

Published in 2012 by John Lynch Digital Publishing House

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Rogue Alliance

By

Michelle Bellon

For Tina, one of my best friends.

Thank you for always being there for me cheering me along on the sidelines, but also putting me in my place when I needed it. I don't know which was of more value, but your friendship is priceless.

Thanks to Sian and Dave of John Lynch Publishing for helping bring this project to fruition. Cheers!

ONE

He faded in and out of consciousness. Sound, light, and movement all blended together until he couldn't tell one from the next. Coherent thought was impossible; fragments of ideas filtered in then slipped through the sieve of his mind. He was weak, dehydrated, and starving.

The one consistent concept he was able to grasp was his name. Brennan Miles. It was the name he had given himself. Simple, strong, normal; all qualities that he longed for. He no longer remembered his real name, just as he no longer remembered anything before he'd come to the institute.

The few who had ever met him took one look at his large frame and stocky build, and thought he looked plenty strong. He could see it in the way they looked at him with a mix of awe and fear. But he wasn't strong in the way that he wanted to be. At the moment, he wasn't even physically strong. They'd kept his food and supplements from him for over seventy-six hours - the longest period to date. Water was the only offering and even that had been the bare minimum. They wanted to see how long he could go and how powerful his need would be when triggered.

He had seen how intense his need could be and what it could drive him to do. All those other times, though, he had been in prime condition - healthy and agile. In his current state, he doubted he would be able to lift his head, much less give in to the power of his unnatural instinct. The doctor would be disappointed.

Serves him right, he thought.

Brennan heard the swish of the door open and close. His acute sense of smell instantly recognized the scent of Doctor Shinto and that of a stranger. Repulsion and hate flowed through his veins. The voices of his visitors drifted in and out. They were speaking about him as if he weren't even there. He was just an object, an experiment. He wanted to lash out and crush the doctor. He wanted to give in to his need here and now, but with his ankles shackled and his wrists bound, he would do no such thing. Even if he had been unrestrained, he doubted that he could stand up, let alone end Doctor Shinto's unconscionable life in his current condition. Instead, he let his head loll against the back of his chair and listened to the conversation at hand.

"Don't get too close, Mr. Champlain. He can smell us. I don't want him to be tempted."

"Tempted, huh?" Champlain said, "he's restrained and looks to be half dead. What threat could he be?"

Dr. Shinto spoke methodically. "He's been without supplement or food for over 3 days. He's had only 50ccs of water daily. He is extremely weak and dangerously dehydrated and will go into hypovolemic shock if he doesn't get what he needs very soon."

His voice was devoid of concern. The only inflection was a breathless excitement revealing the delight he took in his work.

The voice of the Champlain visitor was deeper, more humane.

"He looks terrible. Why would you treat him so terribly? If you know what he can do, what's the purpose of this abuse?"

“We only know what he can do when strong and healthy. We’ve kept him without supplement before to monitor his physiological response. Now, we are curious to learn just exactly how he will react when deprived for an extended period of time, combined with the effects of being under extreme physical duress.

“He is weak now. But his body is not like ours. His brain has been programmed to release high levels of adrenaline when in distress. There is a nano-chip embedded into his hypothalamus. When his sympathetic nervous system triggers the ‘fight or flight’ response, neurotransmitters are released as well as norepinephrine. These directly stimulate all organs of the body and strength, mental acuity, and endurance are all significantly increased as the body’s instinct to survive kicks in.”

“I’ve heard rumors of what you’re doing here, Dr. Shinto,” Champlain snorted, “your experimentation with genetically altered specimens has pushed limits that most of today’s society and medical professionals would find unpalatable, to say the least. *If* word got out, that is. A very close friend of mine- someone who has been a significant financial contributor to your...projects - has recently brought to my attention this particular endeavor of the institute.

“He claims that not only have you been successful in your creation, but that this specimen has strength and physical agility like no known human.”

“Hmm. Has he now?” Dr. Shinto asked cautiously.

“Yes. But I’m looking at him right now and, although he looks to be physically strong, he’s not exactly impressive in his current condition. I understand what you’re claiming to accomplish with this brutality, but I came here to see the phenomenon. I came here to see with my own eyes what this genetically altered super-human is really capable of.”

“I assure you, Mr. Champlain,” Dr Shinto chuckled, smugly, “he is quite capable of what our trusted mutual acquaintance has shared with you - plus so much more. You will see for yourself in only moments. But before the demonstration, the conclusion to this piece of my analysis, may I ask why you are so interested in this project?”

“Let’s just say I have personal interest in his skills. I could use a man like him in my line of work.”

Shinto hesitated.

“Uh...well...” he faltered, “I’m sure his skills would come in handy to your...work, but unfortunately he is not ready to be integrated into society. It would be much too dangerous. And frankly, I’m not willing to let him go.”

Brennan found this conversation almost intriguing. He peered through the slits of his drooping eyelids. This Champlain character was more than just morbidly curious about him. He had an inclination to acquire his assistance. It was a possible way out of the hellhole of the facility. He wasn’t sure exactly how he could be of help, but he was damn sure he would do whatever required of him as long as it meant freedom from Shinto.

He wished he could show him his abilities, but felt drained, lifeless. The thirst was painful. The craving of his supplement was exponentially worse. The smell of his visitors’ scent gnawed at him, making it hard to think of anything else.

The stranger called Champlain turned to face Shinto directly. Even half unconscious, Brennan could see the uncompromising stare of defiance.

“We’ll see about that,” he said before turning to face Brennan again, “but before we move forward, tell me more about the subject and his development.”

Brennan could hear the inflection of uncertainty in Shinto’s voice when he answered. He’d never heard him waver before and it was gratifying to hear.

“Well,” he said, “when we brought him to the institute, he was already a fine physical specimen, given his age. Not like he is now, but very toned from his athletic abilities.

“I won’t go into specifics and bore you but, through genetic modification, DNA splicing, strategic placement of micro-chips in the brain, and trauma based behavior modification we have essentially created a super-human with what you might consider...unusual cravings.”

“What do you mean by unusual?”

“You saw my other work as we toured the facility. I have cloned creatures that have never been considered anything but mythical. As a young boy, I was always drawn to science but I was also fascinated with fantasy. I thought; What if I could take something as fantastic as the concept of a vampire and make it real? This project is the result of years and years of working toward that dream.”

“You created a vampire?” Champlain chuckled, lifting his right brow in disbelief.

Shinto grinned from ear to ear.

“No, no, of course not. There really is no such thing as a vampire, per se. But he’s as close as it’s going to get. His strength is unparalleled. He is three percent faster than humans when agitated or in survival mode, as I explained before. That doesn’t sound like much, but it is. Trust me. He not only craves blood, he must have it for survival. It’s his supplement. Without it he will die.”

Champlain looked truly fascinated.

“How did you get him to crave blood?” he asked.

“Well, the craving is only strong when he hasn’t had his daily supplement via transfusion. Otherwise, it’s your typical human diet for him.

“We altered his genetics so that he doesn’t spontaneously produce red blood cells at the normal rate. The osteoplasts in his bone marrow produce only a quarter of what it takes to be a normal, vibrant, healthy adult. Without supplement, he becomes weak, lethargic and immuno-compromised in a short period of time, which means his body can’t fight off sickness. He is essentially just like a patient with advanced leukemia but, once he has supplement, he quickly regains strength. His craving is merely an instinctual understanding of what his body must have to survive. As long as he has his daily supplement, the craving is suppressed. Mostly.”

Brennan had heard this detailed explanation countless times. Now he was clinging to his last dregs of strength so he could witness the way this interaction played out.

“Well let’s get on with it then.” Champlain said, looking slightly baffled.

A new glimmer shone in Dr. Shinto’s eyes.

“Yes, let’s. Now, if you don’t mind, I’ll have you step inside that room right there. I’ll bring in his live supplement...”

“Live supplement?” Champlain interrupted.

“Oh, well, yes. Normally, he receives it via transfusion, straight into his system. But during these experiments, our goal is to see what he is capable of. It wouldn’t be

much of an experiment if we didn't take it to the next level, now would it?" Shinto said with a grim smile.

"No, I guess not. This might prove interesting after all."

"It won't be a waste of your time. Now you step into the room. I'll set up out here. As soon as I've released him, I'll join you. The door locks and we can watch everything through the viewing window there."

Before Champlain could follow Shinto's instructions, an employee burst through the door they'd come through earlier.

"Uh, sorry to interrupt, Doctor, but there is a problem with specimen 9-4-7."

"What kind of problem? Can't you see I'm busy?"

Shinto's voice was strained.

"Yes, I know," his employee said, "but he's really not doing well. He's having the same issue as last week and I knew you'd be worried."

"All right, then," Shinto sighed, "I'm sorry, Mr. Champlain. I do need to address this right away. Do you mind waiting? It should be only about ten to fifteen minutes."

"Not at all. I'll just wait right here."

"Actually, I'd prefer it if you waited inside the viewing room. Just to be safe."

"Sure, whatever you say, Dr. Shinto."

Shinto rushed out and the room was silent.

Brennan faded in and out. There was no longer an interesting conversation to keep him fighting for consciousness until a delicious aroma filtered into his nostrils. Human blood. He kept his eyes closed but his senses were suddenly on alert.

Champlain was very close.

Something inside Brennan was waking up. It was rising to the surface, driven by his hunger and the drive to survive. Carefully, he pulled at the restraints on his wrists. The leather straps cut sharply into his skin.

"Hey, buddy."

For a moment Brennan was confused.

"Hey. I know you can hear me. Look at me. Now."

Champlain's tone was low but dangerously serious. Brennan was more than intrigued now. Slowly, he opened his eyes to barely a slit. Champlain stood directly in front of him, peering down with a watchful gaze.

"You don't want to live like this anymore, do you?"

Brennan remained silent.

Champlain squatted down so that his face was only a foot from Brennan's. The smell of him was overwhelming. Brennan's pulse quickened.

"Come on," Champlain said, "you gotta be tired of this game."

Tired of the game? Hell yeah. Brennan had been tired of it for a long damn time. Still, he didn't know what Champlain was getting at and ignored his prodding.

Champlain grabbed him by the jaw and lifted his chin. Now the smell was just too much. He snapped but Champlain jerked his hand back just in time.

"Whoa, there! You almost took off my hand!" he laughed.

Brennan glared into Champlain's eyes, feeling only hunger and frustration. What was this guy up to? What did he want?

Champlain stuffed his hands in his pockets casually.

"It's not me you want, friend," he said, "it's Shinto."

Brennan didn't try to disguise the hatred which poured from his eyes at the mention of Shinto's name.

"You're hungry, aren't you? You're tired of being Shinto's guinea pig, right? Well, what if I give him to you? Like a tasty treat. He'll be back in here any minute. He'll want to finish out this experiment; push you to your limits to prove how much of a genius he is. Then he'll do it all over again, bigger and better. You up for that, sport? Or maybe you and I can make a deal, instead?"

Brennan refused to move a muscle or show any emotion, but he was listening.

"What kind of a deal?" he asked quietly. His voice was raspy and dry from dehydration.

"I get you out of here. You come to work for me. It's that simple. Seem like a fair trade; freedom for loyalty?"

The sound of Shinto's footsteps echoed down the hall. They had less than a minute.

Champlain held up a finger in warning,

"I'm not someone you want to strike a deal with and then back out of it. If I let you go, you are indebted to me," he said, "and we'll take care of each other. You got it?"

Brennan nodded.

Shinto walked through the door just as Champlain released the second wrist restraint. The ankles had been first. His eyebrows raised in alarm.

"What have you done?"

The hunger peaked into a violent crescendo. Brennan lunged, soothing his thirst and exacting his revenge in a bath of blood.