



Chapter Six: Dr. Delano Frank Tellandoll

“Do we have to?” a gravelly mechanical voice objected forcefully, its brutal tones cutting through the air. A hunched figure, resembling a grey ghostly goblin, sat alone on the top bench. Singularly distant from wine glasses or bottles, he gripped a pen in hand. Exuding confidence and power, he waved dismissively, expressing exasperated disdain. "Must we endure more of this?" he growled.

The other Explorers rustled uncomfortably, refusing to acknowledge the venomous rumblings.

Miles was dumbstruck, shocked. He knew the terrifying voice . It was Dr. Delano Frank Tellandoll.

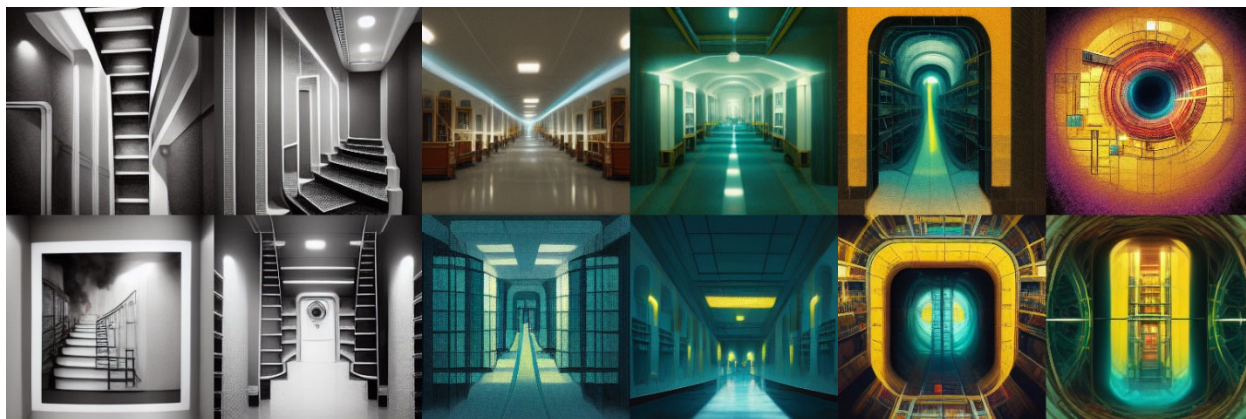
Miles’ body involuntarily squirmed, urging him to flee, but an overpowering darkness rooted his feet to the spot and dissolved his strength.



Memories of all types flooded his brain. Miles saw a whirlwind high-speed movie of his life: Miles as an innocent young child peering into an encyclopedia, his obsession with unraveling the "why" behind everything, challenging the world to surrender its secrets. From fish to fire, frogs to Phoenicians, flatulence to feudalism—Miles hungered for knowledge. Constitutions, comets, Christianity, Caesar, and car crashes—his insatiable thirst for understanding demanded answers. Electricity, elasticity, economics, egrets, and Egypt—why, why, why? He yearned to possess the essence of each subject, to claim them as his own.

And then college, where the images started to turn darker, menacing. Miles knew Tellandoll from an odd sequence of events. By some twist of fate, as a freshman, Miles was offered an internship in physics even though he knew little of physics.

Alone and in a new place, Miles wanted to fit in. He thought college would be a grand adventure in ideas, but he mostly felt lonely and unsettled, afraid of social immersion. Fully aware of his limited grasp of physics, he was also aware that he felt more comfortable with ideas than people.



He pursued the internship believing that he was eager to discover new things but conveniently it was also useful way to avoid social interaction.

The lab was concealed deep within the Tellandoll Physics building's vast basement, protected by impenetrable layers of infrastructure and stringent tech security measures. Miles marveled at his surroundings. With each step, a sense of isolation and entrapment grew, making him question whether accepting the internship had been a wise decision.

The memories grew darker, the environment and setting more haunting. Miles entered the vestibule, laying eyes upon an intricate assemblage of computers, monitors, vents, alarms, hazardous pools, and devices marked with ominous "Hazard" warnings. It was about as far away from people as one could get on a college campus. Miles theorized that this was a concealed, high-powered weapon shrouded in layers of security, veiled in perplexing jargon from the realm of theoretical high-energy physics.

Yet perhaps because he too wanted to be away from people, Miles fit in from the start. Miles never quite understood why, but he loved the internship. Even though the environment was dark and brooding, isolated and secret, he immersed himself wholeheartedly, feeling a deep connection and a sense of privileged purpose by being allowed to be there. Working fervently,

Miles basked in the exhilaration of potential discovery, convinced that the secret project was on the cusp of understanding groundbreaking phenomena.

For decades, Dr. Tellandoll was the singular dictator of the lab that he had built to his standards and specifications. He had been the university's lead administrator for the science departments for decades, a talented grant writer, and the institution's primary liaison to the United States Department of Energy and the Defense Department's funding. Tellandoll singlehandedly secured hundreds of millions of dollars in unrestricted grants, which he coveted and kept for himself alone.

Tellandoll was allergic to people. He had no friends, no family, no flatterers, no visitors, no colleagues, no peers, no co-authors, and no oversight. Graduate students in theoretical physics and advanced mathematics sought positions in Tellandoll's lab, despite not being privy to his plans, or even knowing what he was truly working on. They were mere tools, like different CPU cores, computing values without comprehending the grander outcome. And any who dared question or probe too deeply were swiftly dismissed.

But Miles was somehow different. Maybe because they were both singular loners alit with ideas in their heads, Dr. Tellandoll recognized Miles' interest from the start. Over time, an easy rapport developed between Miles and Tellandoll, almost bordering on the personal. Without any prompting from Miles, Tellandoll often sought him out, occasionally engaging in casual chit-chat. This apparent acceptance perplexed



and fueled jealousy among the graduate students, for everyone knew that Tellandoll was an uncompromising madman who cared for no one. So everyone was surprised when Tellandoll arranged for Miles to continue in the lab during the summer and throughout his sophomore year.

But towards the end of his sophomore year, Miles grew increasingly agitated and concerned. The experimental "results" he encountered didn't align or make sense, yet no one had the fortitude to cross-check them or delve deeper. Miles felt the graduate students sensed that something was amiss, but actively looked the other way as they sought other jobs. Eager to leave but uncertain in the interim, they simply avoided it.

One particularly exhausting day, after closely supporting Dr. Tellandoll, Miles found himself too tired to exercise restraint. Taking a gamble, he ventured, "Maybe someday you'll tell me what all of this is about?"

"Sorry," Tellandoll responded automatically.

"Not even a clue?" Miles countered, a hint of dissent in his voice.

Dr. Tellandoll hesitated, scrutinizing Miles intently, as if peering into the depths of his soul, deciding whether to claim it. "Why?"

Miles paused, unnerved by the intensity of the gaze. Yet he couldn't help but continue. "It might help me make sense of it all... so I can be of assistance." He backtracked weakly, sensing that he had overstepped some boundary. "Not that you need my help..."

"You're probably one of the few..." Tellandoll pondered aloud, his voice trailing off. "But no."

"Okay," Miles replied, a tinge of resignation in his voice. "It's been a long night. I'm heading home. I'll clear out the microbe vent in the morning. Goodnight."

Tellandoll merely nodded, and Miles turned and left. Yet, he couldn't shake the feeling that something had changed. Miles had ceased blindly following Tellandoll's lead.

On his way to his dorm, Miles received a text from Tellandoll: "You're fired." He had almost expected it. Once he arrived at his dorm, Miles lay down to sleep and did not wake up for 32 hours. When he awoke, he felt more relief than consternation.

He would change majors and move on.

Over the ensuing years, Miles deliberately avoided the Tellandoll Physics building and did his best to banish it from his mind. Miles switched majors multiple times, searching for something meaningful that eluded him, yet remained within the realm of attainability.

Now, in the confines of the Alumni Explorers' Club, Tellandoll sat aloof on the top bench, his presence commanding, despite the intense dislike many harbored for him. If Miles' name came up, Tellandoll would likely torpedo the project. And if Tellandoll despised Yawney as much as he claimed, then the proposal would perish.

Stepping into the tense silence, Dr. Yawney took the stage, meeting Tellandoll's gaze and flashing a mischievous grin.



"Thank you for having me," Dr. Yawney began his PowerPoint presentation.

Laughter rippled through the Explorers in muted mirth.