

Mernation

Episode 1

*Down Under*

By A. C. Zito

*Some of the biggest, most important leaders have met to discuss what to do with our planet's prisons.*

Kandice Ballentino: *But what are they up to now?*

Cam Watson: *They have done a lot of extraordinary things as a team together in the past. Now 'here' is supposedly their 'biggest' project together yet!*

Ballentino: *It is now being said from the use of many government scientists they have working for them that they have figured out how to build an underground prison deep in the ocean of the Pacific that will be home to some of the worst criminals ever to walk this earth. They talk of this being a way of ending the death penalty and a new revolution to life as we know it.*

Watson: *But who will pay for the guards to watch over our new exclusive prison? 'No one,' they say! They plan to have no one watch over these men and women who have taken part in some of the 'worst' crimes ever committed by any human being ever? Sounds fishy, right? But they say it is safer than you think. It is supposed to be a way to help tax payer's money and a new way to clean our society of the terrible human beings that have only wished to bring death, destruction, and chaos to our everyday societies. They're saying it's 'better' than the death penalty, but some are saying that it's 'worse!'*

Ballentino: *And they say every country is welcome to join in on what they call 'Operation Life.'*

Watson: *But of course, what's on everyone's mind is: how is this even possible? And how are we going to pay for this if it really 'is' possible? And Kandice, it really does sound like something out of a Science Fiction movie, does it not?*

Ballentino: *It really does, Cam. But we'll keep you updated on more of today's news shortly. For now, all we know is that the United Nations 'is' interested and most every country wants 'in!'*

43 years later:

The ship's dock smelled of ammonia. They must've just cleaned it from the last prisoner they sent out to Mernation. The poor wretch must've been yacking his stomach dry. And I didn't blame him. Hey! I was scared too! This was no trip to Candyland. Everyone who still lives Up Above call it New Australia like it's some type of joke. But people *actually move* to Australia! No one Up Above would put their life at risk like the men and women who live Down Under. Now... *now... now* when you think of *Down Under* you don't think of a silly song made in loving adoration for the great land of Australia. No, now you think of families being torn apart never to see each other ever again. You think of the alien race

that lives at the bottom of our oceans but somehow are still given the titles of humans. Now, you think of the land of murderers, rapists, thieves, and psychos. But instead of giving these people *land* to live on, we now give them the ocean.

But as I stepped onto the boat and they covered my eyes, the mersickness began to way heavy on me. See, when you get on a boat for the first time you think, '*oh no*' I'm about to get seasick. And that's the worst thing that could ever happen, right? Seasickness is a normal thing that pretty much everyone gets. But *mersickness*; mersickness is something totally different. Mersickness can come out of people even if you've never been the type to *get* seasick. Yeah, you might've been a fisherman or someone who has always traveled on a little boat writing romantic novels about lost lovers and all that *jazz*, and it's never been a problem... but once you get on that rocky water knowing you won't ever be leaving it. And you know... you know your life will completely change. The feeling of land where it feels like it's lost to you. The feeling of running already begins to feel like a thing of the past. It sinks in you won't ever jump on a trampoline ever again, skip rope, *breathe oxygen in the open air, speak English or Spanish or French or Mandarin or anything* that the one's from Up Above speak. Even eating food or crying or going to the bathroom brings the new residents of *Down Under* into horrific panic attacks. Knowing *all of this* will be lost to you; that's when you begin to feel the mersickness taking its effect.

"Hey look! *Girly, hey look!* Look, look-look-look! I'm breathing, *girly!*" One of the guards say this to me as he makes it look like he's more or less panting like a dog than actually breathing really hard to try and get my attention. And even possibly make me go into a really bad mersickness. But the stupid oaf already forgot I was blindfolded. They blindfolded me so I couldn't know where Mernation is in the ocean. But no one's ever tried to find out where it's located. It's not like you can search the entire ocean and expect to find it. But I already know I'm going to be fine wherever *A Criminal's Disneyland* is located (yes, that's a name we call it). Somewhere in the back of my mind, I'm actually kind of excited. I've had friends that have told me it was a great experience living in their Mernation community. And it's not like I'm going to any of the Levels 6-10. When you live in one of the Levels 1-5, people say it's actually kind of like taking a vacation. There are not as many worries as there are when you're Up Above. But everyone in these colonies are still basically tormented by not seeing their children, their wives, lovers, ex-girlfriends, parents, siblings, friends, lawyers... okay, okay, I'm dragging on, but you get the picture, right?

"What are you giving me for a hunting weapon?" I ask them. They merely shrug. At least, that's the notion I got from their candescent silence. It's not like they would plan on telling me.

But that's another thing: you do all of your own hunting for food. All of it! And if your water treatment vacuole breaks, sorry but not sorry because the fellow prisoners from your Level will have to take turns retrieving water from one of the other Levels until the Central Security Headquarters finally takes action on the call and goes and fixes the problem. Which, of course, ends up being the most simple of problems! And of course, when the call is made, the whole team is brought out for who knows who might be trying to break free! Problems like that, however, only really happen in Levels 6-10. Levels 1-5 have never really had anyone try and break out in the history of Mernation, ever. Well, maybe once or twice in Levels 4 and 5. But those are Levels that have really long sentences. Those Levels can really

go either way. They can feel like an eternity due to how there is no way of ever getting in touch with how anyone from your Up Above life is doing. And if you don't fit in with anyone in Down Under, it can get really lonely. But most people carry out with their day-to-day new lifestyle just fine. Some even start families in Down Under, having kids, and then coming back up after thirty years or so to see their Up Above spouse has been waiting for them to get back this whole time, *hoping* they wouldn't ever in their wildest dreams actually do. Actually go on living! Who would've thought! But hey! No one's perfect. And there's a motto in the Down Under world that people abide by. It's their one rule: *Coming down here, do you plan to just merely survive; or are you going to be one to thrive?* They supposedly have it painted on the Levels' walls with *Aquaman* and *Maya Angelou* high-fiving. The Down Under citizens need it, of course. For when it comes to guerrilla warfare, this is now the only place that it still exists. Everywhere else, it's a whole new world. And it's been that way ever since Mernation began. It is the year 2065. And I'm Lora Drake. And I'm a Level 5 criminal about to enter Mernation.