Project FEAR

It was time for a change. An elderly woman tucked a flyaway strand of gray hair behind her ear as she wearily looked out the gleaming wall of windows of her tower. The tower was the tallest structure in the gated city, equal only to the looming two thousand foot high metal walls that enclosed everything within. From there, the armed guards regularly patrolled the boundaries of the city to stop anyone from getting in— or out, nothing more. The watchmen each turned a blind eye to all else, including the corpses that littered the streets. The dark and gloomy clouds overshadowed the city, but couldn't obscure the fear-instilling letters that rested on top of the tower. "*Atlas,*" the company that started it all. Who knew the end of the world would be brought about intentionally? Streaks of light from the monochromatic sky shone in through the windows as the woman with gray hair reflected on the events that occurred in her youth.

"How about 'Project FEAR'?" A deep, boisterous voice rang out in a room brimming with people who worked with the government. Everyone had laughed then, when her father suggested the name. "Well, everyone has to be afraid of *something*, and fear is something that's not always tangible; fear is often something you can't fight back against. After all, nobody can block out their own mind."

Everyone had laughed then. She plastered a rigid smile onto her face as she replayed in her mind her father's ruthless words. *"...Something you can't fight back against."* Was that what they were creating? At the start, she too had believed her father's idea to be brilliant; a project to end all the racism, sexism, classism, and all other discrimination that occurred. That was what the world was suffering from, and what brings people together better than fear? Mutual fear. That's when they created the tower to "unify the people", as her father liked to say. Even as

people lost their lives, or their purposes to keep on living, Project FEAR continued to move forward without signs of stopping.

The tower embedded seeds of fear into people's minds and their lives began to change forever. Of course, that's when the walls went up too, to keep everyone inside, to keep everyone *together*. Later on, she would learn that fear wasn't so easily controlled or manipulated. Things never went exactly according to plan. Contrary to father's expectations, the people drowning in fear did not seek out the support of those around them. For many, their first instinct was to... eliminate the threat. And when everyone was reduced to a tense state of constant fear, well, everyone— or everything— became a threat.

She had seen things; she remembered her eyes widening in horror at the bloodbath that ensued. She recalled her nails digging into her palms with enough force to draw blood as the researchers around her gazed on with blank looks— no, with looks of boredom or disdain. Beyond the tower's windows, the "test subjects"— as they liked to call them— stole others' rations, broke into homes, and fought to the death. When food started to become scarce, the people even feasted on their own kind. The elderly woman squeezed her eyes shut at the painful reminiscence. Some memories just never went away.

"I was always father's favourite." That's why, when she opened her father's secret vault— oh, he told her everything, and even if he didn't, she found out anyway— with her own name as the password, she was able to retrieve the one thing that would end it all. Fifty years too late, but better late than never.

"Omicron?"

"Yes, Ms. Atlas?" A computerized voice sounded as a hologram appeared beside her.

"Initiate Project FEAR destruction sequence—" Father would be turning in his grave.

"—Aleka." It was Greek for *'Defender of Mankind'*.

Really, Father, did you have to use my name for everything? It was time for a change, and she wasn't going to wait around for it to happen.