

EP 14: THE ANGEL PROJECT

Marquita Richardson:

Hi, I'm Marquita Richardson, the voice of Theo. Are you interested in getting episodes of Apollyon ad free? Well, you should join Patreon. For as little as \$2 a month, you'll get episodes free of ads and up to a week early. For \$5 a month, you'll get access to director's commentary and other exclusives. All the proceeds help us continue to make great content for you. So for more information, please visit apollyon.observerpictures.com and click "Become a Member". That's also where you can find transcripts for every episode. Thanks for listening. Enjoy the show.

[Theme music]

DIPA: Observer Pictures presents Apollyon, written and directed by Faith McQuinn. This is episode 14, The Angel Project.

[Emergency vehicles and riot sounds bleed through the window]

Jamilla:

Theo, what are you doing? It's dangerous to be close to the window like that.

Young Theo:

I couldn't sleep, but I just wanted to see what was happening.

Jamilla:

Bad things. It's all bad things. Come to bed with me.

TV:

For your safety. A citywide lockdown is in effect until further notice. No unauthorized persons are allowed outside for any reason. If you are found outside your home, you will be detained. You will not be allowed to return to your home after detainment. Force will be used if necessary.

Young Theo:

Mama, what are you doing?

Jamilla:

Go back into sleep Theo.

Young Theo:

Why are you taking the photos off the wall? Are you going somewhere? Are they taking us like Daddy?

Jamilla:

Honey, no, no, no, no, no we're not going anywhere. I promise.

Young Theo:

Then why are you packing?

Jamilla:

The pictures make me sad. I need to put them away.

Young Theo:

But Daddy's in these.

Jamilla:

Daddy isn't here anymore.

Young Theo:

So his pictures should stay on the wall so we can see them.

Jamilla:

It's too hard to look at these every day honey. I have to put them away.

Young Theo:

They don't make me sad. I'll put them in my room.

Jamilla:

No, Theo, leave them in the box. They need to stay in the box.

Young Theo:

Why are you taking daddy away?

Jamilla:

T, it hurts my heart to see him every day.

Young Theo:

You're lying! You're like those people in balloon suits! You wanted him to go away! You want me to forget him.

[Theo taps on her laptop.]

Theo:

That that that can't be right. DiPA, call Savreen Khanna voice only.

DiPA:

Calling Savreen Khanna.

Savreen (over the phone):

Good evening to you.

Theo:

Hi. I was looking at these files from Mom's Secret computer.

Savreen:

Trying to get your own information. I see.

Theo:

I decided I needed to focus on the good things I already have. Anyway, I came across a file that seems out of place. There's no way these findings are accurate.

Savreen:

Oh, I think I know to whom you're referring. Angeline Guzman, she wasn't a test subject.

Theo:

Then why is her file here?

Savreen:

She is the reason Redivir exists.

Theo:

She was on the research team?

Savreen:

No, she was a test subject. Just not the kind you think. She was living in Costa Rica when AVS started. What? She was the first person to treat Lucas Soto for a snake bite.

Theo:

She was part of Soto's expedition?

Savreen:

She was.

Theo:

Everyone on that expedition died! Everyone in that entire area died!

Savreen:

That is what is in the history books, but Angeline survived.

Theo:

She was immune.

Savreen:

Yes, the code named for the Redivir development was named for her—the Angel Project.

Theo:

I always thought that was just because AVS was Apollyon. I just figured someone was a bit too infatuated with Christian mythology.

Savreen:

Simply coincidence...or fate.

Theo:

And this was all kept secret by the ICRS

Savreen:

A decision we made within the DHH. My team, along with Dr. Hilleman's, were the only ones who knew who she was.

Theo:

Why?

Savreen:

Do you know of any person who's been immune to AVS?

Theo:

There aren't any documented cases that I know of.

Savreen:

Exactly. Statistically, there have to be others.

Theo:

Of course.

Savreen:

But those numbers are probably in the dozens, if that. Angeline was a rarity.

Theo:

That's putting it lightly.

Savreen:

She had to be protected. The best way to do that was to keep her identity out of any permanent record.

Theo:

I guess I can understand that.

Savreen:

There were rumors that someone had survived from the expedition, but no one could confirm it. During the wars in Costa Rica, Angeline fled to New Mexico. That's where we found her.

Theo:

How long did you experiment on her?

Savreen:

We worked with her for three years. Theo, Angeline volunteered willingly for every experiment.

Theo:

You told her the truth, upfront?

Savreen:

Yes, once we explained why we need her, she was more than willing to help.

Theo:

She just jumped at the chance.

Savreen:

Exactly. But after hearing some recordings from Dr. Soto, she was on board.

Theo:

There are recordings!

Savreen:

That's a story for another day. For years we've been trying to develop recombinant antibodies because we'd had next to zero success developing antibodies within any mammals, let alone humans. Angeline's B-cells were golden. They not only fought AVS but eradicated it. She wasn't even a carrier.

Theo:

Holy shit.

Savreen:

It took us four years to replicate her antibodies and develop Redivir.

Theo:

Did she know about the human challenge trials?

[Whoosh transition into flashback in Savreen's office.]

Weiss:

The contact of border control says that we should have numbers by tomorrow morning.

Savreen:

Wonderful. I want to know if this is even possible.

Weiss:

I have to say, I thought the parameters we said would be difficult to meet, but it turns out there are more O-Lims who meet the requirements than I expected.

ICRS Computer:

Entry requested for asset

Savreen:

Entry Granted.

Angeline:

Buenas tardes, Savreen.

Savreen:

Good afternoon, Angeline. You're right on time.

Angeline:

As always, good to see you, Dr. Weiss.

Weiss:

Siempre es bueno verte, Señora Guzman. (It's always good to see you, Ms. Guzman.)

Angeline:

Ah, you've been practicing.

Weiss:

Eh, sí.

Angeline:

Bueno. Keep practicing. You will be fluent soon.

Weiss:

I doubt that, but thank you for the vote of confidence.

Savreen:

Xavier, will you give us a room?

Weiss:

Of course.

Angeline:

¿Necesitas más muestras? (Do you need more samples?)

Savreen:

No, we are done taking samples.

Angeline:

De momento. (For now.)

Savreen:

Forever.

Angeline:

Huh? I've always found it interesting that you understand me, but never speak Spanish.

Savreen:

It doesn't roll off my tongue as beautifully as yours.

Angeline:

If you don't need my PBMCs, why am I here?

Savreen:

Because I need your opinion.

Angeline:

Don't you have an entire room of scientists better qualified?

Savreen:

Not for this

Angeline:

Huh? *Esto debería ser interesante.* (This should be interesting.)

Savreen:

With the success of the Angel drug in primates, we've moved to human trials.

Angeline:

That's wonderful!

Savreen:

Yes.

Angeline:
What's wrong?

Savreen:
When doing trials, the subjects are split into groups. There are those without AVS and those with. The drug has proven to have minimal to no side effects in those without AVS. That is the wonderful news. Exactly what we want.

Angeline:
And those with AVS?

Savreen:
We've been unable to save any of them.

Angeline:
Oh, *lo siento muchísimo*, Savreen. (I'm so sorry.)

Savreen:
Thank you. In studying tissue samples of the deceased, we've come to the conclusion that we're not catching the virus early enough for the drug to work. Angeline, do you know what HCTs are?

Angeline:
I'm not familiar with the term.

Savreen:
Human challenge trials.

Angeline:
Savreen, I'm a nurse, not a research scientist.

Savreen:
We want to give subjects the Apollyon virus.

Angeline:
And you want to know how I feel about this?

Savreen:
I want to know if you think people will be willing to do it.

Angeline:
Why are you asking me?

Savreen:
Because you are willing to help us.

Angeline:
But I'm immune.

Savreen:
Yes, but—

Angeline:
Savreen, you want to purposefully infect people with a virus we call El Cacador.

Savreen:
I don't want to do anything.

Angeline:
Tomato to-mah-to, as Americans say. Have you spoken with Dr. Hilleman on this?

Savreen:
No, and I won't. As far as he knows, we are moving to stage two of the trials. He's not in the DHH. We have to keep this information internal.

Angeline:
I'm not part of the DHH either. Why are you sharing with me?

Savreen:
Because you are in a unique position to give me insight and I trust you.

Angeline:
How many people?

Savreen:
At least 25, double that when we move to phase two.

Angeline:
Will they all be from the same area?

Savreen:
Possibly, asking for cross-border travel privileges would require more people to know.

Angeline:
And there is no other way.

Savreen:
There are always other ways. This is just the best one. We need this drug approved as soon as possible. Too many people are still dying Angeline.

Angeline:

Far too many. [sighs] *No hay mal que por bien no venga, ni bien que su mal no tenga.*

Theo:

What does that mean?

Savreen (over the phone):

There is nothing bad that does not bring something good, and there is nothing good that does not bring something bad. We needed to do what we needed to do. So we did.

Theo:

Where is Angeline now?

Savreen:

I don't know. I don't even know if she's still alive. After Redivir was approved, she was put into the ICRS security program.

Theo:

Did mom know her?

Savreen:

No. They never met. I wish they had.

Theo:

I've been studying AVS for years and I can't believe I didn't know any of this.

Savreen:

The DHH is very good at keeping secrets. It's why I need you as close to that department as possible.

Theo:

It has to be me.

Savreen:

You are in the right place at the right time my dear. And as I told you yesterday, I've set some things in motion.

Theo:

You don't want me to stop the trials, do you?

Savreen:

I sometimes forget how clever you are. No, they are necessary.

Theo:

I don't want anyone to be compromised. We can run this study by exposing the subjects to those living with AVS.

Savreen:

I agree, but exposure doesn't guarantee infection. Studying someone that the clinicians know has been infected with AVS is one of the best ways to see how the vaccine truly works.

Theo:

So what do you want?

Savreen:

Your mother's guilt was from conducting the trials. My guilt was from not telling people the truth. No one thought we would be able to get volunteers because well, most people don't want to give themselves a death sentence. We needed [inaudible 00:12:05]reir desperately. You were so little then. You probably don't remember.

Theo:

I was old enough.

Savreen:

Then you remember that death just became quite normal for us. If it wasn't AVS, it was war or conflict. So many families broken, and I was sick of it. We were all sick of it.

Theo:

Enough so to ignore your better judgment?

Savreen:

I went against what I believed to be morally right because I believed more in what was necessary, and it worked. We only lost a few. Most of the subjects are living full lives. Angeline willingly helped us. She gave us sample after sample and went through years of tests because she knew the importance of it all. I want the volunteers to know.

Theo:

So they can make the choice for themselves.

Savreen (no longer over the phone):

Exactly.

Theo (over the phone):

You're asking a lot.

Savreen:

I'm well aware. I've already told you it could be dangerous, but you're right. The truth needs to be out there. If I can't stop this from happening, I can at least make sure people know what's happening.

Armand:

You should probably lock your door at night.

Theo:

Who's that?

Savreen:

Theo, dear, I have to go.

[A small beep as the call ends.]

Savreen:

How long have you been here?

Armand:

Long enough to hear that you've been lying to me.

[Armand marches away.]

Savreen:

Armand! Armand! Wait!

[Savreen runs to catch up.]

Armand:

Casey said I shouldn't trust you. But no, I told them they were wrong. You're a good person with good intentions. I can't believe you fooled me.

Savreen:

My intentions are good.

Armand:

You told me you were trying to protect the people in the OL. How is continuing with the experiment's protection. How

Savreen:

Is stopping the trial's protection? This vaccine will do more for this world than Redivir has ever done.

Armand:

At the expense of so many lives.

Savreen:

You act as if people are being lined up and executed. It is nothing like that. I know your mother died in the Redivir trials, but this is different.

Armand:

Oh, because people will know they're being marked for death?

Savreen:

Because these people will have a choice. You are being over dramatic.

Armand:

You said you were trying to take the carrot away. This isn't taking it away. This is revealing who's holding it. That won't change a damn thing. It will. How? I've already told you that people in outer Atlanta don't care about the information we give them.

Savreen:

Because they see it as a rumor. Rumors have no substance if we can verify it.

Armand:

Really, you think that's all it will take?

Savreen:

If we can make sure that people know the truth, then they can make their own decisions.

Armand:

Like your father did.

Savreen:

My father knew the consequences of his decisions.

Armand:

And he didn't care. The carrot was too big.

Savreen:

Armand, this vaccine is important.

Armand:

So are people's lives.

Savreen:

But you know I should get to choose what people do with their own lives.

Armand:
Even if it kills them.

Savreen:
We're killing people if we stop the vaccine from getting approved. People will continue to be separated by walls without this vaccine. You want that on your conscience? We have Redivir and advancements in quarantine care. It won't be like before.

Armand:
And you would know.

Savreen:
What do you mean?

Armand:
I know you were a part of the Redivir study.

Savreen:
You heard me speaking to Theo?

Armand:
No, I've known for a while. I know that you knew my mother. I know. It's why you and Jamila decided to help with the clinic.

Savreen:
Jamila told you.

Armand:
She left me a letter.

Savreen:
Why didn't you say anything?

Armand:
What was there to say? Thanks for taking away the chance for me to grow up with my mother, or I'm happy my mother's death weighed heavy enough on you that you helped me with the clinic.

Savreen:
I'm sorry.

Armand:
Why? You and Jamila got the medicine and the supplies we needed, and you both got to do your penance.

Savreen:
It's not like that.

Armand:
Really? Why did you move clear across the country if it wasn't to make your charity case?

Savreen:
My husband wanted to live here. When I finally found you, I knew it was fate. I should have told you as soon as I met you.

Armand:
Yeah, but we both know that keeping secrets is your greatest asset. I need to go.

Savreen:
Armand, this will happen with or without you.

Armand:
I know.

[Armand walks away.]

[On the subway]

Lincoln:
You know, I can get home by myself. I'm less than two years from being a legal adult.

Theo:
Ah, please don't remind me. I promised your father. I'd bring you home and that's what I'm doing.

Lincoln:
Are you going to get off the train when we get there?

Theo:
I'm taking you right to the door.

Lincoln:
And then you're coming in, right?

Theo:
Probably not Link.

Lincoln:
What about Christmas? Are we all still going to Reese's house?

Theo:
I hope so.

Lincoln:
Oh fuck!

Theo:
Lincoln, really?
Lincoln:
I'm sorry. It's just it's Christmas.

Theo:
Yeah, I know.

Lincoln:
A work thing might ruin Christmas. Damn.

[Now outside, Lincoln lets out a long groan.]

Theo:
What is it?

Lincoln:
Just give me a minute. I want to soak up the sun. I may never see it again.

Theo:
Oh my God! Stop being so dramatic! Come on!

[Gabriel opens the front door.]

Gabriel:
Good morning.

Lincoln:
Whoa. Do you have some sort of sixth sense?

Gabriel:
No, I looked out the window. Go to your room.

Lincoln:
I don't even get to—

Gabriel:
Room!

Lincoln:
Fine. Bye Theo. Thanks for letting me stay.

Theo:
Of course. Link. I wish you the best. Well, I delivered him to your door as promised. I'm sure you have an entire lecture plan for him. So, I'm going to get going.

Gabriel:
You want to come in? I made coffee. The real stuff. Victoria has some sort of hookup.

Theo:
I don't know.

Gabriel:
Right? You need space.

Theo:
Yeah.

Gabriel:
But you did come all the way across town to bring Link home. He could have ridden the train alone.

Theo:
I know. That's what he said.

Gabriel:
So are you going to come in?

Theo:
Just for a minute?

Gabriel:
Of course, just one minute.

Theo:
Gabriel.

Gabriel:
Sorry.

[Gabriel pours them both a coffee.]

Gabriel:

I'm sure Lincoln is thanking you. This delays his lecture for a little while.

Theo:

Oh, so you do have an entire lecture planned.

Gabriel:

Oh, of course I do.[laughter 00:18:35] I should have known he would run to you. According to Vicki, you're like a mom to him.

Theo:

Ah more like a cool aunt.

Gabriel:

Well, whatever he thinks you are, you're the other important adult in his life, and from his display last night, you may be the more important adult in his life.

Theo:

What happened?

Gabriel:

Well, you know that Vicky and Calista came over last night. Yeah. Well, I forgot to tell him that you weren't coming.

Theo:

And he didn't take it well.

Gabriel:

Nope. He blamed Vicky for crowding you out or something like that. He was quite a little shit last night.

Theo:

I'm sure you were a little shit at 15 as well.

Gabriel:

Probably.

Theo:

So, he just walked out of the house.

Gabriel:

He said he needed a break. So I gave it to him. Huh. I'm trying to be better about that.

Theo:

It's half working.

Gabriel:

Did you talk to him?

Theo:

For a little while

Gabriel:

What'd he say?

Theo:

He's worried about you, about us.

Gabriel:

I didn't want to tell him that we weren't working together anymore. Especially since he's so freaked out about change.

Theo:

The apple definitely doesn't fall far from the tree.

Gabriel:

Oh, so true.

Theo:

I talked to Savreen last night.

Gabriel:

Was she at your apartment again?

Theo:

No, it was on a call.

Gabriel:

Oh, well, turns out you never can't be too sure with her.

Theo:

She told me a wild story that got me thinking. Maybe I should rethink this whole stepping away thing.

Gabriel:
Do I get to hear the wild story?

Theo:
Maybe another time

Gabriel:
Right, just because we're talking doesn't mean we're fine.

Theo:
It's going to take some time Gabriel. You can't just tell me you're fine with unethical science practices and think some good coffee is going to fix everything.

Gabriel:
I never should have. I said some things I shouldn't have. I need to know it's not the end.

Theo:
The end of what?

Gabriel:
This, you and me,

Theo:
It's not. But things are inevitably going to be different. I should go.

Gabriel:
You're running again.

Theo:
Not running. Making space. Hmm. See you on Monday.

Gabriel:
Yeah.

Theo:
And on Christmas.

Gabriel:
Yeah. I don't think I could handle Linkotherwise.

Theo:
Smart.

Gabriel:
Ah. I'm known to be that sometimes.

Theo:
I'll see you.

Gabriel:
Yeah, I'll see you.

[Weiss' office]

Weiss:
So after that big lecture you gave me, you're now saying that you want to work with the DHH.

Theo:
Yes sir.

Weiss:
Why the change of heart?

Theo:
I reflected on what you said about the greater good, and I believe you're correct.

Weiss:
Huh? Yeah. Interesting. So it was my words that changed your mind?

Theo:
Yes.

Weiss:
And now because of what I said, you are completely fine with whatever way the clinical trials may go.

Theo:
Not completely, but I understand we need to continue the work.

Weiss:
No.

Theo:
I'm sorry.

Weiss:
No, I won't move you back to the trials.

Theo:
Why not?

Weiss:
Because you had a very compelling argument the first time around. Or maybe I think your talents are better suited to further research on the vaccine. Or it could be because if I keep switching my team back and forth like a damn racketball, someone will think I'm not doing my job properly. It doesn't matter. Theo. I'm in charge. I make the decisions and this is the one I'm making.

Theo:
But you wanted me to,

Weiss:
I said no. I meant no. So go back to work.

[Heavy fans and beeps from the computers.]

Theo:
Are you doing those subcultures this afternoon?

Annabelle:
Yeah. Is there anything else I need to take care of?

Theo:
No. I just wanted to make sure the schedule is correct. I'm about to go and dilute the samples for imaging. I think Elliot is here this afternoon. I can get him to log everything.

Annabelle:
Anyway, to get out of admin work is fine by me.

Theo:
A woman after my own heart.

ICRS Computer:
Admittance requested for Kane, Riley.

Theo:
Admittance granted.

[The automatic doors slide open and closed.]

Theo:
Hey Riley. Did Dr. Weiss need something?

Riley:
Actually, I'm delivering a message from the DHH. Your presence is requested during your lunch break.

Theo:
Okay.

Riley:
Just arrive at the entrance at 12:15. Someone will be there to meet you.

Theo:
Who is the someone?

Riley:
Sorry, that was all the information I was given. I need to get back.

Theo:
Sure. Thanks.

Annabelle:
The DHH is so weird. That couldn't have been an email?

Theo:
Right?

[Theo sits outside. The click of high heels on the walk grab her attention.]

Theo:
Dr. Milgrim?

Milgrim:
Hello Dr. Ramsey.

Theo:
I'm meeting you?

Milgrim:
Yes, I thought meeting outside might be more comfortable. I'm sorry to take you away from your lunch, but I wanted to speak to you without interrupting your work day too much.

Theo:
That's fine.

Milgrim:
A little birdie told me that you wanted to come back to the trials team.

Theo:
Oh,

Milgrim:
Is that not true?

Theo:
It is. It's just - how did you know?

Milgrim:
That's unimportant? What is important is that I think I can make that happen.

Theo:
Thank you but Dr. Weiss already said no.

Milgrim:
But I'm saying yes.

Theo:
I'm I'm sorry, Dr. Milgrim, but doesn't Dr. Weiss outrank you?

Milgrim:
Can you keep a secret?

Theo:
Sure.

Milgrim:
I'm the department head of the DHH. This trial is under the DHH and for this project, I outrank him.

Theo:
What?

Milgrim:
My working status is need to know information and I thought you might need to know.

Theo:
Why?

Milgrim:

I know that Xavier will not approve a change this close to making his first one because his ego cannot handle that, and we don't want to hurt his precious ego. But I will bring you on as soon as the trials begin. Will that work for you?

Theo:

Yes. That would be wonderful. I appreciate it more than you know.

Milgrim:

Oh no, it's you who is doing me a favor. You are very talented, Dr. Ramsey, and it would be my pleasure to work closely with you on these trials.

Theo:

Thank you.

Milgrim:

Well, I'll let you grab lunch. I've heard our canteen is better anyway. I really do believe we will work very well together. I trust you feel the same way.

Theo:

Of course.

Milgrim:

Good. Trust is good. I value it very highly. Have a wonderful day, Dr. Ramsey.

Theo:

You too. Dr. Milgrim.

[Dr. Milgrim's heels click as she walks away.]

DiPA:

This episode featured the voices of Marquita Richardson as Theo Ramsey, James David West as Gabriel Larson, Pamela Paul as Savreen Khanna, J.K. Robbins as Xavier Weiss, Kyle Nishimura as Lincoln Larson, Torres Fontaine Jr. as Armand, Kirsty Wolven as Dr. Milgrim, Janet Simmons as Jamila Ramsey, Dani McQuinn as young Theo, Meg Biddle-Smith as Annabelle, Bjorn Munson as Riley, Beus Lunaire as Angeline and me, Drea Silvertooth as DiPA,

Producer, Amanda Lorraine, Assistant Director, Van Donnell, Sound Design and Mix, Joshua Suhy. Sound recorded by Courtney Holly at Bowman Sound Studios. Original theme composer and Music Supervisor, Katharine Seaton. Additional music provided by Soundstripe Music. Virology Consultant, Peter Krug, Ph.D.

Apollyon is an independently produced podcast distributed by Realm Media. For transcriptions and a full list of credits, please visit apollyon.observerpictures.com.

ICRS Computer:

The ICRS is keeping the world safe.