

The Dolphin of Table Rock Lake

Cody pushed off from the wall in the training pool as his physical therapist, Jason, swam alongside. The cool water flowed across his body with each stroke his prosthetic arms made. Oxygen levels and gas exchange data shown on the micro-screen display built into his full-face swim mask. Despite the mask having a built-in breathing snorkel, small puffs and hisses would occasionally be heard coming from the prosthetics as each came out of the water and into the air, oxygen and CO₂ being exchanged as each limb also acted as a miniature lung before plunging back in.

He was finally getting the hang of relaxing and letting the three artificial limbs do the work for him, but training his one good leg to sync with its artificial counterpart did take some getting used to. This therapy session was going well and with no interruptions from Dr. Wise, who was following up along the edge of the pool's deck, was a good sign. Seeing the approaching wall, Cody felt confident and gave an extra push and pulled away from Jason. Just before he touched the pool wall, things changed.

As Cody touched the wall and began to turn to swim back, thoughts overtook him and as he pushed off, the water slowly clouded over as he began to hyperventilate. His prosthesis started to move in random directions as he struggled to regain control, but things only got worse as he began to slowly sink down. A descending outreaching hand appeared below him. He tried to reach for it, missing, he screamed as the three artificial limbs flailed uncontrollably causing stored oxygen to be jettisoned into the pool.

"I'm bypassing the AI-Nuro link!" Dr. Wise called out as she tapped and swiped on her control tablet.

The prosthesis came to a stop as Jason already had Cody pulled over to the nearby pool steps on his back and halfway out of the water. He quickly removed Cody's face mask while holding him securely. Cody struggled to catch his breath.

"Take it easy, Deputy, you're doing fine. Breathe like we taught you." reassured Jason.

"I, I saw him, again." Cody said through pursed lips. He was regaining control of his breathing, but his good leg was still stomping in the pool sending water splashing around them.

"That wasn't your brother, just another flash back. Now take slow, deep breaths. Good." Jason gave a nod to Dr. Wise, who in turn released control back to Cody.

The Dr knelt near Cody and leaned slightly over as her long, braided auburn hair lightly fell over her shoulder, getting Cody's attention. He didn't realize that Jason slipped away and that his prosthetics were supporting him on the pool steps.

"Are you doing better, Cody?"

"Um, yes Doc. I guess so." Catching himself staring at her, he redirected his focus as she continued.

"The AI system overloaded when you had that last panic attack and caused feedback that confused your own nervous system. The transfer membranes in-between you and the three limbs couldn't handle the extra stress, so the AI released your O₂ reserves. I adjusted the capillary and nervous system buffers in your shoulders and hip joint to help prevent it from happening again. I also instructed the AI on how to

recognize and handle the signals coming from your nervous system during your panic attacks. The benefit is your attacks shouldn't be as bad from now on. That's good news!"

"That sounds nice." Cody watched as his legs bobbed in the small pool waves.

"So, Cody. You appear to be doing fine with swimming until you came to the wall, and then you panicked. This seems to happen frequently, is this due to the boating accident and your failing to save your brother?" She asked.

Cody felt uncomfortable and kept looking at his legs. He began to feel self-conscious about his oversized prosthetic shoulders and awkward looking left hip. Plus, the slim AI system and power pack mounted to his upper back that extended down to his hip, didn't add much to his appearance or self-esteem either, despite the natural skin tone of the limbs. He started to answer but choked up.

"Jason and I think there is more going on than you think." Dr. Wise said. "For tomorrow's session, we have a little test Jason and I want to put you through. It should help narrow things down a bit. OK?" She helped Cody up and out of the pool and handed him a towel. "In the meantime, let's run a full diagnostic."

Cody started to dry himself off, "Yes ma'am. Can I ask you a question?" he said hesitantly.

"If it's about tomorrow, no."

"No ma'am, I mean Dr. Wise. Why did you choose Kimberling City for your long-term rehab center? You're from Chicago, so why down here in Missouri and why at Table Rock Lake? Wouldn't Branson have been a better choice?"

Dr. Wise paused, looked at Cody with indifference, then went back to her tablet. "It would have. But Kimber City is in the middle of nowhere, where it's most difficult to get help." She looked back at Cody. "That was the most I have heard you speak in the last month, Deputy Bray!... One of our fellow Doctors is from this part of the world. Honestly, I can't blame him for insisting on this location."

By this time, Jason came back in his normal work clothing and took a quick look at the readouts on the tablet. "So, Cody. How are you feeling?"

Cody was getting tired of being asked this question. "I feel like the Robo Hunchback of Atlantis!" he sighed. "I'm fine, just looking forward to finishing up these next four months here and getting back to being a Deputy again."

Jason was slightly taken back by this, as Dr. Wise gave him an approving nod. "OK then! Lunch is being served in the cafeteria, so eat up and get some rest. We'll see you here at the pool tomorrow morning!"

"Sounds good."

The next day, Dr. Wise and Jason were waiting for Cody as he walked into the pool room. He waved at them as he glanced at the pool, it seemed they had an obstacle course prepared for him.

"Good morning, Cody!" Said Dr. Wise. "Did you sleep well last night?"

"Honestly Doc, I really did! I believe the adjustments you made did the trick. My new limbs feel too real now. Everything seems supernatural." He walked with excitement while rubbing his hands together as he came to a stop at the pool's edge. "So, what do you two have planned for me today?"

Dr. Wise and Jason glanced at each other and back to Cody as the Dr. informed him of the morning's agenda while Jason went over to the panels that controlled the pool room's lighting.

"Alright Cody. You have already noticed what we have planned for you today." Dr. Wise lowered her tablet and went over to the far end of the pool and walked its length as she went along. Cody followed close behind.

"This exercise will be done submerged, so connect your face mask's air hose to the regulator near the base of your neck." After he did so, she continued. "After entering the pool, you'll go through a series of random vertical posts. And here at mid pool, we placed a series of simulated fallen trees. There are various random gaps that we want you to swim through."

Cody paused.

"Is there something?" Dr. Wise asked.

"No," Cody answered curiously. "I'm looking forward to this part though." Dr. Wise made some notes on her tablet.

"OK, and here at the end, I need you to swim through this drainage tube. It's five feet in diameter, so you should have no problems. The pool's wall is just a few yards past, so touch it and swim back through the course to the beginning." She turned to face Cody. "And remember, you only have ten minutes of stored air in your prosthesis, so breathe slowly and controlled. Understand?"

"More than ten would be nice." He pulled the face mask down and under his chin as he walked back over to the starting point.

"Pass this test, and I might be able to do something about extending your dive time and take a month off your rehab. One more thing, we're shutting some of the lights off, so you'll need to use your head lamp to see. I'll also be monitoring and recording you. Anytime you're ready, Deputy Bray."

Cody shook his arms and legs out of habit and took a long breath as the lights went out. And with head lamp on, he jumped feet first into the pool.

As soon as he hit the water the snorkel closed as the regulator switched on while his new limbs flooded him with unexpected data. The cool temperature of the water and a barrage of the many small currents generated from his entry into the pool became a shock of new physical sensations. Bubbles ascended past his view as the addition of water temp and estimated depth was now displayed along with the normal data on the micro screen.

"I wish you'd warn me about these updates, Doc." he said to himself as he gained control of the nervous excitement he felt. The regulator display was yellow as he moved his arms and legs around to keep him submerged beneath the water.

Before him was the row of randomly placed columns standing the entire eight-foot depth of the pool. The head lamp shined in a wide dispersal while casting eerie shadows onto the columns behind and

around the closest ones. The regulator display was now green, so pushing off Cody easily navigated through the first set of columns with no problems. Entering the next set of columns, he twisted and turned in a side stroke fashion while lightly kicking with his legs as this set was closer together, occasional small bubbles of CO₂ were expelled from the prosthetic limbs as he went along. He then swam through a short open space as he approached the simulated pile of fallen trees. Their randomly crossed directions and spaced triangular openings were convincing, if not a little too convincing. This was the moment Cody dreaded. The fear of any of these simulated trees falling on him was building up, and the fact that the first opening he had to go through was down on the pool's floor didn't help.

"Come on Cody old boy, here's our moment of truth." He told himself, ignoring the yellow regulator warning while fighting off the thought of a boat hitting him from above. Then he remembered what his brother once told him while on a Dear hunt. *'Breath slow and be in control. When it feels right, let it happen.'* Cody focused and swam along the pool bottom and through the first small opening, the light from the head lamp casting distorting shadows and shapes past it. This didn't help him in fighting off the fear of being hit from above. It was now he was thankful for the full-face covering dive mask that Dr. Wise and Jason insisted on him having as he was able to see all around without obstructions, and no breathing regulator in his mouth was a bonus too. Seeing the next opening, Cody calmly swam to the right and up, then navigated through the two remaining openings and swam eagerly out into the open water.

Feeling a sense of accomplishment, he swam to the surface and raised his arms straight out of the water as mist sprayed outwards from the gas exchange cycle. He gave two thumbs up in triumph before descending back down again.

"That was pretty impressive, won't you say Doc?"

"Yes, like a Dolphin breaking the surface."

"Is that a smile I see?"

"I believe it is, Jason." Warnings began to flash on her tablet. "I may have spoken too soon..."

"He's having another panic attack!" Jason glanced over to the pool where Cody's head lamp lit up the opening of the drainage tube.

Cody knelt on the pools floor while the AI system moved his arms and hands in a fashion that kept him anchored. Before him was the opening of the drainage tube, but all he saw was the large radiant circular shape of its opening and an ever-extending abyss extending past it. He fought seeing his brother's mangled body suspended in the middle of the circle and descending back into its depths, when the flashing red display of from the respirator and high-pitched beeping alarm caused him to snap out.

Assessing the situation, Cody quickly regained control of his breathing and prosthetic limbs as a sudden discharge of CO₂ bubbles clouded his view. His Deputy training kicked in and with controlled determination and speed, Cody swam through the drainage tube, touched the wall, and swam back through the obstacle course, ignoring the constant yellow warnings from the respirator as his air reserves began to drop.

Going back through the fallen tree section pushed his patience as other fears come forward that he realized were false and annoying. Twisting and rotating through the cross hatching, he suddenly found

himself weaving past the vertical columns, his lungs aching while his good leg gave out, the respirator giving a flashing red warning. Passing this last obstacle he surfaced, the snorkel letting air in as the regulator was cut off. After a few kicks and strokes later, Cody reached his starting point and rested, panting on the wall as Dr. Wise and Jason quickly pulled him out of the pool and onto the deck while removed the swim mask, the gas exchange systems in the arms and left leg fired off as if screaming for air. Dr. Wise quickly strapped an oxygen mask over his mouth while checking his vitals.

"Looks like you owe me more dive time and a month off, Doc." Cody gasped out.

"Yes, I do!" Dr. Wise failed to hold back a smile.

"Cody, old boy! You really pushed yourself this time. I think you're going to need some more advanced swimming lessons." Jason said while running a diagnostic on Cody's AI and prosthetic systems.

"So," asked Dr. Wise, "what did you see?"

He had no reply as he began to shiver.

A few days later, Cody and Jason were talking in the rehab center's recreational and social room. They had just come from a meeting with Dr. Wise, who was preparing to travel back home to Chicago for a month. They were sitting by the large fireplace discussing the results of the Dr's conclusion, despite some visitors and patients lingering around in the mostly empty room.

"So, do you agree with the Doc's opinion as to what happened that day?" asked Jason.

"I guess," Cody scratched his head. "But it does make sense. We were doing some fishing out in a remote part of the lake, and there were some others fishing near by too." He leaned forward, looking at the wooded floor. "We were standing, not the best thing to do in an old flat bottom aluminum duck boat!" he admitted. "Something hit us, and Daniel went over." He paused and cleared his throat.

Jason continued, "He didn't surface so you went in to save him, and you landed on a Paddle Fish, and it hit you with its tail. Those are big fish you know Cody," he said reassuringly. "It knocked you out."

Cody composed himself and sat up, looking deep into the fire as its warmth basked them. "I remember the trolling motor going over us, being pelted by it as I reached out to him." He turned to Jason, tears in his eyes. "He was tangled up! Just floating there, under the water, then he sank..."

Jason took a breath, and looking Cody straight in the eyes, "Your brother got tangled up in some poachers old fishing net. Between the trolling motor and the Paddle Fish hitting him, he had no chance. Sorry, Cody. But when that net pulled him down, there was nothing you could do." He placed his hand on Cody's shoulder. "This glowing ring you're seeing, it's a manifestation of your regret for not saving him."

"If I'd saved him, I would still be whole," Cody said raising his prosthetic limbs. "These things aren't me!"

"But you are still you. And like it or not, Cody. This is the *new you*. And as Dr. Wise told you, it's time for you to take this to the lake.

Cody spent much of his time down at Table Rock Lake, which was just a hundred-yard walk from the rehab center. At first, he walked its shores and waded in a few times. The differences in how his real leg

and prosthetic one processed the sensation of touch, especially when walking the in the shoreline, did take some getting used too. And at one point, he spent a few weeks away from the lake and in counseling to overcome some hidden emotions about the poacher's net and Daniel's drowning, more so on the not finding of his body was of more concern. The lack of closure.

One late afternoon Cody, wearing a tee to cover his appearance, took one of the rehab centers power boats out onto the lake. He intended to try out his new removable extended air storage, that was strapped over his shoulders and down his spine, in a less visited part of the lake. His dive mask was on top of his head and its air tube was connected to the regulator on the base of his neck, ready to go. On his good leg was strapped a long dive knife. Despite the nervous anxiety he felt, determination to find closure kept him going as the small boat bucked and swayed on the waves as he turned into a remote inlet. Being true to his law enforcement calling, he kept his transceiver at the ready.

He completely ignored the expensive private VTOL's hovering low over the lake as they came to land at the exclusive resorts nearby. Even the passing of a multi hull lake yacht came without notice to him as he ignored the mild radiation warnings coming from his limbs AI as the boat passed on its way. He was focused on something else, something he thought he saw reflecting in the late afternoon waters where two teenagers were fishing from their boat. He steered into the inlet and called out.

"Hay! How's the fishing here?"

"We caught a few Bass off the shole. Other than that, not much!" One called out.

"Caught any Paddle Fish or Pike lately?!"

"No! Haven't seen any... Hay Jhon, you got one!" His friend stood and pulled on the rod as he fought the fish on the other end of the line. Cody watched as their boat rocked and swayed, the teen working his now heavily bent fishing rod struggled to keep his balance on the rocking boat. And in an instance, he saw a bright blueish white shape appear in the water bellow as the teen was pulled overboard.

"Jhon!" The first teen cried out as he grabbed onto his friend, the side of the boat was being pulled down as he struggled to pull his friend out of the water. "Help!" he called out as it was obvious something was wrong.

"Lake patrol, this is Deputy Bray. I have a person overboard and posable drowning. Sending location now!" He pressed the GPS switch and tossed the transceiver aside into the boat while quickly pulling the swim mask over his face.

"Copy. We have your location and a patrol on its way. Over." But Cody was already in the water and was quickly swimming over.

As Cody swan to the distressed teen, now pulled even more into the water, his only focus was to save him. But just as he was about to reach him, Jhon was pulled under by a luminescent white-blue cord around his foot. Going under, Cody quickly drew his knife and while holding the submerged teen's leg, started to cut through the glowing mass when a large glowing teardrop ring, that was connected to the one around Jhons foot, rose up to ingulf them both. Cody froze in fear as he relieved his brother's drowning seeing that wide luminescent ring and the dull gray netted membrane within it, *Daniel...*

'Snap out!'

Cody came back to reality with a yellow warning flashing from his regulator, as the submerged teen fought for his life. Cody finished cutting through the mass around Jason's foot, freeing him as the two of them quickly swam to the surface, blood flowing from the teen's foot while the glowing ring balled up and vanished below. They grabbed onto the side of the small boat as the gas exchange sprayed water from around his arms. Jhon was gasping and choking as Cody called out to the other teen, now pulling his friend aboard. The dive mask muffling his voice.

"Lake Patrol in on its way! And do what you can to stop his foot from bleeding!"

"What the hell was that thing?!" The teen was wrapping a tee shirt around the foot as his friend coughed his lungs clear.

"I don't know! But I've seen it before!"

The boat suddenly rocked as it was hit hard from below and Cody held on as the boat rocked back and forth. The teen carefully stood and the look on his face said it all as he pointed behind Cody. When Cody looked back, the glowing ring-like shape was already wrapped around his left leg and pulling him under. With head lamp on and knife still held in a tight grip, he assessed his situation as more warnings appeared on his mask's micro screen. The regulator and gas discharge warning both flashed yellow as small bubbles came up around him, indicating damage to his left leg.

"Damn it! Not me you won't!"

He stabbed out at the vertical undulating tear drop that came up and widened towards him. He tucked down and cut at the point where the two were joined at his leg, his free hand swiping outwards as the main glowing netted mass floated away. His leg now freed; he saw the stock coil back down into the depths as luminescent fluid flowed into the lake's currents. Cody tucked in and swam down after it. The depth gauge indicator flashed red as he swam even further down into the dark. With the help from his head lamp, Cody quickly found and grabbed onto the remaining bit of fleshy stock suspended in the water and was then thrashed from side to side. He cursed and swore as he was moved down in front of his captor's face, just in front of a gruesome mouth the size of an oven, with a large yellowish lump between its eyes.

"To hell with you, shit face!"

Cody pulled on the fleshy stock as he kicked and swam back behind its head. He reached out and pivoted around the base of the stock as his lamp lit up the monstrous freshwater anglerfish's head as its mouth opened and slowly closed. At the sight of this, Cody remembered his brother. It was not Daniel's drowning, but the sight of this monstrous fish consuming Daniel that haunted him. Fear and rage engulfed Cody as he ignored the many red warnings and alarms going off in his dive mask as he pulled himself forward towards its head,

"Die you damn piece of demonic crap!"

He plunged the knife into the yellow lump and pulled back on it, various fluids flowed into the surrounding water. The monstrous fish shook violently and lurched towards the surface while Cody still held onto the knife as it was pulled even further back into its head. He could feel his transfer membranes being pushed to their limits, and just as the massive anglerfish reached the surface Cody let go as the AI system took over.

Lake Patrol arrived shortly after Cody was drawn under and began first aid on the injured teen. Sheriff Lee had taken one of the inflatable rescue boats out after seeing something floating in the water and had just returned.

"Are you sure it wasn't a pike that attacked your friend? The wounds look similar." asked the Deputy.

"I'm tell you, officer, that was no pike we saw!"

"Son," Sheriff Lee asked holding up the large, thick, netted ring, still glowing but wilted from visibly deep cuts. "Does this look familiar?"

"Tha, that's it! It attacked them both!"

"What is that thing?" asked the Deputy.

Sheriff Lee pulled up on the rest of the mass to reveal Jhons torn sandal was still attached to it, inch long teeth, like spikes, holding it in place.

"No pike that did this, Deputy." He said, "And whatever it was, it's starting to decay."

"What's that?!" an onlooker called pointing out into the inlet. The back of a large fish crested the surface, its massive tail slapped the water as it disappeared below. Shortly after, the Deputy called out.

"Look!" he said pointing at something that appeared to be chasing the larger one, mist sprayed out from it as a loud puffing and hissing sound was soon heard before it went under.

"What in Sam Hill was that?!" Sheriff Lee called out.

"A *dolphin*?!" someone said. "There it is again!" Lee and the others only saw the fading of the mist as something went along the surface before it submerged again.

"That's what the guy's arms did when he surfaced!" the teen called out.

"What?" asked Lee.

"They sprayed, just like that!"

Sheriff Lee muttered as he sat back into the inflatable and pulled away from the patrol boat. "Keep everyone away until I say otherwise!" he called out as he headed up into the inlet.

Cody remained focused on the retreating monster as he stayed claim, holding his true feelings in. Most of the warnings were now green or yellow; air and CO2 were still leaking from the damaged leg. Letting the AI system control his prosthesis made a vast difference in the gas recharging cycle and the speed and efficiency at which he could swim. His one good leg did some work, but mainly was there for balance and maneuvering as he swam further up into the inlet, the AI sensing the changing in the water current as he quickly closed in on his prey.

The water was getting much shallower as they went along the edge of the shoreline and a plume of silt clouded his view just as the sound of something large hitting submerged logs was heard, followed by a short unearthly grunt. Now swimming on the surface, Cody slowed down and swam out away from the shoreline and after the mist from his limbs cleared, he turned towards where he saw some old fallen trees near the edge of the shallows and along the drop off. As he swam closer, he could see the back of the giant fish's head just out of the water, logs pinning it down. Apparently, it tried to go through the spindle of logs in a vain attempt to turn back into deeper water but got trapped instead.

Now only a few feet away, Cody could see the size of the unearthly creature, eighteen feet perhaps? Logs lurched as the giant listed to one side. It was obvious it was now dead. Its eyes were clouded over, skin tissue began to break down as rancid smelling slim flowed into the surrounding waters. Cody found his knife in its head and was using some of the logs to climb onto the giant to retrieve it when he heard Sheriff Lee's boat.

"Hay, you Deputy Bray?!" He then saw the creature that Cody was now on top of. "What in the name of the Almighty?! Boy, are you OK?"

Cody lifted his mask over his head, "I'm fine, um?"

"Sheriff Lee, Lake Patrol. You called us in... What is this thing?" He was trying to grasp the size of it and didn't want to say anything about the stories he heard over the past year about the 'Giant Lake Monster.'

"Some kind of freshwater Anglerfish, I think. It did this to me," showing his prosthetic limbs. "And it killed my brother." He pulled the knife from the fish. Seeing something where the yellow lump was, now decayed, he moved over to the large gap and reached in.

"I found its netted appendaged you must have cut from it floating in the lake. Must be five or six feet across, looks like it could tear a person apart!" He pointed to the mass as he brought the boat alongside the head. "Um, and it looks like it did. What do you see there, son?" he asked while looking down at its partly submerged head. "Lord almighty... that's its mouth? And it's teeth..."

"I don't think this is the real predator," Cody said as he pulled out a child sized creature from the decaying Anglerfish's, "this is." The creature looked like a form of translucent squid, but in reverse with three human-like arms at midpoint of its body and with gruesome form of a humanoid face opposite the flat, curly tentacles. "Sheriff Lee?"

Lee had to pull his attention away from the intimidating mouth and back to Cody. "That looks like a funky kind of soft bait I use for catching Bass!" He said in disgust.

"I must have split its back open when I attacked it with my knife." He tilted his arms showing that the creature's back was butterflyed open, and showed some remorse as it slid from his arms and into the water between the two and sank.

"Deputy, what's your name?" Lee asked reached across. "You're not looking so good there."

"Cody. I'm, Cody, and my brothers name was Daniel."

"OK, Cody, I got you. So, just slide over towards me, son." Lee tossed the still glowing mass overboard then quickly reached back towards Cody as he slid into Sheriff Lee's boat. Looking over both sides, Lee saw Perch and Bluegills, as well as Catfish swarming the larger fish. The body that fell from Cody arms

was now being pulled apart by two Pike. Looking into the open head wound of the Anglerfish, he asked, "Cody, what do you make of this?"

"It's the lifeboat, for the being I pulled out, I think." He said curiously while studying it.

"Are you saying this is an alien, Cody?"

"I can't say. It tried to kill us, that's all I know."

"I ain't going to argue with you about that, Cody. It's like a tiny space capsule in there. And disgusting looking too." Turning back to Cody, "So, can you tell me how it did that to you?" pointing to his limbs.

"We were out fishing, and I caught a Paddle Fish. I was trying to pull it in when it..." His breathing became short and fast.

"It's OK, son. Tell me." He pushed off as more fish came in, plus the smell was becoming overpowering. Turning to Cody, who was being tended too by his AI system as it attempted to control the panic attack, Lee tried his best too in claiming Cody, as he continued.

"This glowing ring appeared... It, it wrapped itself around m-my arm and pulled me in." Cody choked up. "I tried... tried to fight it, but it h-h-held on so tight... It wouldn't let go!" Cody began to hyperventilate as his AI system struggled to compensate.

"It's OK, Cody! Breathe slowly, calm down... Good son. Now talk slowly, what were you saying?"

"Daniel tried to save me. He jumped in and beat it until I was freed. He pushed me back into our boat... But it came back!" Cody looked at Lee. "It took him! I heard his bones being crushed! I looked over into the water and saw its mouth open and swallow him. It ate him and I did nothing! I couldn't even move to help him!" Cody screamed and cried as Lee did his best to comfort him while coming up with a plan to deal with the monstrous fish carcass. Between posable conspiracies theories and a federal investigation, he was having none of it.

As he was turning the small boat around, Lee looked at the massive fish's, or lifeboat's, large tail and the tow rope in his own boat. An idea came to his mind.

"Son, I'm going to need your help. I need you to get back into the lake and wrap this rope around its tail and tie it off. Can you do this?"

Cody nodded, pulled the mask back down and calmly went back in. The two worked together to tow the now sinking giant carcass out past the drop off and cut it loose. A short time later they arrived back at the patrol boat and were soon heading back to the awaiting medics on shore. The lake would make sure that no evidence would ever be found.

A few months later, after several phone calls and meetings pursued by Sheriff Lee, Cody was transferred to Table Rock Lake Patrol when he was discharged from the rehab center. The event on the lake made Cody rethink Dr. Wise's offer to cancel his last month after winning the bet, and ended up staying the full term. As a result, he came out with improved limbs and a more enhanced AI control system that allowed him more integration with it. And now, the day arrived to test it out.

The Lake Patrol boat that Sheriff Lee and Deputy Bray manned received a call about a recreational pontoon boat that capsized after hitting a submerged boulder near the shore. One of the overboard victims was being assisted by some Good Samaritans.

“Tell them we’re less than a minute away, out!” Lee said on the radio then looked back to Cody. “Deputy Bray, how’re you doing, boy?”

Cody answered back as the patrol boat skipped along the lake’s waves. “Doing great! Sounds like they’re caught in some old poachers’ net.” He checked his equipment as the improved AI read his emotions and adjusted accordingly as he pulled his swim mask over his face.

Soon, they were at the scene. The pontoon boat was half submerged and hung up on an unseen boulder that was just beneath the water line, the dislodged ponton floating away. Most of the survivors were clinging to some lake kayakers that were nearby. Two kayakers were holding the last victim up above the water.

“We’re at location, Deploying Dolphin now!” Lee called out on the radio as Cody jumped into the water. After getting his bearings, he swam over to the victim and dove under as the AI discharged some built up CO2. Yep, she was tangled up some old forgotten poacher’s net, along with its forgotten catch.

The End.