



FRACTURE

A crazy romp set in the Near Future.

Titz wants a baby again and Gyro can't see the point. Wasn't it bad enough when she lost the first one because of Fracture? And why now, when that born-again woman-hater is back in their life? Gyro wants to help his latest victim, Elanora Blakey, the wealthy centenarian, but Titz will only agree if she can use Elanora's *virgin regenerator* to create a special baby.

To find Fracture, Gyro must work with NISA agent, Matt Bolton, God's gift to women. He's *sure* he can turn any lesbian back from the dark side. Titz hates him, almost as much as she hates Gyro pretending to be the befuddled old woman's long lost friend. But *Yellow Peril* needs the money. That's all. Honest!

As for Matt Bolton, he *knows* Fracture is a man, even though his boss insists the *cyber terrorist* is Pandora, the teenage daughter of missing foreign scientist, Ikmael h'Mourhan. And now, with Gyro's help, he can prove it and uncover the president's dirty little secret. All he has to do is control himself.

The delectable Carla has a secret too, but is it worth the price to find out...?

"Women are the root of all evil...."

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PROLOGUE

“Jesus, Fracture!” Titz snapped. “There’s a pregnant woman back here. What are you trying to do? Kill my baby?”

Gyro glanced across at Titz and winced as her partner squeezed her hand in a squirrel grip that’d make a grown man squeal like a pig. Lucky she wasn’t a man. She cocked her eyebrows in a cheeky grin to lighten the mood, but Titz just scowled and tugged on the seatbelt to loosen it around her slight belly. She hadn’t wanted to come on Fracture’s little adventure, but Gyro had teased her into it. There were bound to be some bars out in the sticks where a lonely city girl could find some company for the night, unless....

The four-wheel drive Nerada bounced out of yet another pothole in one of the ruts corrugating the gravel road and raced toward the ominous blackness ahead. Titz grimaced as the seatbelt’s sash dug into her hips. Well it served her right for wanting to have a baby. In the driver’s seat, Fracture snorted and jerked the steering wheel. The Nerada wriggled sideways and its rear fishtailed for a moment, electric engine screaming, before the tires gripped and jolted them back on course. Titz turned to Gyro, eyes pleading for her to do something and save them from this madman even though they were all friends and founders of the *Yellow Peril*.

Gyro rolled her eyes and laughed. This was fun! Just like the good ol’ days that weren’t so long ago. This was how life was supposed to be and had been until Titz got all serious about the *Yellow Peril* and wanting to make it a success. And that had triggered something in her ... a desperation to protect the future. Their future.

“Relax, girl! I swear — that baby will be the death of you. I don’t know why anyone ’d want a baby; they cramp your style. Anyway,” she reached over to squeeze Titz’s knee, “you’ve got me.”

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Titz gave her that stupid look again, like she wasn't so sure. Always that same fear. Why couldn't Titz believe her when she said she'd never leave her? She was committed to their relationship. They didn't have to get "married" and have a baby and pretend to be normal to make their love real. Gyro pouted to put Titz at ease and then smirked as Fracture turned his head to stare at Titz with the look of a cat playing with a mouse it had just caught.

"Now isn't this fun, my dear?" he asked in a menacing baritone. His grin lit up his rakish good looks and the whites of his crazed eyes glowed in a sudden flicker of lightning overhead. The crack of thunder ripped through the Nerada's interior like a firecracker going off amongst the four of them and it squiggled as the right-hand-side wheels left the road and dug into mud.

Titz screamed and jabbed her finger ahead. "*Keep* your damned eyes on the road!"

Fracture just laughed as he turned back and twisted the steering wheel while flooring the accelerator at the same time. The Nerada shuddered and fought back. Then, without slowing down, it whipped left onto twin brown lines and raced straight toward the steep crest of a low rise, crowned with a swirling mass of gray and greenish-black cloud. Straggly trees that bordered the green pasture's fence-line shot past in the gloom and up ahead, spiraling tendrils danced off the cloud's leading edges like ribbons streaming from the fingers of a giant gray ghost. To the far left, a funnel sprouted to the ground behind the rise and began to drift right.

"Yes!" Fracture sang and the Nerada punched toward the swirling funnel, back wheels slipping and fighting to maintain any grip. "Looks like an F2."

Then the back swung round in a great arc. The Nerada slid to a stop amid Titz's squeal, just twenty or so meters shy of the crest and facing back the way they had come.

Fracture grinned across at Crank, the fourth member of the party. "Just in case we have to make a quick

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getaway." With that, he flung his door open and scrambled out.

Overhead, the dull afternoon sky darkened with the approaching cloud and the wind picked up leaves and twigs and hurled them at the Nerada. The clean smell of rain permeated the air and the temperature dropped. Fracture pulled out a pair of yellow shades from his shirt pocket and slid them on before staring up at the crest. For a moment he stopped to adjust the stereo lenses attached to each side of his shades and looked back to film Crank, Gyro and then Titz.

"Coming?" His left eyebrow cocked above his shades and his smile mocked them and dared them to join him.

"Uh," Gyro glanced at Titz and squeezed her hand to reassure her, "I think we'll wait for your cinematic masterpiece to be released."

Fracture pouted and stared expectantly at Crank. "What about you, ol' buddy?"

A beep chimed on a little box that Crank held. He looked down and frowned. "The electric field's rising. You better get back in the car, Frac. We can wait a few minutes." He twiddled his free hand, its gloved fingers tap-dancing on his knees. "Radar shows this cell will clear us in a moment. Come on, man, you don't want to get struck by lightning, do you?" The little box beeped again, louder.

"Get in the car, Frac," Gyro called out.

"But that would be an act of God." Fracture laughed and turned away to scramble up the slippery rise. "And since I don't believe in God," he yelled back over his shoulder, "how can he hurt me?"

"Men!" Titz growled. "The sooner evolution does away with the Y chromosome, the better off we'll all be!"

Gyro smirked as Crank grunted to agree and glanced across at where Titz scowled through gritted teeth. But Titz didn't hate men. Just those obnoxious ones who tried to hit on Gyro and thought it a smear on

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their honor that she preferred women to them.

Rain splattered the roof and the wind whipped up into a frenzy. Fracture reached the crest and stood staring at the tornado while it ambled past, oblivious to his presence. Gyro watched his live feed on her shades as the twister ripped up bushes and stripped trees and flung the detritus into the air. Then her skin tingled and her hair stood on end. Crank and Titz screamed at Fracture to get down as Crank's box chimed a ballistic staccato. The sky lit up in a blinding flash.

Crack!

Titz screamed. Gyro joined her and they grabbed each other. All around, the world went nuts. The wind howled for mercy and night descended early. Another crack of lightning, further away, split the darkness. Fracture had disappeared from the horizon.

"Shit!" Crank threw his door open and scrambled out. "Frac's been struck by lightning!"

"Fuck," Gyro mumbled and pulled free to open her door.

Titz grabbed for her. "Where are you going?"

"To help Crank. We have to get Fracture to a hospital." She covered her mouth with her hand and stared at Titz. "I hope he's not dead," she whispered, sick at the thought.

"Don't go," Titz pleaded as Gyro clambered out. The heavens opened up with pelting rain. "It's dangerous, you could get struck by lightning *too*."

Gyro held up a palm to ward her off. "Stay there," she ordered although Titz hadn't moved. "We'll be back in a second."

She scurried up the rise to where Crank knelt on one knee next to the vague outline of a shape, playing with it, and dropped to her knees as she reached him. The rain lashed them in a drenching cold. Crank pulled Fracture up into a sitting position and got his head under one arm while she wedged herself under

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the other. They dragged Fracture toward the Nerada, but his feet just dragged in the mud as they slithered and teetered side to side.

Gyro slid into the car and eased along its side until she felt the rear door's handle. Crank jerked it open and shrugged Fracture into the back seat before shoving him up against Titz and climbing in. Gyro scrambled into the driver's seat and turned to stare at the sodden, dying body, the cold water leaching out the last remaining vestiges of this man she had only known a couple of years — almost as long as she had been with Titz who should take control and do something, like she always did. Instead, Titz shivered and pulled back as far as she could. Her hand went to her belly as if to protect her baby from the dying throes of its father. Fracture's head rolled sideways and his dull, lifeless eyes leered past Titz and Gyro gasped at the jagged red welt that ran down the side of his face from his brow, where the camera had been, and followed where the microphone lead had pressed against his skin.

And then he moaned, soft and low, almost inaudible. Or was it a whimper? A plea for help from one friend to another?

"Go, go, go!" Crank screamed as Gyro twisted round and slammed her door shut. The Nerada's engine sprang to life, then golf ball-sized hail rained down and the Nerada drummed, an incessant pounding that drowned out the high-pitched whine. They jerked forward and raced for the gravel road. Gyro peered through the dents and scratches in the plasglass windscreen while the wipers flailed at chunks of ice. She swung onto the gravel road and fought to travel in a straight line.

"You're gonna be okay, mi amigo. I swear," she heard Crank say in a trembling voice. Then Fracture gurgled. "He's having a seizure!" Crank yelled. "Titz, call an ambulance. Titz! *Titz!*"

Gyro gunned the accelerator and risked a glance in the rearview mirror as Fracture arched his back. Titz was scrunched up against her door, as far away as she could get from Fracture, and looking like she was

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deathly afraid of catching some dreaded plague from his flailing arms. Why had she talked Titz into going on this *insane* trip? All she wanted was to go back to their old life. Carefree and one long party. She didn't want to settle down, just be loved for who she was. Gyro blinked a tear from her eye. Why did Fracture have to get hit by lightning?

She glanced in the mirror again just in time to see Fracture spasm in Crank's grasp. His right arm lashed out at Titz and smacked her across the chin as if to punish her for not caring and it seemed to galvanize her. Crank grabbed the arm to tie it down and held on tight while Fracture writhed. "Call an ambulance," he yelled at Titz.

"O-okay." She tapped her shades and mumbled to someone. "They've dispatched one," she called out. "They should meet us, just after we reach the highway. Turn right."

A shaft of sunlight stabbed through the clouds, less ominous now that the rain had stopped. Gyro risked another look in the mirror. A divine aura bathed Fracture's head. Water still dribbled from his matted hair and ran down along the red welt. Titz reached out to touch it, perhaps asking for a blessing or for forgiveness.

Fracture jerked and seized again.



The antiseptic old building was a sprawl of concrete and glass from late last century. Once the privileged benefactor of those who could afford medical insurance, it was now the last port of call for those who had no other choice. Gyro fumed. Fracture shouldn't be here, but his policy didn't cover "Acts of Stupidity" as outlined in the unfathomable English buried in one of the multitude of claustrophobic clauses. And it *was* the closest hospital. Time had been of the essence.

Had been.

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When Fracture was admitted, he had been checked to make sure he was stable and then left to fend for himself. No insurance? Get on the end of the line. That was a week ago.

Gyro punched the water button on the grimy vending machine and held it in while lukewarm water dribbled into the paper cup and swirled around, mixing the contents into a turgid brown concoction. The brown and the stale smell wafting up hinted at the truth behind this ersatz coffee. True coffee, made from ground up beans imported from South America and roasted with a connoisseur's loving care — coffee like she used to have with her parents before they split up and sold their souls, each in their own way — coffee like that swelled your heart and painted pure bliss on your face.

Three-quarters full, she released the button and took a sip. And grimaced. *Those days are long gone, girl. They don't want you back.*

With that reminder of the last time she had seen her parents, she wound her way across the visitor's lounge, easing past the gurneys with bodies waiting for treatment let alone a bed. At least Fracture had that now. She sank into the chair next to Titz and offered the coffee with a shrug.

Titz shook her head and stared past at the wardroom's doors. "God, the toilets in here are disgusting. When can we see him? The sooner we can go, the happier I'll be."

"Titz—!"

"Soon," Crank muttered. "I got Jojo and Hyper to spook the doctors' schedules. I've kept an eye on ours. One more patient and then we're up."

Titz scowled and rubbed her belly through her tee shirt although there was hardly a bulge to show. "Are you slipping, Crank? Can't crack an old dump like this?"

He ignored her barb and instead stuck his hand inside his jacket to rummage in a pocket. "It's beneath my dignity." He pulled out a yellow aeriol, popped it in his mouth and bit down on the cheesy, chocolaty,

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puffed-soya snack. "Anyway," he sucked to free some of the goo stuck to his teeth, "I have to take it easy. I'm more pregnant than you." He rubbed his small potbelly, imitating Titz, and chuckled at Gyro. Then he looked past and his smile faded. "Here comes Panarkis. We're up, but don't expect too much." With that he stood up with a forced smile. "Hey Doc, good to see you."

Gyro grabbed Titz's hand and squeezed it as she followed Crank to her feet. "How's Frac?" she asked.

"Can we see him now?" Titz demanded.

Panarkis plucked off his shades and a flicker crossed his bland facade. "For a short while, but," he hesitated, "don't get your hopes up, he suffered a bad injury."

"You can repair the brain damage though," Crank said, more as a suggestion.

"How...?" Then the doctor's mouth tightened a fraction as he stared at Crank's shades. "We have a limited Community Health budget and—"

"So you're not going to treat him?" Titz glared at Panarkis like a caged tiger ready to pounce the minute the cage door swung open.

He took a defensive half-step back. "We do what we can, but the injury to his right cerebral cortex—"

"His inferior prefrontal cortex," Crank said, his fingers wriggling by his side, "not to mention his amygdala, whatever that is. Hmmm, interesting."

Panarkis frowned. "That's patient information! It's private—"

"We only want the truth," said Titz.

"Not bullshit to put us at ease," Gyro added to put some force into Titz's demand and show their solidarity. "Just how bad is it? Can he be healed?"

Panarkis hesitated and his glance flicked from her to Titz and back. Then, with a resigned half-shrug behind dead-tired eyes, he gave in. "We've done all we can—"

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“Which isn’t much by the look of it,” said Crank, still scanning Fracture’s medical record.

Panarkis sniffed. “His injury is most unusual. The lightning struck his headcam and entered to the side of his brow. It affected part of the brain not normally injured by a lightning strike to the head. We’ve gotten him past the initial after-effects of apathy and depression and recovered his motor functions, but....”

“What’s this about him becoming a born-again Christian?” Crank pushed his shades up to stare at the doctor.

Gyro’s throat tightened. “Just what we need,” she muttered, more to herself than Titz, “another one of those.”

“Unfortunately, injuries like this can lead to quite significant personality changes. Normally, this results in psychopathic behavior and the inability to make morally and socially acceptable decisions, but in Mister Turner’s case,” Panarkis pursed his lips, “he has found God. And I’m afraid,” he shrugged, “it’s not for the better. In fact, you may not recognize him as your friend.”

“Can’t you do anything?” Titz asked, her soft voice trembling. Gyro squeezed her arm to offer some solace.

“Even with insurance there’s only so much we can do — even in the best private hospitals. In time, with medication and the latest microsurgery techniques, he might recover some of his previous personality, but for now, and as far as we are concerned, as long as he can look after himself, he’ll be released in another week, maybe two. It depends on whether — on how long it takes to get his epileptic seizures under control.”

Titz frowned. “But—”

“I’m sorry.” Panarkis stepped aside and waved them toward the ward entrance. “He’s by the fire escape. On the right. It’s where we keep our difficult patients.”

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With that, he thrust his shades onto his nose, turned toward the exit and pushed his way past some more visitors. Almost, it seemed, as if he was anxious to get away.



Gyro pulled the curtain back and squeezed along the side of the bed to make room for Titz and Crank. Muffled voices filled the air with the soft murmur of false hope. In the next cubicle, Hispanic voices, all women, danced to staccato melodies of welcome before dying to a whisper. A faint whiff of urine and vomit caressed the air. Titz pressed up against Gyro and grasped her hand while they waited for Fracture to break the ice. Instead, a stranger with catheters inserted into his left arm and hand, and with small, round electrodes stuck to his shaved head, stared up at her, and then glanced at Titz before coming to rest on Crank with a puzzled frown.

"I ... I know you." He grimaced as if trying hard to remember and then his frown faded when it dawned on him who they were. But instead of a warm smile, he glared at Gyro and Titz. "You are the ones who led me astray."

"What are you talking about?" asked Gyro.

"We're your friends," said Titz, miffed.

"Fracture." Crank edged past to the head of the bed and pushed a tray on a swing-arm out of the way. Some of the orange liquid in a plastic cup spilt as he reached over to squeeze Fracture's shoulder to reassure him. "Everything'll be okay, you'll see. Hey, ol' buddy, relax, the cavalry's here."

Fracture pulled away and brushed Crank's hand off his shoulder like it was a fly. "God has punished me and shown me the light! Everything is clear now. The world is full of evil." His voice rose to a shrill peak. "Evil!" The background noise died. "Man has fallen! Ever since Eve caused Adam to be cast out from the Garden of Eden. Even the sacrifice of our Lord, Jesus Christ, has not stopped the spread of evil from

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reaching its climax today.

"And you!" He pointed at Gyro, then Titz. "Women have been the cause ever since they gave up bearing children to interfere in the affairs of man."

"Hey Frac." Crank gave a nervous chuckle and glanced at Gyro. "He's joking. You know what he's like."

But Fractures eyes were wide and there was nothing but hatred and disgust within them. His top lip curled up in a sneer. "Satan has infiltrated our society through the Ultranet. God has shown me! The governments of the world have joined with all the multinationals in a conspiracy run by Jews and homosexuals and women and all the weird sexual deviants to pervert mankind from the way of God. The communists will make a comeback to set up an evil empire where babies will be crucified—"

Crank reached out to grab Fracture's arm, but Fracture slipped past and scrambled to the end of the bed. The tubes in his arm protested.

"I will stop you—" He yanked the tubes from his arm and hand and then wrenched the electrodes from his scalp. Gyro stared at the small scabs on the side of his skull and shuddered at the thought of undergoing microsurgery on her brain. In the distance a faint dinging sounded.

"Grab him!" Crank called, but Titz hesitated. Gyro reached past her, but Fracture slipped off the bed and yanked open the door to a small cupboard.

"Please, Frac, what are you doing?" She hustled Titz to move. "Titz! Block him."

Fracture pulled out a plastic bag with a blue shirt poking out, the same shirt he was wearing when he had been struck.

"You can't go, Frac." Gyro gave Titz a shove. Why was she so reluctant to move? "You still need treatment."

"This is stupid," Titz grumbled, but she moved to the end of the bed. "Where *are* the nurses? It's their

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job to restrain him.”

Crank lunged over the bed and pulled supports, holding plastic containers filled with clear liquid, down on himself as he got tangled up in the wires and tubes, but Fracture backpedaled out of reach. He wrenched the curtains apart and looked down the ward. Titz threw out a halfhearted arm to block him.

“*Mister Turner,*” a woman’s voice, full of authority, called out from the far end of the ward, “where do you think you are going? Get back into bed.” Along the ward, people shuffled out from behind curtains to watch the show.

Fracture reeled around and darted for the fire escape.

“Stop him!” Crank cried out.

Gyro shoved Titz. “Move! Grab him before he gets away.”

Titz resisted for a moment and then gave in. “Fracture!” She lunged and caught hold of his arm before he could step through the door.

He turned and caught her in a hug. “You!” He glanced over her shoulder at Gyro. “The *two* of you are the worst of all. Women homosexuals! Ye shall burn in the fires of hell for all eternity!” He wrestled Titz out into the stairwell.

Gyro charged after him. This wasn’t about Fracture now. This person wasn’t even Fracture anymore. And he had Titz. She crashed into the door as it swung shut and elbowed her way back through to see them teetering on the edge of the stairwell.

“Let go!” Titz cried, trying to break free.

“And you!” Fracture’s face filled with loathing. “What you carry is not my child, it is the Devil’s spawn.”

Gyro hesitated. *Not that damned baby.* Why did Titz have to ruin their nice little existence by wanting—? She bit her lip. What a stupid thing to think when Titz was in danger. Anyway, it was what Titz wanted.

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Fracture and Titz wobbled.

"No!" Gyro leapt forward, but as she crashed into them, Fracture pivoted and Titz slipped from his grasp. She screamed as she tumbled down the stairs and crashed onto the next stairwell. Fracture wrenched free, but lost his footing and fell. He landed on top of Titz's stomach with a thud, then rolled over her and scrambled to his feet to dash down the next set of stairs.

"Titz!" Gyro screamed and started down the stairs. "Help! Help!"

The door above burst open and two nurses dashed in. "Oh my Lord!" one muttered. She tapped her fingers. "Emergency, third floor, fire escape. Doctor Panarkis, please come to the third floor fire escape. Now!" The two nurses pushed past to fuss over the unconscious Titz.

Gyro turned to look down the stairs, but Fracture was gone.

"Shit!" Crank hissed.

She looked up at him, standing at the top of the stairs, staring at Titz and just as impotent as she was. Panarkis blundered past him, followed by a couple of orderlies carting a stretcher. Gyro dragged herself up the stairs and stared at Crank. What had just happened?

Then Titz moaned. "Gyro!" she called out and a nurse tried to calm her and ease her onto a stretcher. "Oh my stomach. What about the baby?" She screamed and clutched at her belly, her face screwed up in pain.

"Are you pregnant?" Panarkis asked.

"Yes," Titz wheezed.

"How long?"

"Ooh!" Titz moaned and tried to sit up.

"Hold her down," he ordered and then looked up at Crank as if he was the father. "How long?"

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"Six weeks," Gyro said in a flat voice. It was just supposed to be a harmless adventure. A little fun.

Panarkis went stony-faced and made a call. "Get me Obstetrics. We have an emergency, a woman six weeks pregnant, in a fall." He waved at the orderlies to lift Titz up and carry her down the stairs. "We're on our way."



Gyro sat in the chair next to Titz's bed in her private room and stared out the window. This hospital was a far cry from the one where Fracture had been treated. Titz's broken arm was on the mend and apart from concussion, a fractured rib and bruising, there was only one piece of bad news. She had lost the baby. Gyro tried to fathom why she felt more relieved than anything.

She snuck a guilty glance at Titz. But Titz was dead to the world, thanks to the sedatives prescribed.

You'll get over the baby. Maybe it's for the best.

Gyro bit her lip and stared out the window again. Time was a great healer. She sucked in her top lip and blinked away the tears forming in her eyes. Why did Titz need a baby when she had her? What was going to happen to them now? Fracture was the linchpin who had held their site together, but with Titz suffering from depression and Crank lost in his own little world of misery because his best friend was gone for good and the cops weren't interested in tracking him down, someone had to take his place.

And that someone had to be Gyro. She sat up and squared her shoulders. Crank and Titz might be more skilled and have more experience than her, but she had talent and was a reasonable cracker in her own right. Yes, it was time she took over the responsibility of leading the *Yellow Peril* through this hard time.

She leant over and squeezed Titz's hand. *We'll get through this, you'll see. And our love will be stronger. I swear.* And in times like these, a baby was the last thing they needed.

Gyro nodded to herself. Yes, maybe it was for the best.

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