

A woman with long brown hair, wearing detailed silver and black armor, is shown from the waist up, aiming a bow. She is looking off to the side with a focused expression. The background is a bright, hazy sky with a large, faint, circular architectural detail visible in the distance. The title 'JERICHO'S Wall' is overlaid in the center in a yellow serif font, with 'JERICHO'S' in all caps and 'Wall' in a cursive script.

JERICHO'S *Wall*

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Chapter 1

The fresh sea breeze blew across the patio of Jericho Baal's summer home on the island of Crete, stirring feathery leaves of the Cyprus trees that were lined up on each side like tin soldiers guarding Lord Baal's summer residence. The only open area was directly out to the cobalt blue sea of the Mediterranean where a dock led out to his 167-foot private yacht, aptly named BAAL. This island retreat was the place where the lord would summarily call in his generals from around the world for business, entertainment and, most importantly, worshipful company.

From his patio lounge, Jericho Baal smiled as he saw his Monitors busily working as they prepared for the meeting. The invention of these Monitors was truly a stroke of diabolical genius. These identical android beings with their superior strength obeyed every order, and even better, their superior hearing ability kept a check on any human disloyalty to Lord Baal's rules.

Today's gathering of his Generals was going to be a special meeting, one that the Generals weren't expecting. He loved surprises that made people squirm and that thought made him break out in a broad smile revealing yellowed-teeth. He ran a hand through his black hair and then closed his gold-veined eyes against the heat of the sun. The extreme heat felt wonderful over every inch of his weathered naked body.

He had at last achieved his reason for being. The evil kingdom that he had set up 200 years before had finally culminated in just himself and the carefully handpicked generals that he knew would obey his every whim, and of course the workers who provided all his needs. The others before, those leaders of the financial world who wanted to rule the world, had no idea of who they signed on with to help them.

He devilishly smiled as he thought of those from Europe, who first signed on to his scheme. And then there were Americans, with their greed. They would sign on to anything. But, like the Europeans, they kept wanting more until at last he said enough. He happily eliminated them one by one. He created this scheme and he alone would achieve it without competition from anyone. He was, after all, Lord Jericho Baal.

He turned his head as he heard the door open and close behind him.

"Sir excuse me, but I thought you would like to know."

He looked up to see his lovely assistant with her long robe flowing softly in the breeze, looking as edible as ever.

"What is it, Lilith?"

"All of your Generals have arrived and are in Greece. They will be arriving here at 1:00," she said as the breeze blew a strand of her long black hair across her face.

“And the time right now is?”

“11:15,” she replied with a smile.

“Certainly, time enough,” he said reaching for her.

Across the Mediterranean from Lord Baal’s estate was the city that was once Athens where Lord Baal’s Generals gathered in the Ballroom of the Royal Palace. They spoke quietly to each other as they awaited their orders.

These 10 Generals, each served their respective area of the world. They represented the remaining wealth of the world. One, because of his royal status, others because of their personal wealth, and still others because of special favor from Lord Baal himself. Lord Baal’s goal of building a pristine planet and reducing the surplus population had been achieved exactly as planned. Biological weapons that spread viruses throughout the world was the first assault. That alone wiped out millions of people worldwide. For those that survived, the next step was vaccines. With fear among the population, the masses readily lined up for them not knowing that the deadly virus was actually in the shots. Tens of millions more died.

Within the last 67 years, the earth’s population was reduced from 8 billion to a more workable 217 million. Finally, Jericho Baal stepped up and put an end to this sadness and promised to help the remaining people. He generously gave them housing and food as well as free clothing and all he asked in return was their help to replenish the land to build a better future for them and for their children.

There were no longer countries, no longer wars and no longer churches. Money was only exchanged between Lord Baal and the Generals, who commanded the workers. The workers received no pay and owned no property. It was now a one-world society known as the Great Collective. In gratitude, Lord Baal demanded 15% of the profits of each of these Commonwealth states to be placed in his care to help maintain the wilderness and to keep the planet clean. This was his Wilderness and no one was allowed to be there except, of course, him. He made sure that Monitors patrolled the perimeters of each Commonwealth and gave strict orders for anyone violating this rule to be put to death.

These ten Commonwealths were held in small areas throughout the world. The rest of the land was returned to its natural state. He also said for the well being and safety of everyone, there were just a few rules to follow. One of which was to daily honor Lord Baal for his help. All workers were required to sing the state Anthem three times a day. The first was at 5:00 am, when the workers began their workday; the second was at 12:00 pm, just before lunch; and the last was at 5:00 pm, when the workers were finished with their day’s work and were allowed to go home. Since the people were grateful for his help, and even more grateful to be alive, they happily accepted this.

The Generals, dressed in their finest woolen uniforms, were all looking forward to their meeting with the Lord as they assembled in the Ballroom. This ancient building was one of the few Presidential Palaces that still remained in the world because it served a use for Lord Baal.

Mohamed Gabr, who was General of the North Africa Commonwealth, could be heard above the others when he said, "But General Tules, I'm afraid we're beginning to cross lines."

General Angela Tules, of the South American Commonwealth, responded patiently, "No, General. As I've told you before, my pharmaceutical production has nothing to do with your chemicals."

"Yes you have said this, but still my sources have told me that you now have a chemical division. Is this true?"

"My dear General. It is true that we have a slight interest, but you must understand that all pharmaceutical companies have an agrochemical division. It's unavoidable since there is a slight overlap, but as far as manufacturing chemicals. No, General. We leave that up to you. This is your field," she said with a slight smile.

May Winningstad, the General of the Western America Commonwealth, looked in the direction of General Gabr when he had raised his voice, but returned her attention to Robert Chan, the General of the Eastern Asia Commonwealth. She was the tallest of the female generals and stood almost 6 feet tall. Even in her woolen uniform, she still displayed perfect curves. "General Chan," she said as she brushed her red hair from her face, "I would be very interested in hearing more about your use of drones. We've been using them for years to help in our agriculture and it's been quite profitable. But I've heard you have been using them to induce weather patterns."

"Yes," he answered with a slight hesitation. "We're experimenting with cloud seeding."

"I find that fascinating," she responded. "Have you really been able to create rain?"

General Chan smiled and said carefully, "We're in the early stages so nothing definitive yet."

"I understand," she said as she smiled. "But the possibilities are exciting especially since we live under almost a cloudless sky and the effects of heat are hard on our workers. With your seeding, can you choose between clouds and actual rain?"

General Chan smiled. "As I said, we are still in the early stages."

On the opposite side of the Ballroom, General Cook was in a small group who were discussing their mining ventures. "Unfortunately, Australia has been hampered by the fires that are plaguing us right now. We've lost many of our workers in the gas fields through smoke inhalation but the good news is that with all of that, we have still managed to hold our number that Lord Jericho expected."

Nicky Bekker, General of the South Africa added, "Well, you don't need much diesel to power up the electric trains, so it works out."

“True,” Ginia Cook said. “Fortunately, the gold mines came through. How are your mines doing in South Africa, General Bekker?”

He smiled, “They just keep producing. Couldn’t say that years ago with everybody in the game, but we’re doing fine now.” He turned to the General from Europe. “Still pumping oil?”

General Oleg Timchenko from Eastern Europe, who rarely smiled said, “Yeah, Eastern Europe is doing fine. But with less need for oil, we are concentrating on farming and have expanded into the wilderness with Lord Jericho’s permission.”

“Really? Lord Jericho approved of that?” General Dieter Otto, from Western Europe, asked knowing that the wilderness was never to be touched.

“Yeah,” General Timcheko responded. “We’ve had to double up on our working hours, so the workers are now being fed one extra meal per day. We needed the ten extra acres of land.”

A short distance away, the General of the Commonwealth of Western Asia, Sultan Omar Alam, was listening intently as the Canadian Commonwealth General Joseph Irving was discussing how technology was adding to their food production.

“The drones have been very useful for a couple of reasons. Like both of the American Commonwealths, we have used them to drop seeds to the workers, but we’ve found that they are also useful in eliminating insect damage as well as aerating and watering the fields.”

The Sultan smiled. “So soon we will not need the workers?”

General Irving returned the smile, “Well, we’re not there just yet.”

General Hart, from the Commonwealth of Eastern North America, added, “Who knows what’s going to happen in the future, but in the meantime we are saddled with these workers and they need to be fed. I absolutely agree with the usefulness of the drones. Our food production has increased by a third.”

A Monitor came into the room and announced, “Generals, we will be boarding our transport shortly to Crete. If you will just follow me.”

He led them out through the building to the back door. Beyond was the transporter waiting on the concrete pad. He pushed a button on the side wing and the air stair came down revealing the entrance to the transporter. The Generals climbed the stairs into the luxurious cabin that held 20 reclining seats. In the background, there was soft music playing.

The Monitor stood at the front on the cabin and said, “Generals, I trust you are all comfortable. This will be a short ten minute flight and you will be met by Monitors on Crete when you land,” he said as he punched the buttons to program the flight.

“Have a good day.” He descended the air stair and immediately it retracted back into the transport and the engine began a soft hum. The transport slowly lifted off, elevated 100 feet and zoomed away over the Mediterranean Sea.

In exactly ten minutes the transport landed in front of Lord Jericho's home and the air stair immediately came down. Two Monitors were waiting as the Generals descended the stairs. “Lord Baal is waiting for you inside. Please follow me and I'll show you the way.”

They crossed the massive front Lawn, with the second Monitor following closely, and entered a wide tiled courtyard where they finally had a view of the 45,000 square foot palace with its whitewashed walls and red-tiled roof. As they came through the door, they were immediately in a large circular hall with travertine floors. The Venetian plastered walls held large abstract art within deep niches.

The Monitor continued straight past doorways off to the right and left until he came to a huge central hall that was obviously set up awaiting their arrival. Ten chairs were placed in a semi-circle, each separated by tables, which held glasses full of water. The chairs all faced a large leather chair, with a table beside it. On the other side of the table was a smaller chair. A Pad was on the table along with two glasses of water.

“Generals, please be seated. Lord Baal will join you momentarily,” the Monitor said as he and the second Monitor took their place at the back of the room.

The Generals took their chairs and waited eight long minutes in silence.

Finally Lord Baal, dressed in a long grey robe, came through the door and took his seat at the front of the room. Lilith followed him in her flowing white robe as she sat in the smaller chair.

He carefully studied each of his Generals before saying, “Thank you all for coming. I trust you had a pleasant trip.”

Some of the Generals nodded.

“Good,” Lord Baal said. “Shortly we'll be going down for luncheon on the yacht and perhaps a short boat ride but business first,” he said briefly flashing a yellow-toothed smile.

“Lilith,” he said as he turned to his assistant, “Do you have the figures of each of Commonwealth states?”

She quickly picked up her Pad, punched a code and handed it to Lord Baal.

He silently looked at the figures, glancing occasionally at the Generals, and then held the Pad in his hands as he called out the first name, “General Cook, can you explain these figures?”

All eyes were on Ginia Cook. She cleared her throat and spoke with as much conviction as she could muster. "Lord Baal, Australia has suffered this year from deadly fires and we lost many workers in the gas fields. I pulled workers from the farm fields to help, and sent others to the gold mines. Fortunately, the gold mine revenue made up for the lost revenue on the gas fields, so we were actually even with the figures you expected this year."

"But General, I take it with your loss of life, that you now lack workers. What is your plan?"

"Sir, I have been adding extra hours to all the workers so we can still meet our quota. Fortunately we have a multitude of children that will be coming into the farm fields in a few months so that will help with the problem."

"Very well, keep me informed."

He looked at his Pad. "General Bekker, I see that your revenue on your diamond mines has well overshot our figures. I must commend you."

"Thank you, sir," Nicky Bekker responded.

Lord Baal turned his attention once again to his Pad and frowned. "General Winningstad," he said as he looked at her. "From what I can see your worker numbers have been reduced. Can you explain?"

May Winningstad was fully prepared to tell the Lord about her excellent numbers but was caught off guard with this question. She hesitated before replying, then carefully said, "Sir, it is true that our worker force has been slightly reduced. This is due to a number of things. We have a population of Olders that have reduced output. We have solved that problem with the assistance of the Removers." Lord Baal nodded, but said nothing as he waited to hear more.

"In order to make up for this loss, we have added more production quotas to our existing workers, and I am happy to report that that our figures have met your expectations."

Lord Baal continued to stare at General Winningstad. "Is there any other reason your worker numbers are down?" he asked as he glared at her. When she didn't reply he continued. "Could it be possibly that you have allowed workers to escape to the wilderness?"

She was caught and she knew it. "Sir, I did not allow anything. With the help of the Monitors we have discovered that there was a small rebel uprising. I took immediate steps to punish the offenders. Some were taken care of by the Removers. The others have been successfully Re-educated. Their immediate discipline was a lesson to the workers to never let this happen again."

"May it be so," he replied.

“General Chan, we spoke last about your efforts with changing weather patterns. My sources tell me that you have been successful.”

General Chan clenched his jaw before replying, “Yes, my Lord.”

“This can be of great use to all of our Commonwealth states. I would like you to prepare a document detailing exactly how you have accomplished this. Would you be so kind as to do this for us all?”

General Chan stared back at Lord Baal. “Of course, my Lord.”

“And General, I expect to have this document in one week.”

General Chan did not change expression as he replied, “Sir, it will be done.”

Several of the Generals gave a slight smile. Among those was Oleg Timchenko.

“General Timchenko, I see this pleases you.”

“Yes, Lord Baal. We are concentrating our efforts on agriculture and have extended our hours into evening. This means adding an extra meal for our workers. With being able to control the weather our production will most definitely rise.”

Lord Baal smiled. “Production is paramount.”

“General Gabr,” Lord Baal said as he looked directly at Mohamed Gabr and held his gaze for a moment before he continued, “I see that your figures are well down from expectations. What do you have to say about this?”

General Gabr stiffened and said, “Lord Baal, there are a few reasons. First, our workers have simply not kept up with the work. I have disciplined them and sent some back for Re-education but still the profits have been down. We have also had an Older who was responsible for the largest spill we’ve ever had and we had no choice but to have the Removers take care of him. And recently I have discovered that there has been another General that has been taking business from us.”

Lord Baal set his Pad on the table and asked, “And who would this be?”

“Sir,” he replied turning to General Angela Tules. “She has been infringing on my profits. She actually is producing chemicals and this is my assigned duty.”

“I see,” said Lord Baal. “This General, whose Commonwealth is not only on the other side of the planet from you and in fact across an ocean, has been stealing your ideas. Is that it?”

“Yes exactly,” General Gabr said angrily. Then added, “Sir.”

Lord Baal narrowed his gold-veined eyes at General Gabr. "General, our Great Collective has no place for self-serving individuals. One is not superior over another. I've heard enough of your excuses. Perhaps a lesson is in order," he said as he gripped his hand into a fist. Within seconds, the General began convulsing until Jericho Baal finally released his hand and watched as the General slumped down in his chair.

Lord Baal snapped his finger at the Monitors in the back of the room who both immediately came forward.

"I believe the good General needs a nap. Please take him to one of our guest rooms." As the two monitors removed the General, Lord Baal added, "Such a shame. He's missing such a good luncheon."

The Generals looked at each other in fear.

Lord Baal broke the silence, "Now where we?" He asked. "Ah yes, General Tules." All eyes focused on the General from South America. "That was quite an accusation, wasn't it?"

General Tules replied quietly, "Yes sir."

"Whether it is true or not, you do realize that putting your own interest above others, is something that I won't tolerate."

General Tules hesitated a moment. "Yes sir," she said at last.

There was a chill in the room as everyone waited for Lord Baal to continue. "This business is most unpleasant, so I will say this to you. Your numbers have saved you." And then he added, "Today. But rest assured, this is my last warning to you."

General Tules swallowed. "Thank you, my Lord."

Jericho Baal took a deep breath and let it out. "Now, to the business of the future. Since you have all displayed your ability to turn a nice profit, I have confidence that you can achieve even more. Each one of you will be expected to produce an extra 10% beginning immediately. There was an audible gasp in the room and Jericho Baal stared at the Generals momentarily. He continued with a slight smile, "Really, this is a compliment to all of you for your leadership qualities. And oh, just one more thing, your tribute to me will also be going up an extra 5%."

Jericho Baal looked down the line and back again at his Generals. "I trust that you will not disappoint me."

He clasped his fingers and smiled. "Now, it's time for fun. I'm told that the chef has a special menu planned of rare Wagyu filet and spiny lobster. Anyone hungry?"

Chapter 2

It was hot, hotter than she could remember in her almost 16 years. And it was ten times worse in wool. The October sun drilled through the pristine atmosphere to the fields where Joshlynn Fellows was planting seed potatoes. Around her were mostly students since fieldwork in the afternoons was a requirement of the Collective after a full morning of class. Children from the age of five up to the age of sixteen were required to be responsible for the production of food. There were also some workers over sixteen, as well as Olders there like her mother who was almost 50, whose Forever Job was chosen for them because of the test. But Joshlynn hoped beyond hope that her life was going to be changed as of tomorrow when she would turn sixteen and it would be her turn. There was no studying for the Forever Test, it simply assigned your forever job based on your answers.

She pushed her dark auburn hair out of the way as she bent down and dug holes with a spade. The oppressive heat made her wool uniform pinch as she planted each seed potato cut side down then carefully patted the loose earth on the top with her hands.

She looked up as a drone buzzed close to her and dropped a fresh pile of seed potatoes. She turned and looked back at the long row that was yet to be planted and then glanced at her mother. Intuitively, her mother turned her head toward her daughter and smiled and then immediately went back to planting her row. Joshlynn quickly checked to see if any of the Monitors caught the exchange. It was strictly forbidden to make contact with any other workers in the field.

At last the three chimes signaled that it was time for the Anthem and all workers stood, with the exception of Molly, Joshlynn's mother, who was struggling to get to her feet. A photo of a handsome young man with blonde hair and steely blue eyes was projected onto a Sky Screen and the Anthem began with all workers and monitors singing in unison.

*Lord Baal we pledge our honor high
Lord Baal without you we would die
This earth you saved from want and strife
We laud you fully with our life
Equality serves to keep us strong
Our selfish ways we know are wrong
So hail to you and Mother earth
This glorious planet of our birth
And when we are old, we move aside
To keep this land a source of pride
Our youth are strong and will carry on
To serve you til their time is done
Lord Baal we pledge our honor high
Lord Baal without you we would die
Hail, Lord Jericho Baal. Hail to the Collective*

At the conclusion of the Anthem all workers and Monitors made their way to the electric trains. Joshlynn immediately ran to her mother to help her.

“Everything all right?”

Molly coughed once and answered, “Fine. I’m fine”.

They each touched the Identifier Screen recording who was aboard, then sat in silence as the train slowly headed back to the city. At Station 3, Joshlynn and Molly disembarked and immediately headed for the apartment that they shared with two others. She picked up the box just outside that contained the daily food ration and allowed her mother to enter first.

The tiny two bedroom one bath apartment, with its drab green painted walls, had a central lounge area with a worn blue sofa, two equally worn chairs, in brown, and a small wooden dining table with four folding chairs. A tiny kitchen along one wall held a sink, an under counter refrigerator and, next to that, a warming oven.

The two bedrooms, painted in the same drab green color, were identical with two narrow beds hugging each wall. A table divided the beds in the middle. Two coat racks in each room provided hooks to hang the uniforms.

The ever-present subliminal music that was piped into each room of the apartment only had one switch, a volume control, but no second switch to turn the music off. As Joshlynn walked in, she set the food box on the counter and turned up the volume then joined her mother who was already sitting on the couch.

Joshlynn whispered in concern that the Monitors were listening, “Would you like something to eat?”

“Not just yet,” she replied softly. She leaned back and let out a breath. “I’d rather talk. How are you feeling about your test tomorrow?”

Joshlynn’s face lit up. “Excited, but I’m so nervous.”

“I know. I remember my test. I had such hopes. But,” she smiled, “field work. It’s been hard, but it also has advantages like being able to see you each day. You know I missed seeing you the first years of your life when you were raised in the Nursery Commune. But these last eleven years have been so special to me.” She reached over and squeezed Joshlynn’s hand.

“Tell me again about the old times,” Joshlynn said.

Molly momentarily looked away and then turned back to her daughter. “Joshlynn, you know this is dangerous,” she whispered. “And you absolutely can’t talk to anyone else about this.”

“I won’t, I promise,” Joshlynn said quickly.

"This is only what my grandmother, your great grandmother, told me. Yes, she was one of the Olders, but she was very sharp. She actually lived during the free times when people could have religious beliefs and they worshipped their God if they chose to. There were no mandatory Anthems then. People could choose what they wanted to do with their lives and they could travel wherever they wanted to go."

"And there were no Monitors," Joshlynn added.

Molly nodded, "And there were no Monitors. And families could have as many children as they wanted."

"Why did it change?"

"The Leaders decided that there were too many people on the earth and they were using too much of the resources. So they decided to decrease the population."

"By just having one child?"

"Yes, and by creating a system where the weakest part of the population would be eliminated. Many also died because of the great plagues."

"And the Removers took them away," Joshlynn said.

"Yes," her mother replied. "The Removers weeded out the weakest of the population so the strong ones, like you, could carry on."

"Tell me again about father."

Molly smiled. "He was a kind man, such a good man. He would have been so proud of you. You're very much like him, you know."

"You never told me that before. How am I like him?"

"He always questioned everything. I told him that it was dangerous and I'm telling you the same thing. I lost him and I don't want to lose you."

Joshlynn's eyes opened in surprise. "So, because he asked questions, the Removers came? Just because he asked questions?"

"Yes, the Removers did come, but it was later. You were only six months old then. When he came back from Re-education, he was so angry. He just wanted to be free and wanted to escape. He said he would go get you and we would all escape together. I told him a baby couldn't survive in the wilderness and I couldn't leave you. He said he would come back for us. He just needed to taste freedom once in his life. And he left."

"Did you hear from him again?"

"No, I only heard about him. The Monitors caught him before he reached the border. Then the Removers came."

They heard noises outside the door. Then Bella and Kim, their housemates, walked in.

"I'm starving," Bella said. "I wasn't able to get lunch today. Did you bring in the food?" she asked as she turned down the music.

"It's on the counter." She turned to her mother. "Can I make you some food now?"

Molly gave her a quick nod.

Bella spoke non-stop during dinner while Joshlynn watched her mother pick at her meal.

As was their normal schedule, after the meal they prepared for bed because the morning Anthem came at 5:00 am and they were expected to be fed, dressed and standing outside their apartment building to sing before they boarded trains to their assigned locations. The Monitors took note of any latecomers.

Molly was already in bed when Joshlynn came in the bedroom. Her mother's face was devoid of color except for her flushed cheeks. Her short grayish red hair was matted to her head. Joshlynn put her hand on her mother's face and felt the heat.

"Would you like some water?"

She nodded.

Within a moment Joshlynn was back and helped her mother drink a few swallows. "Sleep well. You'll feel better in the morning."