

WE'LL CONSPIRE

"There's a city at the centre of the earth," the barista said as she handed me my coffee. She'd spelled my name wrong on the side of the cup but these things happen.

"I thought there was a ball of molten lava at the centre of the earth," I said. I sipped the coffee. It had caramel in it, which I didn't want. I took it anyway.

"Do the research!" the barista shouted as I left the coffee shop. I ignored her and stuck my hand out for a cab. I was running late.

"I see you don't believe in 'em either," said the cab driver.

"What?" I asked. I looked at my watch. It didn't help.

"Masks," he said. "You're not wearing a mask."

"I'm double vaccinated," I told him. He shook his head. His face in the rear view mirror was pitying.

"You're just waiting til they turn on the switch," he said.

"What switch?"

"The one that gives you your instructions," the cabbie said.

"Just here is fine," I replied.

I walked as quickly as I could, then I broke into a run. Sweaty or later, these were my choices. I pushed through the revolving door into the lobby and almost slid up to reception.

"I'm here to see -" I began.

"The election was fixed," said the receptionist. She was in her mid 20s and she had sparkly nails.

"I'm very late," I said.

"You can't trust the mainstream media," she said. "Name?"

I told her, and waited an eternity as she printed out a visitor's pass. I grabbed it and headed for the lift. A stocky security stopped me and pointed at my bag.

"The King is a lizard," he told me as he handed my bag back.

I pressed the button for the lift and got in. It was crowded.

"The government know about the UFOs but suppress the knowledge," a small woman told her companion. He nodded.

"The world is controlled by a shadowy cabal," he said as if in agreement.

The door opened. "Excuse me," I said, but nobody moved to let me out and the lift carried on upwards. I started to feel panicky. I was hemmed in, I was stuck, I had missed my floor. I couldn't breathe, I felt heavy, I felt sick. I fainted, I collapsed on the floor.

When I awoke, I was strapped to a table. A lizard was standing over me, his Bill Gates mask hanging on the wall behind. Some shadowy men in robes were conferring with a triangular-headed alien. Several famous Hollywood entertainers were laughing as they drank from a bottle of something deeply red.

"Where am I?" I asked.

The lizard picked up a drill.

"In the city at the centre of the earth," he said. He turned on the drill.

I could smell burning. I smiled.

"I'm home," I said.