

# Green T

By E.S. Strout MD

*The thymus gland 's function is to activate the body's T-lymphocytes prior to puberty. These cells effect arousal of the dormant human immune system. They produce a hormonal substance, which stimulates our immune response to overwhelm any threatening agency. They may serve additional purposes as yet undetermined . . .*

*Gray's Anatomy, 39th Edition*

1.

Monday, March 4, 2002:

CONFIDENTIAL: DIRECTOR SPECIAL PROJECTS EYES ONLY:

Project R-GL 1041 update.

1. Experimental tissue implants performing as expected.
2. Human studies approved.
3. First subject: Michael Norman, age eleven, impending rejection of a three months old cardiac transplant.

Director, N.I.H. Immunology Research

Friday, March 8. 1320 hours:

The procedure took six hours, including recovery room time and transfer to the Surgical Intensive Care Unit.

Bandages covering his upper sternum bristled with a suction tube and several monitor wires. Balanced electrolyte solution dripped into transparent IV tubing. Spiky green tracings marched in lockstep across the EKG monitor.

“Surgery went well,” Dr. Goldstein assured the parents. She scratched a note on Mike’s chart in her tight, compulsive script. “No complications. We’re very encouraged.”

“His new heart is gonna be okay now?” Gene Norman asked.

“We believe so. When the serologic tests confirm a positive response, we’ll begin reducing his medications.”

“I still don’t understand why he needed all those drugs.”

“Mike’s immune system recognized the transplanted organ as not his, Mr. Norman,” Dr. Westlund explained. “And was trying to reject it as it would a foreign body. The new implant will modify that system so that it won’t attack Mike’s transplanted heart.”

## 2.

Dr. Debra Goldstein balanced wire-rimmed reading glasses on her nose and mopped perspiration from her forehead with a sleeve of her blue scrub suit. She punched in her password and fed updated progress notes to the National Institutes of Health Immunology Research database. “Mike’s T-lymphocyte count has tripled. The Immuno geeks will be happy as hell.”

“If you say so, Deb,” Dr. Westlund said, a crease of doubt furrowing her brow. “I agree that Mike fits the study protocol. Still, you know my reservations about these experiments.”

“You should be more upbeat, Diana. If we succeed, the problem of organ transplant rejection in kids and young adults will be overcome.”

“Or so they keep telling us, Deb. But why do we know nothing about the tissue donor other than he or she was an accident victim?”

“Donor organs are kept fresh on ice, yet our little segment was frozen solid. Where’s the rest of the gland?” Dr. Westlund wondered. “And don’t you find it a bit odd that no tissue typing was required?”

“Let’s leave the research stuff to those nerds at Immuno, Diana,” Dr. Goldstein protested. “We got six figures for just one procedure.”

“Much too much for a mediastinal implant. They’ve been way too secretive for me. We’re missing something, Deb. See if you can find anything more about our donor.”

Dr. Goldstein tapped keys, breathed a frustrated sigh. “Rats! I’m drawing a blank here.” She stepped away from the computer console. “You try, Diana. You’re the computer maven.”

Dr. Westlund massaged the keyboard, then glared at the screen. “Got something. What the heck is Site Romeo?”

“Beats me.”

There was a sudden sharp, accusatory beep from the computer.  
“Little bit touchy here. Guess I got too nosy.”

“What happened?”

“I was looking at donor background, same as you. Then I entered that project code R-GL 1041 and got this.” She turned the screen so her partner could see:

WARNING  
RESTRICTED ACCESS  
TERMINATE IMMEDIATELY  
PROSECUTION AND FINES APPLICABLE

“Damn screen’s frozen now.”

Goldstein nibbled a fingernail. “Maybe we should just take the money and run.”

“They’ve got me curious now, Deb. What are they hiding?”

3.

Saturday, March 9. 0725 hours:

Mike bounced on the edge of the bed, free of IV’s and EKG monitor leads. A tape strip covered the surgical scar. His skin color was pink and healthy. “I’m ready to get out of here,” he announced.

“Mike’s response has been remarkable. Eighteen hours postop, and his T-cell count is over a thousand,” Dr. Goldstein told the parents. “The rejection process is reversing as predicted. We’ve stopped all his drugs.”

“I’m hungry, Doctor,” Mike said as he grabbed her arm. “Couple of Animal Style In-N-Out burgers, okay?”

“Maybe tomorrow, Michael,” Dr. Goldstein replied with an odd pained grimace. “Be careful, Mike. You just tore my sleeve.”

4.

Two days later:

Dr. Goldstein bit her lip. “We’ve moved Michael to a private room, Mrs. Norman. He was running in the hallway, yelling, grabbing food off patients’ trays. He punched an orderly . . .”

“This is not like Michael,” Sarah said.

“It’s an accelerated recovery, to be sure. Mike’s incision is healed; his EKG and lab studies are normal. The immuno research people are quite pleased.”

Michael bounced on the bed. “They’re starving me, Dad. Can’t you sneak me in a pizza?” He jumped to the floor and started doing pushups.

“I’m impressed, Michael,” his father said. “You couldn’t do any physical exercise before the implant. Better take it easy.”

“I’m okay, Dad. I’d like to break some nurse and orderly bones instead. They piss me off.”

“He’s never been this aggressive. Your surgery has changed him somehow,” Sarah protested. “We’d better take him home.”

“You’ve agreed to the entire research study protocol. They paid you quite a large sum for participation in the study,” Dr. Westlund reminded her. “These procedures must be carried out precisely as delineated or Mike’s immune system recovery could be jeopardized.”

“Let me make a phone call, Mrs. Norman,” Dr. Goldstein said. “I’m sure these changes are only temporary.”

Gene hammered a fist on the bedside table. “Protocol be damned. Sarah’s right. You guys messed up his brain with that implant. We’ll be signing him out now.”

5.

“That’s not very damn helpful,” Dr. Goldstein whispered, placing her hand over the mouthpiece. “We’ll look into it, he says.”

“We’re dealing with a couple of pissed off parents here, Deb. Gimme the phone. I want some answers.”

“Immuno Research is hedging,” Dr. Westlund grumbled a minute later as she terminated the call. “They insist the aggressiveness is a side effect, want precise details on the subject’s increasing strength.”

“The subject? Don’t they even know his name?”

“Let’s talk to Mike’s folks again. They’re waiting outside.”

An Army M.P. carrying an assault rifle and wearing camouflage gear told them the parents had just left.

CLASSIFIED: DIRECTOR SPECIAL PROJECTS EYES ONLY:

1. Latest lab studies confirm subject’s upgraded immune system protects his transplant. It will also provide resistance to wide range of pathogenic bacterial and viral agents.

2. Increased physical strength and hostility represents donor characteristic mediated by hormonal substance expressed by T-lymphocytes of the implant tissue. Updates to follow.

Director, N.I.H. Immunology Research

6.

Tuesday, March 13. 1130 hours:

Dr. Goldstein’s dark periorbital circles disclosed lack of sleep. A stethoscope snaked in plastic convolution over one shoulder. An Army M.P. wearing a sidearm arrived minutes after her distraught phone call. “Michael’s behavior became much more bizarre, Sergeant. A sedative had no effect. Three orderlies couldn’t hold him.”

Mike’s room was a war zone. Lamp broken. Monitors torn from their wall mounts. Folding chair wedged in a broken window. “He went out this way,” Dr. Goldstein told the man with a nod toward the window. “Head first through the glass.”

“Wow! It’s thirty feet to the ground.”

“I know,” the embattled surgeon said. “The E.R. people checked. No body. No blood. And they can’t locate Mike’s parents.”

“We were told to expect unusual occurrences, Doctor.”

“Unusual?” Dr. Goldstein’s voice squeaked. She gnawed a thumbnail. “Like how, unusual . . .?”

The man’s cell phone beeped. “Sergeant Ellis . . . Yes, sir. I’m at the scene now. Subject bailed through a window.” After listening for a few seconds, he nodded and terminated the call.

“Your patient is okay,” he said. “The research people have isolated him for additional tests.”

“Then he’s all right?” Dr. Goldstein asked.

“Sorry about the confusion, Doctor. Immunology Research says they traced him with a chip secreted in the implant tissue. Said you would understand.”

“Understand, my ass! They told us nothing about a locator device,” Dr. Goldstein complained, her voice raising half an octave.

The Noncom’s tone was apologetic. “Wish I could tell you more, Doctor. My unit from Fort Myer was assigned for security just this morning. We’re as much in the dark as you are.”

“This is irregular as hell, Sergeant Ellis. We need him here now. He’s only two days postop,” Dr. Goldstein demanded, her face blossoming in an angry red flush. “There could be serious complications.”

“I can only relay your request, Doctor. I’ll tell you off the record, your research folks are pretty obsessed with this patient.”

“Tell me about it.” She punched numbers on her cell phone. “Diana. Meet me at the Biomedical Division building. Now, please.”

7.

The meeting lasted five minutes.

“Sonsabitches.” Dr. Westlund snarled as she handed their visitor passes over. “Research data is on a need-to-know basis, they say. Changed my mind, Deb. They shoulda paid us twice as much.”

“Look, Diana,” Dr. Goldstein said as a truckload of soldiers pulled up to the curb. “More Army guys.”

“Military? What the hell for?”

Dr. Goldstein shrugged. “Unknown. Sergeant Ellis told me his unit had just been assigned for security duty. He knows nothing.”

“Protecting a patient with a little thymus implant. Why? I’m gonna get back on the computer. Come on, Deb.”

8.

Diana fed a CD into the drive slot, then flexed her fingers over the keyboard. “Okay, Immuno Research. Come to Mama.”

Minutes passed. “Anything?” Dr. Goldstein asked.

“Complex system, Deb,” Dr. Westlund said. “Gotta give me a little longer.” She gave the screen a scowl of grudging admiration. “Multiple safeguards here.”

Dr. Goldstein exhaled a forlorn sigh. “No go then?”

Diana grinned. “Just gimme another sec. Government sites can be penetrated if you have the right software.”

“Isn’t this dangerous?”

Dr. Westlund put a finger to her lips for silence. “I’m asking for Site Romeo.” The screen went blank for several seconds, then a menu popped to the screen. “Hot damn. We’re in! Let’s see what’s in Archives.” She moved the cursor and tapped a key.

“Preliminary events? What the hell?”

“Diana, that file number looks familiar.”

The screen read: SEE USAF FILE R-GL 1041. It was followed by another series of digits, then D.O.D. PASSWORD REQUIRED.

“Department of Defense. It figures.” Dr. Westlund cracked her knuckles and poised fingers over the keyboard. “Now let’s see what we’ve got.” She pressed a series of keys. The screen went blank.

“Oh no, Diana. We lost it.”

“Damn. It must be of those Omega sites. They have a complex password selected at random by computer, changed daily.”

“How can you know that?”

“My Dad is a retired CIA spook.” Westlund inserted a second CD, then made a furious assault on the keyboard. “I’m talking to the password computer now.”

There was nothing for a minute, then the screen lit up with a flood of text.

“Bingo! Got ‘em, Deb.”

“Can they find us?”

“They should believe this is a random hit, but the software is old. It’s a tossup. Workin’ as fast as I can.”

“We’re looking at scanned copies of old internal memo hardcopies. Procedure notes from an Army pathologist in, good God, 1947!”

“Geez, that’s the year my Mom was born.”

Diana tapped the screen with a fingertip. “Check this out.”

*Thursday, July 3: Autopsy of crash site casualty reveals enlarged thymus gland. Entire organ placed in dry ice for transfer per Defense Department order.*

*Saturday, July 5: Groom Lake facility acknowledges receipt of specimen. Viability uncertain. Awaiting instructions.*

“Wait a sec, Diana. What the heck is Groom Lake?”

“Unknown. Running Lexis/Nexis search now.” Westlund tapped more keys, then stared in disbelief at the screen. “Yikes, Deb. Look at this.”

Dr. Goldstein read: “Groom Lake, Nevada . . . Secret U.S. Air Force Research Facility . . . Area 51?”

“Hot damn. More military involvement,” Dr. Westlund whispered, a spark of discovery flashing from her eyes. “Now we’re gettin’ somewhere.”

Dr. Goldstein stared, transfixed. “Wherever somewhere is.”

*Tuesday, July 8: N.I.H. Research team here. Specimen viability confirmed. Preliminary studies on small thawed sample shows increased T-lymphocyte activity.*

*Thursday, July 10: Entire frozen gland transferred to National Institutes of Health. Department of Defense approved project. Designation R-GL 1041.*

“This is getting weirder by the second.” Diana continued to scroll. “Now it jumps to three years ago here at N.I.H. This next one is from September of 1999.”

*Monday Sept. 6: Shred all hardcopy related to Nevada and New Mexico locations. Refer to as Site Romeo in all future correspondence. Delete all references to pilot cockpit chatter and unidentified bogey incident over N.M. July 3, 1947. URGENT. REPORT COMPLIANCE.*

Diana Westlund’s eyes widened in shock. “N.M.? New Mexico? Unidentified bogey? Roswell! Our Air Force shot down a UFO!”

“You were right, Diana. This is nuts.”

“There’s more.” Dr. Westlund continued to scroll.

*Friday Sept.17: Tissue samples viable after prolonged freeze. Unusual hormonal activity detected by recent technology. Will augment R-GL 1041 project.*

*Tuesday Feb. 14, 2000: Young animal test subjects show high resistance to infectious agents following minimal implants.*

*Wednesday, Sept. 12: Human studies will be restricted to pre-adolescents with drug-suppressed immune systems. Organ transplant patients with impending rejection are prime targets. Search underway.*

10.

The doctors stared at the screen, eyes wide with sudden comprehension. “Mike Norman,” they gasped in unison.

“Tissue compatibility not necessary?” Dr. Goldstein read from the screen. “Why not?” she muttered, her voice barely audible. “The donor?”

“I’m starting to connect the dots. Increased lymphocyte activity. Thymic T-cells with incredible potential. You see where this is going, Deb?”

Goldstein expressed an involuntary gasp, hand covering her mouth. “Thymus tissue from the UFO pilot at Roswell.”

“Little green T-lymphocytes, strong enough to overpower any tissue antigen mismatch, Diana . . . And replace the subject’s suppressed immune system with a new one having some unusual capabilities.”

“Young patients pending organ transplant rejection provide an ideal vehicle, Deb. And N.I.H. still has more alien thymus gland to implant in other subjects.”

“We’ve got to tell somebody, Diana.”

Dr. Westlund slipped a blank CD in the disk drive and punched DOWNLOAD. “I’ll call my Dad.”

The screen went black an instant later. At the bottom, FILE DELETED flashed in stark white print. “They’re on to us, Deb. Let’s get outta here now. Move your ass . . .”

There was a crash of splintered wood as a Delta Force team dressed in camouflage gear and carrying assault weapons broke through the office door. “You ladies are under arrest,” a young black man with a second lieutenants bar on his helmet said.

“On what charge?” Dr. Westlund demanded.

The officer shrugged. “Unknown, ma’am. Brass wants you held in the Army stockade at Fort Myer.”

“For how long?” Dr. Goldstein stammered.

“Indefinitely, they said.”

11.

Wednesday, 29 August 2007, 1000 hours:

“This briefing is a classified update on the progress of N.I.H. Project R-GL 1041,” the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff announced. “The image on your screens is that of subject Michael Norman, age 16. He is carrying 150 pounds of combat gear, plus radiation-proof body armor and that Gatling gun. Part of his load includes self-contained breathing apparatus impervious to chemical assault. His restructured immune system renders him resistant to all known bacterial and viral diseases.

“So how does this single individual improve our military status?” the Marine Corps rep asked.

The Chairman smiled. He pressed a key. Another image appeared. “The young lady accompanying PFC Norman is Private Emilia Chavez. She has identical capabilities. She is pregnant by PFC Norman. Gentlemen, these soldiers are merely prototypes.”

The End