

Excerpt from *The Unfrozen Few*, Book One: Welcome to the Future

© Randy Boyd / West Beach Books

Used with permission

Gasping. Nathan Black gasped, lungs caught between inhaling and exhaling, mind screaming: *You're in a coffin!*

Coughing. His core spasmed. Limbs twitched. *Breathe*, he ordered himself.

Breathing. Reflexively, his hand reached up and touched—

Not a coffin. A cryo-chamber. Its glass cover slid back as sensors detected movement. He calmed, took a deep breath, wondered: *Who will I see first? What year is it?*

But no one was there. No family. No medical team. And no light. Only faint green gaslight from his chamber, dimming as the frozen formula evaporated into the oxygen-rich room.

“Big brother?” he called out. No response. “Hello? Can anyone hear me?”

He sat up, peered into the darkness, then hesitated before stepping out. His black thermos-suit was intact. Had it been a safe vessel?

“Of course.” He stood, half amazed, half proud. “But ...?”

Where were the scientists in lab coats, ready to help him rejoin the living? The room felt vacant—except for the glow of green gas from other cryo-chambers. Ten of them. All unopened.

He moved through the dark, searching for a door or light switch. A voice stopped him.

“I can't move,” said a young man. Sounded black, like Nathan.

“One second,” Nathan said. “Trying to shed more light—”

“Am I dead?”

“Just the opposite. You've been reborn.”

“What are you doing?” the man asked, panic rising.

“Looking for a way out,” Nathan said, running his hands along the wall. “A door, a call button, anything.”

“Why is it so dark?”

“The gas is the only light,” Nathan said.

The man's breathing quickened. "Are you sure I'm not dead?"

"The unopened chambers," Nathan said. "You see their green glow?"

"Affirmative."

"Then you're not dead."

"Oh God!" the man cried. "But *he's* still dead!"

"Who? Hold on," Nathan said. "Others must be waking up too. Before we lose the light, I need to figure out what the hell is going on."

"I don't understand."

"You will." Nathan approached the man's chamber and took his hand. "You're alive. See? Now breathe."

The man's face morphed from confusion to wonder. "It worked? Miraculously?"

Nathan squinted at the name tag on his thermos-suit. "Well, Darius," he said, "if you mean freezing us in time—yes. But—"

"What year is it, Doctor ...?"

"Yes, I am, but—"

"You're dressed like me," Darius said. "Am I cured of G.R.I.D.? Sorry—AIDS? I don't feel cured. More like still dying ... and not just of a shattered heart."

"Yes, I'm a doctor," Nathan said, resuming his search. "But also a patient, like you."

"Why can't I move?"

"You can," Nathan said. "Wait ... I need the glow from the nine unopened chambers."

"Oh, indeed I can move." Darius sat up, looked around. "But I only count six chambers still glowing."

"I saw my glow vanish before my eyes," said a Latina's voice.

"Who else is awake?" Nathan asked, hands skimming the walls.

"I need medical attention," said an older white man.

"I'm a doctor. One second," Nathan said, scanning the dimming columns of light.

"My skin," the man groaned. "It's on fire."

"Swanky?" said a young black woman. "Swanky, where are you?"

“Can someone count how many are awake?” Nathan asked, still hunting for an exit.

“Can somebody page Dr. Frankie Black?” the black woman added.

“I ain’t moving,” the Latina said, “not till I know I’m not dreaming.”

“How long were we frozen?” the white man asked.

“Where’s the mad doctor in charge of freezing us?” the black woman asked.

“In fact,” said Darius, “where-forth are both mad doctors? I most definitely don’t feel cured.”

“Didn’t someone say they’re a doctor?” the Latina asked.

“Yes, and I’m trying to find the exit,” Nathan said.

“He black?” the black woman asked. “And his name is Dr. Black?”

“Yes and yes. Name’s Nathan.”

“Hello?” said a younger white man. “Do I have permission to exit this bio-cryo-whatever-chamber?”

“Definitely feverish,” the older white man said. “My skin is red hot!”

Nathan hurried to the man’s chamber and checked his forehead. “You’re fine,” he said, looking at the name on his thermos-suit. “Raymond.”

“But am I cured of AIDS?” Raymond asked. “How come I still feel my creepy, KS-like sores under this getup?”

“What say we solve some bigger-picture items first,” Nathan said, returning to the wall.

“Where the hell are we?” the Latina asked.

“Still near LA,” the black woman guessed. “Right?”

“What year is it?” the younger white man asked. “My guess: 1995.”

“This better not be some snake-oil scam,” Raymond muttered.

“Would a scam have kept us alive?” Nathan banged on the wall, then exhaled. “We’re probably still in Duranga Valley. On the Black Ops Medical compound. Granted, we weren’t supposed to wake up like this.”

“In the dark,” the younger white man said. “Literally.”

“We’re supposed to go through some program,” the Latina said.

“Emergence,” Darius offered. “To re-adapt in a safe place with staff, guidance, and counselors.”

“Found it!” Nathan said.

“The guidance and counselors?” Darius asked.

“An opening.” Nathan traced a square indentation on the wall. “I knew there had to be a way out.”

“And the cure!” the younger white man said.

“As far as I’m concerned, it’s all about the cure,” the black woman said.

“Oh, I’m living for the God-blessed cure!” the Latina said.

“So,” Darius said, “going out on a limb here: we were all frozen because we had AIDS.”

“No need to stay in the dark about that,” the black woman said.

“I need help pushing this open,” Nathan called out.

“Coming,” Raymond said. “Just smile so I can see you—kidding.”

“Only four chambers still glowing,” Darius noted. “Whoever you are, welcome.”

“Don’t be a stranger, stranger,” said the younger white man. “Come out, come out, whoever you are.”

“Better still,” the black woman quipped, “lay low till somebody pay they light bill.”

“Help me push,” Nathan said as Raymond joined him. “Everyone else, stand back.”

“Most of us haven’t dared to leave our chambers,” Darius said. “Myself included.”

“Stay that way for now,” Nathan said.

“They said they’d wake us when there was a cure,” the younger white man said. “We’re awake. Ergo, there’s a cure . . . right?”

“Could be our chambers just ran out of formula,” Nathan said, pressing his shoulder into the wall.

“Somebody should be here to tell us,” Raymond said, pushing alongside him.

“Doing my best to find out why they’re not,” Nathan said, straining. The wall gave way.

“We did it!” Raymond raised his hand. “High five, brother!”

Nathan ignored him. “I’m going in.”

“What’s happening? We can’t see,” the Latina said.

“Only three chambers still glowing,” said the black woman.

“The black doc,” Raymond reported, “he’s climbing through some cubbyhole in the wall.”

“A ladder!” Nathan announced, gripping wooden rungs. “They must be nearby.”

“Who?” Raymond asked.

“The mad scientists who saved our lives.” Nathan climbed upward, feeling for another panel. “I think I know this place ... one of the old underground labs.”

“He says we’re under a lab,” Raymond relayed. “You expect us to climb up there?”

“Help is on the way,” Nathan said, descending. “The sooner I get moving—”

“You’re abandoning us?” the Latina asked, edging toward the exit.

“Listen, Doc,” Raymond said. “One: my skin feels like the sun. Two: who the fuck are you?”

Nathan felt his forehead. “Still no fever.”

“My breathing,” the younger white man said. “Pretty short ... maybe ... pneumocystis pneumonia.”

“He needs a hospital!” the black woman shouted—igniting a flurry of voices:

*“Are we all still dying?” “Where’s the cure?” “What about the doctors who froze us?” “I’m just as scared as before!”*

“Quiet!” Nathan commanded. “Some of you seem fine. Others need attention. I’ll do what I can, but I could use some help.”

“Help how?” Darius asked.

Nathan scanned the room. Only three green columns of light remained. “Anyone willing and able, climb up here with me. Help find a light switch.”