obsessive precision of a man whose world depended on predictable mathematics. Forty-seven measurements over six months—each slope calculation verified, every grain pattern mapped, wind conditions catalogued like weather data. Two-degree slope running northwest to southeast, grass grain flowing perpendicular like microscopic rivers beneath the surface. Optimal green speed holding steady at 10.2 on the stimpmeter, a number he trusted more than his own pulse.

From his current position, the six-foot putt should break exactly 1.3 inches to the left before finding the cup with mathematical certainty.

Instead, for seven consecutive days, the ball had rolled straight as a surveyor's line and stopped eighteen inches past the hole with what could only be described as deliberate mockery.

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"Son of a—" Rod caught himself mid-curse, scanning the empty golf course that stretched around him like a green ocean under Colorado's afternoon sun. At sixty, with fifty-one years of golf carved into his muscle memory, he'd never encountered a putt that violated physics with such cheerful persistence. More troubling still—he'd never desperately needed a simple six-footer to cooperate this badly.

The divorce papers rustled in his golf bag like autumn leaves, their legal finality a constant reminder of yesterday's signatures. Twenty-six years of marriage reduced to asset division and custody schedules, all because Sue couldn't tolerate what she'd called his "obsessive need to quantify everything."

"You treat our marriage like an engineering project, Rod," her words echoed in his memory with painful clarity. "Some problems can't be solved with spreadsheets and formulas."

Well, apparently some putts couldn't be solved with physics either.

*Under pressure... pushing down on me, pressing down on you...*

Rod froze mid-backswing, his putter suspended like a conductor's baton. Where the hell had that Queen lyric materialized from? He was strictly a Rick Astley devotee—had been since college, much to his friends' endless amusement and occasional horror.

"Focus," he commanded himself, realigning the putt with engineering precision for the forty-eighth time. "Ball follows gravity. Gravity follows mathematical principles. Mathematics doesn't lie."

He struck with mechanical perfection. The ball rolled in a perfectly straight line, stopped exactly eighteen inches past the hole, and somehow projected an aura of satisfaction that made Rod consider having a stern conversation with Isaac Newton's ghost.

"This is impossible," Rod informed his golf ball, which remained supremely unbothered by accusations of physical impossibility.

Rod's phone buzzed against his hip, the vibration cutting through his contemplation of physics-defying golf equipment. Duke's text message appeared with typical urgency: *Emergency meeting. Brewhouse. Something weird is happening.*

Rod glanced at his golf ball, still sitting eighteen inches past the hole in blatant defiance of Newton's fundamental laws. "You have no idea, my friend."

Twenty minutes earlier, across town, Jeff "Duke" Lukas had experienced what he was already thinking of as The Great Coffee Shop Catastrophe of his otherwise charming life. Duke had always prided himself on reading people like sheet music—every subtle note, every meaningful pause, every delicate harmony that revealed whether someone was leaning in with interest or pulling away in polite retreat. At sixty-two, his silver-haired distinction and natural charisma had carried him through a successful sales career, a surprisingly enjoyable decade of post-divorce bachelor adventures, and countless social situations where knowing exactly what to say opened doors that remained permanently closed to less intuitive souls.

Which made this morning's linguistic disaster all the more devastating to his professional pride.

"I like your... hammer time... coffee choice," he'd announced to the attractive barista, his signature confident head-tilt somehow triggering a catastrophic malfunction in his usually reliable brain. "Very... can't touch this... sophisticated blend selection."

The poor woman had stared at him with the expression typically reserved for people suffering minor strokes or major personality

disorders—which, Duke reflected with growing horror, might not have been entirely inaccurate.

Now he sat in his pristine sedan outside the Brewhouse, practicing normal human conversation in his rearview mirror like an actor preparing for the performance of his life.

"Hi, how are you today?" Pause for careful self-analysis. Excellent. No trace of MC Hammer contamination.

"Beautiful weather we're having, isn't it?" Still operating in linguistically safe territory.

"Would you like to have dinner sometime? *Ice ice baby...*"

"Damn it to hell!" Duke's palm struck his steering wheel with enough force to trigger an indignant honk from his car's horn, the sound echoing through the Brewhouse parking lot like mechanical protest against his linguistic catastrophe. This musical possession was escalating from embarrassing into genuinely alarming territory that threatened to destroy his carefully cultivated reputation as someone who actually knew what words meant.

Yesterday had featured unwanted Air Supply lyrics infiltrating a crucial client presentation—he'd somehow incorporated "sweet dreams" into a serious discussion about quarterly revenue projections, causing his potential client to stare at him with the expression typically reserved for people experiencing public mental breakdowns. Tuesday brought the absolute nightmare of unconsciously weaving "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" into a professional conversation with Herbert, his seventy-year-old accountant who approached life with the enthusiasm of someone auditing suspicious tax deductions for the Internal Revenue Service.

His phone's urgent ring provided blessed interruption from his spiral of mortification. Rod's name glowed on the caller ID like a lighthouse beacon cutting through dense fog.

"Duke, where are you?" Rod's voice carried the strained patience of someone whose universe had recently abandoned all pretense of logical behavior. "I'm heading to the Brewhouse now, and Scrott's already there documenting whatever cosmic practical joke is being systematically played on us."

"I'm in the parking lot practicing normal human conversation," Duke replied with the hollow dignity of someone whose legendary social skills had been systematically sabotaged by forces beyond mortal comprehension. "Apparently I can't even ask someone about dinner plans without unconsciously channeling Vanilla Ice. Rod, this is getting genuinely terrifying."

"Duke, we need to compare notes," Rod said, his engineering mind recognizing patterns that suggested their individual impossibilities might be connected. "Something's happening to all of us, and I think it's bigger than malfunctioning putts and involuntary MC Hammer references."

"You're experiencing weird stuff too?" Duke asked, relief evident in his voice as he realized he might not be suffering a complete psychological breakdown in isolation.

"My golf ball has been defying basic physics for a week," Rod confirmed. "Today it rolled straight past a hole it should have curved into. Forty-seven times. The mathematics don't lie, but apparently gravity has started taking creative liberties with Newton's fundamental laws."

"At least golf balls can't embarrass you in front of attractive women," Duke replied. "I'm afraid to speak to anyone under fifty for fear of accidentally proposing marriage in rap lyrics."

"Come inside," Rod said. "Scrott's got theories, and I suspect you're going to want to hear them. Plus, maybe if we pool our impossibilities, we can figure out what's systematically rewriting the rules of reality."

Inside the Brewhouse, Scott "Scrott" MacDonald had covered seventeen notebook pages with observations that would've seemed like elaborate conspiracy theories to casual observers. But Rod and Duke had learned years ago that Scrott's artistic mind detected patterns in chaos the way other people recognized familiar faces—an intuitive gift that had made him a sought-after session musician before life convinced him that predictable paychecks were more sensible than creative uncertainty.

"What's he documenting?" Duke called out as he spotted Scrott's concentrated form through the window.

"Everything," Scrott's voice came from inside the establishment. "He's got charts, Duke. Color-coded charts with cross-references and what appears to be a comprehensive timeline of impossible events."

Rod pushed through the Brewhouse's heavy wooden door, the familiar scent of craft beer and friendly conversation providing welcome normalcy after his morning of physics-defying golf equipment. "Scrott, please tell me you've discovered a logical explanation for why reality seems to be malfunctioning on multiple fronts."

"Define logical," Scrott replied without looking up from his meticulous documentation. "But I've definitely discovered patterns. Sit down, both of you, and prepare to have your remaining faith in causality systematically challenged."

Duke settled into his customary chair with the careful movements of someone whose confidence had been recently undermined by involuntary musical references. "Scrott, please tell me this isn't going to be one of your elaborate theories about how everything connects to ancient alien interference in human cultural development."

"Worse," Scrott said with grim satisfaction. "It's a theory about how something is currently interfering with human consciousness through pop culture integration. Rod, you mentioned Queen lyrics appearing in your thoughts?"

"Just the one," Rod confirmed. "Under pressure. Which seemed oddly appropriate given my circumstances, but I genuinely don't listen to Queen. I'm more of a Rick Astley enthusiast."

Scrott flipped to a fresh page in his observation journal with the methodical precision of someone building a comprehensive case. "That's exactly what I'm trying to understand. But Rod, it's definitely not just Duke's MC Hammer disaster. Listen to this."

He retrieved his phone and activated a recorded conversation. A woman's voice, professional and crisp: "The quarterly reports show excellent—like a virgin—growth in our overseas markets. We should consider—touched for the very first time—expanding our European operations into previously unexplored territories."

The three friends sat in stunned silence as the implications settled around them like uncomfortable revelations.

"Please tell me she was discussing olive oil imports," Duke said with diminishing hope.

"Financial services," Scrott confirmed with scientific detachment. "International investment portfolio management. And she had

absolutely no awareness that she was quoting Madonna with perfect lyrical accuracy. When I approached her afterward to inquire about the musical references, she stared at me like I was suffering from auditory hallucinations."

Rod felt his engineering mind engaging automatically, the way it always did when confronted with problems that demanded systematic analysis and logical solutions. "Scrott, what's the demographic distribution? Age ranges, gender patterns, geographical location data?"

"That's where it gets genuinely fascinating," Scrott replied, consulting his color-coded charts with the enthusiasm of someone whose artistic training had finally found its most important application. "Cross-generational. Both genders. International scope based on preliminary research. A corporate executive in Tokyo unconsciously incorporated Duran Duran lyrics into a board meeting about quarterly expansion strategies. A grandmother in Manitoba worked 'Material Girl' into a conversation with her priest about church fundraising approaches."

"You're documenting this systematically?" Duke asked, his business instincts recognizing the value of comprehensive data collection.

"With scientific rigor that would impress university researchers," Scrott confirmed. "Including a construction worker in Phoenix who delivered his entire safety briefing to the tune of 'We Built This City,' a coffee shop customer in Seattle who ordered her 'sweet dreams' latte with 'are made of this' foam art, and a merger negotiation where a senior partner successfully closed a multimillion-dollar deal by unconsciously integrating 'Money for Nothing' lyrics into his presentation."

Rod found himself laughing despite everything—the stress of impossible putts, his dissolving marriage, and the apparent systematic

breakdown of reality finding release in pure absurdity. "Did he successfully close the merger deal?"

"Apparently so," Scrott confirmed with scientific detachment. "His colleagues interpreted the musical interjections as some kind of advanced psychological negotiation technique designed to keep opponents mentally off-balance during critical discussions."

They ordered craft beers from the Brewhouse's impressive selection, and for a moment the atmosphere felt like any other afternoon gathering—three longtime friends sharing stories and solving the world's problems one conversation at a time. Except today they were apparently attempting to solve problems that shouldn't exist according to fundamental physical laws.

"So," Duke said, raising his beer in a mock toast, "we've got gravity that doesn't function properly, charm that systematically backfires, and people unconsciously transforming into human jukeboxes. Anyone want to venture a guess about what's causing this coordinated impossibility?"

*We are the world, we are the children...*

The thought struck all three of them simultaneously, arriving with the clarity of shared revelation rather than individual memory. They stared at each other across their beer glasses, the implications settling around them like pieces of a cosmic puzzle finally clicking into place.

"Did we all just think the same lyric at exactly the same moment?" Rod asked with the careful precision of someone who suspected the answer might challenge everything he understood about individual consciousness.

"We Are the World," Duke confirmed, his voice carrying equal measures of wonder and growing alarm. "All three of us. Simultaneously."

Scrott was already making rapid notes, his documentation instincts engaged with phenomena that belonged in peer-reviewed journals about consciousness research. "Gentlemen, I believe we've just experienced our first confirmed incident of shared musical intrusion. This suggests whatever's causing these phenomena isn't just affecting individual minds—it's creating connections between consciousness that extend far beyond normal friendship."

The Brewhouse's sound system crackled to life with unexpected music, filling their corner booth with perfectly timed examples that seemed designed to illustrate Scrott's point. A jogger had unconsciously hummed the entire 'Jeopardy' theme while crossing at a downtown intersection, apparently unaware that his musical choices were being broadcast to anyone within hearing distance. A dog walker had somehow worked 'Who Let the Dogs Out' into a completely serious conversation with another pet owner about responsible leash protocols and waste management policies.

"The common thread appears to be contextual relevance," Rod observed, his analytical mind engaging with systematic pattern recognition. "The songs relate directly to what people are actually doing or thinking about. It's not random musical chaos—it's purposeful soundtrack integration."

"Like someone or something is providing a carefully curated soundtrack to people's daily lives," Duke agreed with growing fascination. "The question that's keeping me awake at night is: who's serving as our mysterious cosmic DJ?"

As if responding directly to his question with perfect comedic timing, the Brewhouse's audio system crackled to life with "Don't Stop Believin'"—despite the fact that, as they would later discover during their investigation, the radio had been unplugged for maintenance throughout the entire afternoon.

"Well," Scrott said, making a final notation in his comprehensive journal, "at least our mysterious DJ demonstrates genuinely decent taste in classic rock selections."

"Tomorrow," Rod announced with the decisive tone he'd once reserved for important engineering project deadlines, "we start documenting this properly with scientific methodology. If something's systematically rewriting the fundamental laws of physics, we're going to figure out what it is and how it operates."

"And more importantly," Duke added with characteristic pragmatism, "we're going to figure out how to make it stop before I accidentally propose marriage in Klingon or inadvertently declare my love using Backstreet Boys lyrics."

*Don't you forget about me...*

This time the shared musical intrusion felt distinctly different—less like unwanted mental invasion and more like a gentle promise, or perhaps a cosmic reminder that whatever was happening to them, they weren't facing these impossible challenges alone.

As they prepared to leave their familiar sanctuary, none of them noticed how their natural laughter seemed to harmonize perfectly with the mysterious music still emanating from the unplugged radio system, or how their fifteen-year friendship had somehow begun resonating with frequencies that existed far beyond the normal range of human

experience and stretched into realms that connected consciousness across vast distances.

But something vast and patient and genuinely fascinated by human potential was definitely noticing them, cataloging their responses with cosmic attention to detail, and preparing to make contact in ways that would fundamentally transform their understanding of what friendship could become when enhanced by universal perspective.

The constants were changing, but the best parts of being human—loyalty, humor, the willingness to face impossible things together—remained beautifully constant.

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## **Section 2: "Scientific Method Meets Cosmic Comedy"**

Dawn transformed Riverside Golf Club into Rod's personal physics laboratory, morning mist rising from perfectly manicured fairways like steam from some cosmic experiment awaiting results. He'd arrived before sunrise with enough precision measuring equipment to survey a small asteroid—professional-grade inclinometer borrowed from a surveying colleague, laser rangefinder accurate to microscopic tolerances, and a digital level that had cost more than most people's monthly mortgage payments. If the fundamental laws of physics were systematically malfunctioning, he intended to document exactly how they were failing—and possibly compose a strongly worded letter to Isaac Newton's ghost.

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"This feels like massive overkill," Duke observed, watching Rod calibrate instruments with the methodical intensity of someone preparing to launch a space mission rather than analyze problematic putts.

"Science demands absolute precision," Rod replied, adjusting his tripod-mounted laser with surgical care. "If gravity is rewriting its own operational manual, we need bulletproof measurements to document the rebellion. Besides, after yesterday's Brewhouse revelations about widespread reality dysfunction, I desperately need something that operates according to predictable laws."

"Speaking of unpredictable phenomena," Scrott said, settling onto a nearby bench with his ever-present observation journal, "I documented twelve additional incidents during my drive here this morning. Including a Starbucks customer who unconsciously ordered her 'smooth criminal' latte with 'billie jean' foam art—completely without awareness of the musical integration."

Duke's eyebrows climbed toward his hairline with familiar alarm. "Please tell me you're fabricating that example for dramatic effect."

"She tipped the barista and cheerfully declared 'just beat it,'" Scrott confirmed with the matter-of-fact tone of someone recording daily miracles. "The barista didn't even register the strangeness. I think he assumed she was having an intentional Michael Jackson tribute morning."

Rod completed his elaborate scientific setup and positioned a fresh ball at the now-infamous testing location—site of forty-seven previous attempts that had systematically challenged his faith in universal constants. "Baseline measurements confirmed and locked. Green speed holding steady at 10.2 on the stimpmeter. Slope calculating at

2.4 degrees downhill with 1.8-degree break toward the target. Wind conditions negligible. If I execute this putt with precisely 4.2 feet per second velocity..."

Rod executed the stroke with textbook precision, his putter following a perfect mechanical arc that would have impressed any golf instructor. The ball rolled in an absolutely straight line, stopped exactly eighteen inches past the hole, and somehow managed to look smugly satisfied with its act of physical rebellion.

"That's scientifically impossible," Duke stated with the flat certainty of someone watching the laws of nature file for divorce.

"Unless gravity has developed a wicked sense of humor," Scrott observed, scribbling furiously in his observation journal. "Rod, try putting to a completely different hole."

"Maybe it's not the yips anymore," Duke added with growing fascination. "Maybe it's the quips—the universe making jokes at your expense, one impossible putt at a time."

"Hilarious," Rod replied dryly, gathering his ball and precision instruments. He relocated to a section of green with no discernible slope, placed the ball on what his digital level confirmed was perfectly flat ground, and executed another textbook putt. The ball rolled in a laser-straight line for exactly six feet before stopping abruptly, as if it had collided with an invisible wall that existed only in its own personal physics textbook.

"The distance remains mathematically consistent," Rod noted, his engineering mind compulsively cataloging the impossibility. "But it's completely ignoring the green's actual topography. It's behaving as if it's rolling across a perfectly flat surface regardless of reality's inconvenient hills and valleys."

*Under pressure... pushing down on me, pressing down on you...*

"There it is again," Rod muttered, his frustration mounting. "Why Queen? I don't even like Queen. I'm more of a Rick Astley guy."

"Maybe the universe is trying to communicate something profound," Duke suggested, his voice carrying the careful tone of someone offering philosophical consolation to an increasingly agitated engineer. "You know—pressure, stress, impossible putts that systematically defy the fundamental laws of physics..."

"Or maybe the universe has absolutely terrible taste in music," Rod replied, already positioning another ball with the stubborn determination of someone who refused to let reality win without a proper scientific fight.

But as he lined up his next shot, all three friends noticed something that made their previous impossibilities seem almost mundane by comparison: Rod's shadow on the green wasn't matching his actual position. While Rod stood directly over the ball, his shadow appeared to be putting from three feet to the left, moving in perfect synchronization with his actions but from a completely different location.

"Okay," Scrott said with admirable composure, carefully documenting what defied documentation. "I'm officially adding 'shared hallucinations with specific 80s music video themes' to my research findings. Anyone want to predict what's next? Duran Duran perhaps? Maybe some Peter Gabriel?"

As if directly summoned by his words, the morning air around their golf course position began to ripple and fold with purposeful energy, creating impossible geometric patterns that looked distinctly like the "Sledgehammer" video—all clay animation, surreal transformations,

and imagery that belonged in art galleries rather than Colorado golf courses.

"I take that back immediately," Scrott said with sudden urgency, his musician's instincts recognizing dangerous aesthetic territory. "Peter Gabriel is perfectly acceptable, but absolutely no Sledgehammer sequences. That video disturbed me on multiple psychological levels."

The rippling stopped instantly, replaced by something that resembled "Rio"—all tropical colors, beautiful impossibility, and visual poetry that somehow made the golf course feel like an exotic vacation destination designed by cosmic artists.

"Much better," Scrott approved with genuine gratitude. "Thank you, mysterious 80s-obsessed cosmic intelligence."

Duke stared at the shifting patterns with the expression of someone whose reality had just been redecorated by a particularly sophisticated alien interior designer. "Did... did it just respond directly to Scrott's specific aesthetic preferences?"

"I believe it did," Rod said, his analytical mind struggling to process phenomena that belonged more in music videos than physics textbooks. "Which raises some genuinely fascinating questions about the intelligence level and responsiveness of whatever's orchestrating these manifestations."

The sketched figures moved with increasingly urgent purpose, their hand-drawn movements carrying the unmistakable quality of beings attempting to bridge communication gaps between entirely different dimensional realities. One of them—a tall, impossibly elegant figure that somehow evoked David Bowie's "Let's Dance" era with perfect visual precision—extended a pencil-sketch finger and pointed directly at Rod's golf ball with deliberate significance.

*Don't you forget about me...*

This time the shared musical intrusion arrived with full cinematic accompaniment—vivid flashes of the Simple Minds video materializing around them like fragments of someone else's memory made visible. Empty hallways stretched toward infinity, filled with running figures whose faces carried expressions of desperate urgency, as if they were racing against time itself to deliver a message of cosmic importance.

"Okay," Rod said with the careful deliberation of an engineer forced to acknowledge phenomena that existed far beyond the comfortable boundaries of technical specifications, "I think someone or something is definitely attempting to establish meaningful communication with us."

"The critical questions remain: what exactly are they trying to communicate, and more importantly, who or what are they?" Scrott replied, sketching frantically in his observation journal with the focused intensity of someone trying to document the impossible before it disappeared. His artistic training allowed him to capture details that his friends might miss—the way the sketch figures moved with mathematical precision, how their hand-drawn world seemed to operate according to different physical laws entirely.

"And why are they using eighties music videos as their primary communication protocol?" Duke added, his voice carrying a mixture of fascination and growing alarm. "I mean, don't get me wrong, I appreciate the cultural references, but this feels like first contact being conducted by someone whose understanding of human civilization comes entirely from MTV."

The pencil-sketch Bowie figure gestured again, this time toward the morning sky, where faint geometric patterns had begun to appear—not

drawn in the air, but somehow existing in the space between air and vision, visible only when viewed from precisely the right angle.

Rod's analytical mind engaged automatically, the way it always did when confronted with problems that demanded systematic analysis. "The patterns appear to be mathematical in nature. Possibly some form of coordinate system or navigational reference."

Before anyone could respond to his observation, Rod's phone rang with the distinctive tone he'd programmed for unknown but potentially important contacts, immediately shifting the atmosphere from cosmic wonder back to more familiar earthly concerns.

"Hello?"

"Mr. Alpaugh?" The voice was distinctly female, professionally warm, with just a hint of an accent he couldn't quite identify. "My name is Dr. Roberta Dorsey. I'm a quantum systems researcher, and I understand you've been experiencing some... unusual phenomena lately."

Rod glanced at his friends, both of whom were still watching pencil-sketch figures perform what looked like interpretive dance in the shimmering air around them. "You could definitely say that."

"I'm currently in the area conducting field research. Would it be possible to meet in person? I believe what you're experiencing may be directly connected to some global anomalies we've been tracking for several weeks."

"Global anomalies?" Rod's engineering mind immediately shifted into problem-solving mode.

"Mr. Alpaugh, you're absolutely not alone in experiencing these impossible events. Similar incidents are being reported simultaneously

worldwide. I'd very much like to speak with you and your friends about what you've observed."

Rod found himself agreeing to meet at the golf club's parking lot in twenty minutes, though he wasn't entirely certain why the agreement felt so natural. Something about Dr. Dorsey's voice suggested she might actually possess answers to questions they hadn't even learned how to ask yet.

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## **Section 3: "Professional Consultation with Benefits"**

"Someone who apparently possesses detailed knowledge about our impossible situation," Rod replied, his engineering mind already cataloging the implications of mysterious phone calls arriving with suspiciously perfect timing. "Dr. Roberta Dorsey. Quantum systems researcher. She's driving here to meet us."

"Excellent," Scrott said with genuine enthusiasm, continuing his meticulous documentation while pencil-sketch figures performed what could only be described as interpretive dance in the shimmering air around his head. "Maybe she can provide scientific explanations for why we're apparently living inside an elaborate 80s music video compilation."

The visual anomalies began to fade as they collected Rod's precision measuring equipment, the sketch figures dissolving back into ordinary morning air like dreams reluctantly surrendering to consciousness.

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Whatever cosmic intelligence was orchestrating their experiences seemed to understand that serious scientific consultation required fewer visual distractions.

Twenty minutes later, they watched a sleek black SUV with government plates pull into Riverside Golf Club's parking lot with the kind of purposeful precision that suggested its driver was accustomed to arriving at unusual situations with professional equipment and ready explanations.

The woman who emerged looked exactly like someone who might have stepped directly from a sophisticated Duran Duran video—elegant and professionally mysterious, with an air of controlled competence that suggested she dealt with impossible phenomena as part of her regular Tuesday morning routine. She carried what appeared to be some form of advanced scientific equipment, devices that hummed with barely contained energy and looked expensive enough to purchase small countries.

"Gentlemen," Dr. Dorsey said as she approached their small group, her voice carrying the warm authority of someone who had spent considerable time explaining impossible things to skeptical audiences. "I'm Dr. Roberta Dorsey. Thank you for agreeing to meet under these rather extraordinary circumstances."

"Dr. Dorsey," Rod replied, noting how her presence seemed to cause the residual atmospheric shimmering to organize itself into more stable patterns, as if her scientific training somehow encouraged better behavior from whatever cosmic forces were redecorating their reality. "You mentioned something about global anomalies during our phone conversation?"

"Indeed I did." She gestured toward the morning air, where faint geometric patterns still lingered like mathematical ghosts. "What you're experiencing here—the gravitational inconsistencies, the linguistic anomalies, the shared consciousness events—they're components of a coordinated worldwide phenomenon that's been systematically manifesting for several weeks."

"You can actually observe the visual manifestations too?" Duke asked, his voice carrying equal measures of relief and growing alarm. "The music video sequences and pencil-sketch figures?"

"I can detect quantum field fluctuations that are manifesting as shared visual hallucinations based on familiar cultural reference points," Dr. Dorsey confirmed with scientific precision. "Your minds are interpreting cosmic modifications through the lens of 1980s popular culture. It's actually quite sophisticated—using recognizable imagery to prevent psychological rejection of fundamentally impossible phenomena."

She gestured toward what appeared to be an ordinary food truck parked with deceptive casualness at the edge of the parking lot, its exterior suggesting nothing more exotic than gourmet sandwiches and overpriced coffee. Inside, however, was some of the most sophisticated scientific equipment Rod had ever encountered—banks of monitors displaying real-time quantum data, field detectors that hummed with barely contained energy, and devices that looked like they belonged in NASA mission control rather than a mobile lunch venue.

I would like you to meet my team members and research assistants, Duncan Stanbury and Kevin Smith. Duncan is an MIT grad and Kevin attended Stanford and used to work at Google.

Everyone exchanged brief pleasantries and Rod, Scrott and Duke began their visual inspection of all the gear.

"Impressive camouflage," Scrott observed, settling into one of the surprisingly comfortable chairs arranged around a central console that looked capable of monitoring galactic weather patterns. "I'm guessing the 'Cosmic Burgers and Quantum Coffee' exterior isn't entirely accurate?"

"The health department permit is completely legitimate," Dr. Dorsey replied with deadpan precision. "We actually make excellent breakfast burritos when we're not tracking modifications to fundamental physical constants."

"How long have you been monitoring our specific situation?" Duke asked, his business instincts automatically cataloging the implications of sophisticated surveillance disguised as casual food service.

"Three days," Dr. Dorsey admitted with professional honesty. "We initially detected the gravitational anomalies through our standard monitoring networks, then the quantum consciousness events triggered our advanced warning systems. Your group represents something quite remarkable—three individuals with perfectly complementary skill sets experiencing coordinated modifications simultaneously."

Rod found himself studying her face as she spoke, noting the way her eyes illuminated when discussing quantum phenomena, the subtle smile that suggested she found their impossible situation as fascinating as it was potentially dangerous. "Dr. Dorsey, can I ask what originally drew you to this kind of research? Most quantum physicists stick to considerably safer theoretical territory."

She paused, her professional composure softening slightly as personal history surfaced. "My doctoral thesis proposed that human consciousness could directly influence quantum field states through focused intention. My dissertation committee called it 'dangerously

unscientific speculation that bordered on academic fantasy." Her laugh carried warmth mixed with vindication. "Turns out they were half right—it was dangerous, just not in the ways they imagined. I've been waiting my entire career to meet people who could prove my theories weren't elaborate career suicide."

"You mentioned modifications," Rod pressed, his analytical mind engaging with the systematic approach that had made him successful in engineering. "Modifications to what specifically?"

"To fundamental physical constants," Dr. Dorsey confirmed, activating a display that showed a world map marked with dozens of glowing points scattered across every continent. "Someone or something has been systematically adjusting the basic laws of physics in localized areas around the globe. Each dot represents a confirmed location where similar anomalies have been detected and verified."

"That's a considerable number of dots," Scrott observed with the understated tone of someone who specialized in documenting the impossible.

"It's a coordinated global phenomenon," Dr. Dorsey confirmed with the grave certainty of someone who had spent weeks verifying impossible data from multiple independent sources. "And the frequency of incidents appears to be accelerating exponentially. Whatever's orchestrating these modifications is moving into a more active phase."

Duke studied the map with growing unease, his business experience recognizing patterns that suggested careful planning and massive resource allocation. "Dr. Dorsey, who or what possesses the technological capability to modify fundamental physics on a global scale? We're talking about rewriting the basic operating system of reality itself."

"That question," she said with the careful precision of someone who had spent considerable time contemplating genuinely frightening possibilities, "is exactly what we're desperately trying to determine. But I strongly suspect you three may represent a critical key to understanding both the source and the ultimate purpose of these modifications."

As if directly summoned by her words, every piece of equipment in the mobile laboratory began chiming simultaneously with harmonic precision that suggested orchestrated response rather than random malfunction. Data flowed across multiple screens in patterns that looked distinctly musical—waves and frequencies that seemed to pulse in rhythm with familiar songs, as if someone was translating cosmic information into humanity's most universal language.

"What's happening to your equipment?" Rod asked, his engineering instincts immediately engaging with the systematic light patterns that resembled nothing so much as a sophisticated computer attempting to establish communication protocols.

Dr. Dorsey and her team worked frantically at their controls, her fingers dancing across interfaces with the urgent precision of someone who recognized the magnitude of what was occurring. "We're receiving some form of direct signal transmission to our quantum monitoring systems. Not through normal electromagnetic channels, but directly into the quantum substrate of the equipment itself." She paused, staring at one particular readout with expressions that cycled through scientific excitement and genuine awe. "Gentlemen, I believe something extraordinarily intelligent is attempting to establish meaningful communication with us."

The main display began organizing the incoming data into increasingly recognizable patterns—not random quantum noise or equipment

malfuction, but structured information that somehow bypassed their auditory systems entirely and spoke directly to their understanding, as if the message was being written directly onto their consciousness using mathematics as the universal translation medium.

The data streams suddenly coalesced into something that looked distinctly like the opening sequence of "Money for Nothing"—all computer graphics, impossible digital landscapes, and visual complexity that belonged in advanced animation studios rather than quantum physics laboratories.

"Is that... Dire Straits?" Scrott asked, his musician's ear immediately recognizing the distinctive harmonic patterns and synthesized rhythms that had defined an entire generation's relationship with technology.

"It appears our mysterious communicator has evolved from simple visual effects to full cinematic music video experiences," Dr. Dorsey confirmed, though her scientific excitement was unmistakable as she monitored readings that suggested intelligence levels far beyond anything they had previously encountered. "This is absolutely remarkable. It's using familiar cultural touchstones to establish sophisticated communication protocols that bypass linguistic barriers entirely."

The Dire Straits sequence faded with deliberate artistic timing, replaced by something that resembled "Video Killed the Radio Star"—all retrofuturistic imagery, television screens displaying impossible geometries, and visual metaphors that somehow conveyed complex concepts about communication, technology, and the evolution of consciousness across cosmic distances.

And then, cutting through the visual symphony like a clear signal breaking through dimensional interference, came words that bypassed

human language entirely and spoke directly to their understanding with the clarity of mathematical truth made accessible:

**GREETINGS, FRIENDS OF EARTH.**

**WE HAVE BEEN WAITING.**

**THE MUSIC IS ONLY THE BEGINNING**

The silence that followed carried the weight of first contact—three ordinary friends and one quantum researcher and her two assistants sat gobsmacked, suddenly face-to-face with intelligence that spanned galaxies and apparently possessed both infinite patience and genuinely sophisticated taste in popular culture.

"Well," Duke said into the profound quiet, his voice carrying the careful tone of someone attempting to maintain conversational normalcy while processing the fact that aliens had just introduced themselves through his favorite decade of music videos, "at least they're remarkably polite for cosmic entities."

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## **Section 4: "Integration, Romance, and Other Universal Constants"**

Dr. Dorsey was frantically recording every data point her instruments could capture, her scientific training engaged with the kind of discovery that entire careers were built around. "The communication method is extraordinary. They're using quantum substrate manipulation to create

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shared visual experiences that translate complex concepts into familiar cultural references. It's like they've studied human psychology and determined that MTV represents our most effective universal language."

"So we're having first contact with beings who learned about humanity from eighties music videos," Rod summarized, his analytical mind struggling to process implications that stretched far beyond anything his engineering background had prepared him to handle.

"And they appear to have excellent taste," Scrott added, making rapid notes while trying to capture the aesthetic beauty of what was essentially the universe's most sophisticated art installation. "Though I'm curious about their opinion on Nine Inch Nails."

The displays flickered briefly, as if their cosmic correspondents were checking their cultural database for appropriate responses to industrial music references.

The ominous visual sequences faded with deliberate theatrical timing, replaced by something altogether more cheerful and unmistakably familiar—the opening frames of "Never Gonna Give You Up," complete with Rick Astley's earnest face filling the main display with the kind of unexpected charm that had made the song a cultural phenomenon decades after its original release.

"Oh, come on," Rod said directly to the screen, his voice carrying equal measures of exasperation and grudging admiration. "Are you seriously Rickrolling us during humanity's first official cosmic contact? That's either the most sophisticated joke in galactic history or evidence that aliens have been studying our internet culture with genuinely alarming thoroughness."

The cosmic intelligence seemed to find his response absolutely delightful, because Rick Astley's image was immediately replaced by what could only be described as interdimensional laughter—rippling patterns of light that somehow conveyed cosmic-scale amusement while maintaining the kind of warmth that suggested genuine affection rather than condescending humor.

"I think it genuinely likes our sense of humor," Duke observed with growing fascination. "Either that, or it's been conducting intensive research into human internet culture and decided that Rickrolling represents the pinnacle of our comedic achievement."

Dr. Dorsey was frantically recording readings from her instruments, her scientific excitement evident as data streams showed intelligence levels that defied every theoretical framework she had studied. "This is absolutely remarkable. The entity is learning human communication patterns in real-time, adapting its approach based on your specific responses and cultural references." She looked up from her displays with the kind of scientific enthusiasm that had probably gotten her into trouble with dissertation committees. "Gentlemen, you're actively teaching a galactic intelligence how to be funny."

"Outstanding," Scrott said with the dry satisfaction of someone whose artistic training had finally found its most important application. "I'm officially adding 'comedy coach to alien intelligence' to my professional resume. That should definitely help with future job interviews."

The displays shifted again with purposeful intention, this time showing what appeared to be a three-dimensional map of the galaxy that put every astronomy textbook diagram to shame. Earth sat at the center of a vast network of interconnected points, each pulsing with the same harmonic frequencies they'd been experiencing throughout their impossible morning—a cosmic web of civilizations connected by

mathematics, music, and apparently shared appreciation for sophisticated humor.

Words appeared on the screen—not typed text or visual overlays, but somehow directly written into their understanding, bypassing language entirely and speaking to them in concepts that felt more fundamental than vocabulary:

**YOUR WORLD BRINGS UNIQUE GIFTS:**

**MUSIC THAT TOUCHES QUANTUM SUBSTRATE.**

**FRIENDSHIP THAT STRENGTHENS UNDER PRESSURE.**

**HUMOR THAT TRANSFORMS FEAR INTO WONDER.**

**WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN THE GREATER SYMPHONY.**

"A galactic network," Dr. Dorsey breathed, her voice carrying the awe of someone witnessing the scientific discovery of several lifetimes. "They're offering humanity membership in some kind of cosmic community."

"What's the catch?" Duke asked with the practiced skepticism of someone whose decades in sales had taught him that every offer, no matter how attractive, inevitably came with carefully concealed fine print designed to benefit someone other than the customer.

The response appeared instantly, written directly into their consciousness with the clarity of mathematical proof made accessible:

**NO CATCH, NO OBLIGATIONS, CHOICE REMAINS YOURS!  
BUT CONSIDER: ALONE YOU ARE TALENTED;  
TOGETHER WE ARE MAGNIFICENT!**

The elegant simplicity of the cosmic sales pitch would have impressed Duke under normal circumstances, but something about the timing felt almost too convenient. Before Dr. Dorsey could formulate a response to their interdimensional correspondents, Duke's phone rang with the distinctive tone he'd programmed for important business contacts.

He glanced at the caller ID and his expression shifted to the kind of confident smile that had been charming clients and getting him into interesting situations for decades. "Sorry," he said to the group, gesturing apologetically toward the phone, "I should probably take this call. It might be..."

He stepped outside the mobile laboratory, seeking privacy for what he apparently assumed would be another successful business conversation. Through the thin walls of the disguised food truck, they could hear his end of what quickly became a puzzling exchange.

"Duke here, and I have to say you've reached me at a fascinating time—" There was a pause that stretched longer than his usual confident patter normally allowed. "Oh. Hi there, Sandra. No, I... how did you possibly get this number? I don't recall giving my personal contact information to..."

Rod and Scrott exchanged meaningful glances that carried the weight of longtime friendship and intimate knowledge of Duke's conversational patterns. His voice had shifted from confident charm to something approaching genuine wariness, which was distinctly unusual for someone who treated every telephone conversation as a potential performance opportunity.

Dr. Dorsey's attention was suddenly divided between monitoring their cosmic correspondents and eavesdropping on what was clearly becoming an unexpectedly complicated phone call. "That timing seems

remarkably convenient," she murmured, her scientific training recognizing patterns that suggested coordination rather than coincidence.

Through the laboratory walls, they could hear Duke's conversation taking an increasingly cautious tone: "Coffee? Well, I suppose I could consider... no, I understand completely. Yes, I have been experiencing some rather unusual phenomena lately." Another pause, longer this time, during which his voice carried growing confusion. "How could you possibly know specific details about that?"

Through the lab's small window, they could observe Duke pacing with agitated energy, his free hand running through his silver hair in a gesture they recognized as his "thinking too hard" behavioral tell.

"Sandra Hollingham, was it? Strategic consulting?" Duke's voice carried the tone of someone who was simultaneously intrigued and concerned despite his better judgment. "Yes, I think I would like to know more about my available options."

Five minutes later, Duke returned to the laboratory looking pleased and slightly confused, carrying an elegant business card between his fingers like evidence from a crime scene.

"Who was Sandra?" Scrott asked, his documentation instincts immediately engaging with potential new data sources.

"Someone who apparently possesses detailed knowledge about our situation," Duke replied, studying the business card with the careful attention he normally reserved for important contracts. "She wants to meet for coffee in an hour. Says she represents certain interests that might be able to help us navigate our current circumstances."

Dr. Dorsey's expression shifted to something approaching professional alarm. "Duke, what exactly did she say about your experiences? How specific was her knowledge?"

"She knew about the song lyrics phenomenon. Said she'd heard I was dealing with some unusual auditory anomalies and wanted to discuss... options for managing the situation." Duke looked around at the cosmic equipment surrounding them, displays still showing galactic networks and interdimensional communication protocols. "Given that we're currently receiving messages from space through 80s music videos, her timing seems remarkably convenient."

"Too convenient," Dr. Dorsey said with the grim certainty of someone who understood the implications of competing interests in cosmic contact scenarios. "Duke, there are other organizations monitoring these events. Not all of them have humanity's best interests at heart."

"Are you suggesting Sandra might be working for the bad guys?" Duke asked with characteristic directness.

"I'm saying be very careful about who you trust," Dr. Dorsey replied with professional seriousness. "The modifications you're experiencing are components of something much larger than localized phenomena. And not everyone wants humanity to understand what that something actually represents."

Dr. Dorsey studied her data displays with growing scientific frustration. "The problem is, my readings remain incomplete. I'm detecting the phenomena and measuring their quantum signatures, but I'm missing crucial data points about how they manifest in real-time human experience."

She turned to Rod, her expression earnest and professionally focused. "My data has significant gaps, and I need you three to help fill those

informational holes. Your direct observations, Scrott's systematic documentation, Duke's social interactions—you're experiencing things my instruments can't measure or quantify."

Rod blinked, then cleared his throat as the unintended implications of her phrasing registered. "So... you want us guys to be responsible for filling all your holes?"

Duke snorted with barely suppressed laughter while Scrott suddenly became very interested in his observation notebook wondering if Rod was aware of what he just said or wanted to lighten the moment. .

Dr. Dorsey paused, her scientific mind catching up with the unintended double entendre. A slight flush crept up her neck as professional composure warred with human embarrassment. "The data gaps, yes. The informational... holes."

"Right," Rod said, his engineer's brain finally registering why Duke was grinning like a teenager and Scrott was staring at his notebook with a childish grin. "The data holes. Of course."

"Perhaps we could phrase that differently in future scientific discussions," Dr. Dorsey suggested with diplomatic precision while extending a purposeful playful grin in Rod's direction..

As if to emphasize her point about careful communication, the laboratory's displays flickered with another music video sequence—this one distinctly darker, all shadows and ominous imagery that looked like it belonged in a Depeche Mode video about surveillance and hidden agendas.

"Even our cosmic DJ seems worried," Scrott observed, making careful notes about the atmospheric shift. "That's not particularly encouraging."

"Sandra," Duke said with the decisive tone that had closed countless business deals throughout his career, "I genuinely appreciate the offer and the apparent concern for my wellbeing. But I think I'll stick with my friends. They've never steered me wrong in fifteen years of impossible situations, and I don't see any reason to start doubting them now."

"Jeff, you're making a catastrophic mistake that will—"

"Maybe I am," Duke interrupted with growing confidence, "but it's my mistake to make. And honestly? Any organization that's this genuinely worried about people maintaining friendships and exploring cosmic possibilities probably isn't one I want to join. That kind of fear-based thinking went out of style with my first marriage."

He ended the call with a satisfying click, "But she was drop dead gorgeous", then looked around at his companions with the kind of smile that had been getting him into interesting adventures for decades. "So, what do you say? Ready to join the cosmic symphony and see what kind of universal music we can make together?"

Rod thought about his impossible putts, his recently concluded marriage, and the two best friends a man could reasonably ask for during a midlife crisis that apparently included alien contact. He considered the loneliness that was ending, the problems that might actually be solvable when approached collectively, and the genuine possibility that the universe might possess a sophisticated sense of humor after all.

"You know what?" he said with growing enthusiasm. "I think I am absolutely ready for whatever cosmic adventure comes next."

Scrott closed his observation notebook with a satisfied snap that seemed to mark the conclusion of an important chapter in human development. "Well, I've just documented humanity's first successful

integration into a galactic network. That's definitely going in my memoirs, assuming anyone believes them."

The laboratory displays around them filled with gentle, harmonious light that seemed to celebrate Earth's entry into the cosmic community becoming officially recognized. But before they could fully process the magnitude of what had just transpired, Dr. Dorsey's secure communication device rang with an urgent tone that suggested important developments.

"Dr. Dorsey here," she answered, automatically activating speaker mode so the group could participate in whatever was coming next.

"Robbie, this is Derek Devon calling from the ELTA facility in Chile. I hope I'm not interrupting anything critically important."

Dr. Dorsey's eyes immediately lit up with professional excitement mixed with obvious personal warmth and she immediately placed the call on speaker. "Derek! Actually, your timing is absolutely perfect. I'm here with three individuals who've just completed successful integration protocols. Rod Alpaugh, Duke Lukas, and Scott MacDonald—the Colorado team whose quantum signatures have been generating some genuinely fascinating data patterns."

"The gravitational anomaly team from Colorado?" Derek's voice carried immediate recognition and unmistakable scientific interest. "We've been tracking their quantum signatures for several days through our global monitoring network. Are they by any chance available for consultation? Their adaptation patterns have been remarkably sophisticated."

"More than available," Dr. Dorsey replied, glancing at the three friends with a smile that carried implications extending far beyond simple professional collaboration. "In fact, I was just about to suggest they

accompany me to the Denver Integration Facility. We could all travel together and combine our research efforts."

Rod felt his pulse quicken with what he told himself was entirely scientific excitement about cosmic adventure, though Dr. Dorsey's meaningful look suggested additional possibilities that had nothing to do with quantum mechanics and everything to do with personal chemistry that apparently functioned correctly even during interdimensional first contact.

"Educational approaches," Rod repeated with growing amusement, then found himself smiling with genuine warmth at the woman whose scientific expertise had somehow made interdimensional first contact feel like the most natural thing in the universe. "You know what, Dr. Dorsey? After forty-seven impossible putts and a divorce that systematically taught me everything I thought I understood was fundamentally wrong, I think I'm absolutely ready for whatever cosmic adventures the universe has planned."

"Excellent, and please—everybody call me Robbie," she said, moving closer to check readings on sophisticated equipment that definitely didn't require such intimate proximity for proper calibration. "Because I have a genuinely strong feeling we're going to work very well together on multiple levels."

Duke was openly laughing now with the delighted appreciation of someone witnessing his friend's romantic confidence returning after months of post-divorce hibernation. "Rod, your ex-wife complained that you were too methodical and systematic. I don't think Robbie's going to have that particular problem with your analytical approach."

"Not at all," Dr. Dorsey confirmed with scientific precision mixed with unmistakable personal interest. "I deeply appreciate a man who takes

his time and pays meticulous attention to important details. Those are exactly the qualities needed for successful cosmic integration... and other collaborative endeavors."

Hello fellas. I am glad to meet you and hopefully meet in person in the near future. Dr. Dorsey, if I can help in any way, just let me know and I hope to see you at the Denver facility. I have to head into a meeting but I am sure you guys are in good hands with Dr. Dorsey", as Derek ended the call.

Scrott looked up from his final documentation with the satisfied expression of someone whose artistic instincts had captured something genuinely historic. "I'm officially recording this as 'Humanity's first successful integration into a galactic network, followed immediately by the universe's most sophisticated pickup line delivered through quantum mechanics."

"It's absolutely not a pickup line," Dr. Dorsey protested with mock scientific seriousness that fooled absolutely no one present. "It's completely legitimate scientific collaboration protocol."

"Right," Rod said, his engineer's precision failing to disguise the genuine happiness in his voice. "Scientific protocol. Of course."

As they prepared to gather their equipment and leave for Denver's Integration Facility, none of them noticed that Rod's golf ball had finally, quietly, completed its long-delayed journey—rolling the remaining Seventeen inches with perfect mathematical precision and dropping into the hole with a satisfied plop that seemed to celebrate the restoration of physical laws and personal happiness simultaneously.

Some constants, apparently, were worth waiting for—whether they governed gravitational forces or matters of the heart.

Outside the mobile laboratory, the morning sun cast long shadows across the golf course where three friends had discovered that the universe was far stranger, infinitely more wonderful, and significantly more humorous than any of them had dared imagine. The cosmic network had gained new members, but more importantly, it had gained a family whose friendship would help guide humanity's integration into something magnificent.

**We are family**—the thought arrived not as musical intrusion, but as joyful confirmation of universal truth that connected consciousness across impossible distances while preserving everything that made friendship sacred.

The constants had changed, but the best things about being human remained exactly the same. Though apparently, they were about to become considerably more interesting.

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### **End of "The Constants"**

*You have completed a 30-minute cosmic experience The choice... will always be yours...*

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### **Wondering what is next?**

*Dr. Maureen Hamner thought her morning runs around CERN were solitary affairs—until she realized she wasn't running alone. When impossible shadows begin stalking Europe's leading consciousness*

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*researcher and government agents transform her laboratory into an interrogation room, Maureen faces the same cosmic choice that changed Derek Devon and Luke Matson forever. But her escape from military acquisition leads to something neither Derek nor Nancy expected: a consciousness bridge between three brilliant minds that could revolutionize both human evolution and the meaning of love itself. Some discoveries change science. Others change everything.*

*Hope you will continue the series.....*

*Cheers,*

*Derek*

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