

## Clone City

By Jonathan Clayton

Britain. The most barren, inhospitable desert of the 23rd century. Uninhabited, unexplored, abandoned. The most desolate wilderness on Earth.

Britain. Home to nothing but cockroaches and rats. There is not a weed, not a puddle of water for miles on end. Entry means certain death.

But Britain is not completely empty. There is but one human settlement left alive. In fact, even though it is the most unlikely of places, Britain is home to the most advanced civilisation in the world. A supercity, home to the most powerful technology ever known to man. Its name is Corby.

Corby. Way back in the early 21st century, Corby was just an average, unimportant town in the east Midlands. Possibly the most unremarkable place you could ever go to was Corby. It was the least likely candidate to become a futuristic metropolis.

But then, in the mid 21st century, global warming began to tighten its stranglehold on the Earth. More and more people began to perish due to the intense heat. By 2050 the entire population of earth had been decimated. By 2100, only one third remained.

But then, in Corby, one scientist discovered a technology that he knew could save the people of his town. A technology so powerful that it would change the way they lived forever. He discovered the ability to clone human beings.

Immediately he began using the genes of dead men, women and children to bring them back to life. Soon he developed this process further which allowed him to clone people just as fast as the heat killed them. This gave the population of Corby time to protect themselves from the heat. They constructed an immense glass sphere, surrounding the entire town, to shield them from the sun, and the immortal race now began its centuries-long wait for the heat to subside.

2232. Only Corby and a handful of Icelandic human colonies remain. Just one percent of the Earth's population in the 21st century is still alive. And life in Corby is now a world away from what it used to be back then.

Take the story of Paul Cleveland for example. He woke up one morning on a perfectly normal day, 2 February, 2232 to be precise. Perfectly normal, except it was the day of his 150th birthday.

A century and a half already, he thought, how time flies. He threw off his covers, put on his clothes, and opened the door of his frosted glass bed cubicle. The usual rattle of gunfire met his ears. The populace of Corby were the most trigger happy people who had ever existed. He stopped. He had almost forgotten. He unlocked the metal case above his bed, pulled out his submachine gun, and slung it over his shoulder. He did not want to go through the inconvenience of dying today.

He opened the door, and at exactly the same moment a door to door salesman walked up to him. He began to try and pitch to him some computer software, but Paul levelled his gun at him and he backed off. As he continued walking down the street, he heard the rattle of gunfire close behind him, and saw the door to door salesman sprawled, bleeding on the pavement. As he glanced down the street he saw half a dozen bodies grotesquely sprawled on the floor, all of them the same man. Door to door sales, he thought, the most dangerous job in town.

He wandered down to the town centre and checked his balance at the cash-port. He was overdrawn by 500 virtual pounds. He needed to save money. Perhaps he could stop eating for a month. After all, it was not as if he needed food to survive. But then again, being cloned was an inconvenient business.

'Hurry up!' yelled a man behind him, and he realised he had been standing in front of the cash port for about a minute now, and a queue had started to build up. Before he could move, he was shot in the back.

'Thanks a lot!' he said as he crumpled to the ground.

The next thing he saw was a familiar sight. It was the hostile appearance of the shiny, clinical metal walls of a huge square room, the walls towering to at least ten times his own height. He had been here about two dozen times before. This was a cloning cubicle, the room that you are first awoken in after you are reborn. He knew that he was inside the gene library, an imposing structure that dominated the city, and was the hub of life for all Corby dwellers.

It was unlikely to be more than two minutes after he had died. He knew the drill. As soon as his heart stopped beating a small chip located in his chest would beam out a radio message toward the gene library. The workers would then take his DNA out of their vast storage bank and use it to create a new clone of him. His old memories, broadcast to the library at regular intervals from a transmitter on his head, were reprogrammed into his brain as his unconscious form was wired up to a computer. However, the clone would not come out as an adult. The room was not even large at all. He had just become smaller. He was a baby.

Presently a worker in a clean white coat walked into the room, towering over him, carrying a syringe. Paul knew what it contained. Accelerated growth hormone.

'What age would you like, sir?' she asked. Paul wondered if she felt vaguely ridiculous addressing a baby as 'sir'.

'Er, 25 will do please,' he replied.

The scientist adjusted the amount of liquid in her syringe, and then jabbed it into his arm. Instantly he felt a strange sensation. His body warped, expanded, his face melting and reassembling itself, his head pushing ever upwards, the room rapidly shrinking. The stress on this body was so intense that he thought his ribcage would buckle. But finally, he stopped growing. He looked at his reflection on the metal wall. Not bad. He thought he looked his best at 25. He was glad he hadn't asked for 150.

After he had sent for his clothes and gun, he walked out of the gene library. Would he avenge his own death? Well, he would probably bump into that man again in the next hundred years. But he would probably forget about him. He had a dozen more of his own murders to avenge already. He couldn't remember all his killers' faces. He sighed. Life in this town had been so much more relaxed in the old days, when a death was a death and murder had consequences and you weren't likely to die every decade. He would rather have lived a lifetime in the old world than an eternity here. Slinging his gun onto his shoulder, he began his 26th life.

By the 25th century, the planet's atmosphere began to stabilise, and the residents of Corby left their protective bubble behind and began to repopulate the Earth. In 2451, an agreement was made to raze the gene library to the ground, being sick of the monotony of immortality and to stop this powerful technology ever being misused. Never would humans use the power of cloning again.