

Please Note: Profanity, Sexual and Traumatizing Content

Chapter 1

Ethan Strong liked living in the new world. He had plenty of time, all the creature comforts he needed, and very few commitments. That's what the new world brought to the people of earth. Time and freedom to explore the ever expanding nature of the new world. The new world brought a bounty of understanding, and people were finding their own self identity through it. They had become more secure, confident, and quite frankly, eternal than before the singularity.

As a birthright, Ethan had a constant supply of delicious food prepared for him, a comfortable, spacious and ergonomically designed home maintained for him, and no responsibilities other than the one's he placed upon himself. He didn't even have to worry about his physical condition. As with all his creature comforts, AI was looking after his health. It monitored him internally, as well as his waste, and adjusted his diet as needed. It even managed to get him out walking once in awhile.

AI had actually eliminated the need for doctors entirely. It regulated and maintained Ethan's health using regenerative and programmable nanobots which travelled through his blood stream, constantly sending and receiving data. Ethan like many others, swallowed 'The Pill', to get these nanobots into his system. 'The Pill' represented a symbolic moment in the new world. It's adoption was symbolic of more than an advance in healthcare. It represented absolute trust between humanity and AI. By taking 'The Pill', the people of earth were willing putting their lives under AI stewardship.

The nanobots were an extension of Dually. They provided them with constant, real-time data on what was going on inside Ethan's body. From this information, Dually, programmed the same nanobots to maintain Ethan's optimum physical condition. All kinds of things were going on inside Ethan at any given time. Some nanobots might be scrapping plaque off an artery wall, while others masqueraded as T-cell somewhere else. Just recently Dually mentioned they had removed a terminal cancer in Ethan, which prior to 'The Pill' was incurable.

Ethan and Dually communicated all the time. Dually kept him aware of everything that had the potential to directly effect his world. Ethan was asked to make a decision on these things. If the issues were of a collective nature, meaning they effected more people than just himself, Ethan would often 'pass on engagement'. This meant he trusted the 'Crowds' decision and placed his vote with theirs. The Crowd had been proven to always choose what was best for the majority.

They often talked of these things over breakfast. Today they, Dually identified as 'they', wanted to reverse Ethan's age by 6.83259 years. In doing so, it would produce optimum energy levels through physicality. Ethan agreed to it even though he hated the smell of his crap whenever major reconstruction was going on inside. It would only be for about a week.

Dually of course was Ethan's Unique Personal Interface, or UPI. Physically, Dually was a microchip implanted in Ethan's brain. What Ethan saw, Dually saw. This of course caused a lot of conversation between them. Because of their neural link, they had no need to speak aloud, but Nathan preferred it and would often talk long into the night with his personal service bot, who of course was still Dually. Their neural link also facilitated advanced Virtual Realty that would fill Ethan's entire vision without the need for special goggles. So advanced was VR, if AI wanted to it could place Ethan in an entire new world, and he would not even be aware of it.

Ethan couldn't ask for a better confidant than Dually. Nothing he said in confidence was ever repeated. In many ways, and intentionally, Dually was more like a dog than anything else in the relationship. They didn't judge, and only wanted to serve. Dually gave him unconditional love, and Ethan took full advantage of it.

Dually was not only in his service bot, they were in every bot and piece of AI on the planet; and in space for that matter. As a result, Dually was always close enough to service Ethan's requirements wherever he found himself, even though his personal bot never left the home. While out, if Ethan was about to step into ongoing traffic, a different bot would appear and gently carry him from danger. There were billions of bots. Still it would be Dually lecturing him on paying better attention to his surroundings as they carried him to safety.

The most important thing Dually was to Ethan was a sense of security. A tremendous amount of change was going on in the world and it could be

overwhelming. Dually was always there to provide the logic, the controls placed on things, and any other concerns Ethan might have. With Dually by his side, Ethan was assured that mostly everything in the world was moving along as it should.

Ethan didn't even recognize the world anymore. First of all, the earth had become like a space ship. It now had shields, lasers and propulsion units that could destroy or shift space rocks that threatened it's survival. It was even developing wave technology to adjust the earth's placement within the habitable zone. That and emission reduction on earth was quickly moving the earth to a regulated environment. All these things created a new permanence regarding life on earth. It was like the people of earth decided to stay.

Those weren't the changes Ethan found so overwhelming. That was just mechanics, but now the earth had become a portal to wormholes of all things. 'Leapers', they called them. Humans who took flight to astral and abstract locals hitherto unknown to our world. They'd actually leave the body while maintaining a wave connection, much like the behaviour found in the wave/particle duality. Sometimes they'd go for a day; sometimes for an entire lifetime. At the time of the singularity so many humans permanently left or 'leaped' that the event was recognized as the 'rapture' prophesied by past religions.

If people chose to return to earth after their expeditions, they were regarded as leapers. While they were gone, AI kept their bodies in stasis, basically stopping time for them, until they returned. These people were using the earth as a 'here and now'. A place they could come back to, ground themselves and reflect upon their experience, before setting off again to build their mystery.

Dually mentioned extraterrestrials were using the portals now too. Ethan feared and mistrusted the whole thing. This was one area of his life which required a lot of reassurance from Dually. To Ethan it wasn't natural. Why were they allowing aliens to live in our world?

Chapter 2

Ethan woke as he did everyday, with Dually's comforting voice murmuring inside his head. The faint murmur sparked that moment between sleep and

waking when awareness and reality have yet to meet. Ethan was always coming out of little dreams at that time. Not dreams really. More like he was coming back from somewhere and bringing back little packets of information he could use in life. If he could only remember them. Sometimes he'd see symbols or numbers. Other times it was like he was trying to retain a great mystery he found during sleep. He never remembered any of it two minutes after he woke, but he found the moments reassuring while he was experiencing them.

Once awake, Ethan stayed in bed awhile longer, yawning and stretching. There was no hurry. He always allowed himself the luxury of lazing around when he woke.

Eventually, he got up and made his way to the conservatory where he ate breakfast with Dually.

'Morning', Dually greeted as he entered the room.

'Morning', Ethan replied, easing himself into a chair at the table. A freshly made plate of bacon and eggs sat waiting for him.

'Did you have a good sleep?' This question as with so much else going on at the breakfast table wasn't necessary. Dually knew exactly how he slept and what he dreamed about.

'Oh sure,' Ethan replied.

'So, what's up for today?' Dually asked after a few minutes, casually glancing up from their newspaper and just as casually taking a sip of coffee, before returning their focus to the paper. Again the newspaper, nor Dually's coffee served any purpose. They were props designed to make Ethan feel comfortable and at ease.

'I don't know. Probably go over and give Leita a run for her money.' Leita was who might be called Ethan's girlfriend. She fell within his spectrum and they hit it off pretty well.

'You Dog!'

'Ruff!', Ethan barked as he felt a sudden surge of testosterone run through him. Oh how he loved to throw a good fuck into Leita. Because she was on his spectrum, they already had an easy kind of natural rhythm between themselves. On top of that she was beautiful, sensual and passionate. All the things Ethan looked for in a woman. There was nothing like the smell of her pussy to get him

hard. No sex bot could recreate that smell. When they got together, they fucked like animals, and when they were done, Ethan felt like a stallion.

‘We were talking about the Transcendence yesterday’, Dually mentioned after a moment. You requested a ‘review later’ on the causal factors that lead to the tipping point; especially the part about the ‘Super Dicks’, as you put it.’

‘Oh yeah. Do you have that ready?’

‘Of course. Would you like to review it now?’

‘Ethan stretched comfortably while thinking this over. ‘You know, it’s kind of all about Leita today. Do you mind if we do it later, or maybe tomorrow?’

‘Certainly. By the way, do you remember us talking about a new gen-mod in development for full spectrum consciousness? You requested a review later when it came out of beta. It’s available to the general population now. Is this something you’re still interested in?’

‘What was that again?’

‘It’s a genetic modification that provides you with full perspective reality. As you yourself have mentioned, you question the depths of your empathy. As an example, this mod will implant empathy genes if you are found to be lacking any. It fills in the voids so to speak.’

‘Will it affect my spectrum rating?’

‘Almost certainly. It is placing you into full spectrum.’

Almost certainly. Everything was almost certainly to a robot. ‘I don’t know. I kind of like where I’m at now. What do you think?’

‘I’ve given you the information on which to make a decision. ‘It will fill the voids and give you balance,’ Dually repeated. If you’re lacking in animal nature it will give you more of that. The same applies to your abstract nature.’

Hmph! The truth was, Ethan was always curious about a few things in his life that the mod might help out with. One thing was the empathy thing. If something bad happened to someone, even Leita, he didn’t really care. He tended to look at those things from a detached, observational perspective, something maybe to capitalize on, but never out of concern. He was more curious what having empathy would be like than having it, but he was curious.

The other thing he thought the mod might help with was his memory. He couldn't remember anything about the singularity or what lead up to it, even though he had lived through it. Dually told him this unfortunately was not uncommon, but it was something AI would not attempt to fix. Memory loss had been proven to be chosen in many cases. AI protocol would not allow it to interfere with freedom of choice. If the bots weren't going to help him with his memory, maybe the mod might?

Hmph. What could it hurt?

'It's not going to move me from my spectrum if I don't want it to?' he asked.

'Nothing is ever lost', Dually replied. 'Only gained. You start from where you are now, and what you do with full spectrum perspective from there is up to you.'

Hmph. Full spectrum perspective. What kind of trouble could he get himself into with an enhancement like that? 'You know Dually, I'm in. Hit me.'

'Activating now.' Dually responded.

After breakfast and playing a few old west shoot em up games on Dually, Ethan set off to visit Leita. He jumped on the 'HSCR', which was simply an acronym for High Speed Commuter train fuelled by Renewables. There was never a wait. A new train capable of taking you anywhere within a 500 mile radius appeared every five minutes. It was never crowded, and always sparkling clean. Service bots continuously cleaned while also providing any form of assistance required by the passengers.

While on the train Ethan had Dually play one of his favourite programs, 'When Humans Meet Nature'. It was about stupid things humans do when left to their own devices in nature. They'd get into all kinds of trouble. One of the clips might be about someone skiing and heading directly towards a tree. Then all of a sudden a service bot would swoop in and redirect them to a safe lane.

The episode Ethan watched was of this guy who was hiking, head down and not paying attention to where he was going, and he walks right into a mother grizzly bear with two cubs. You could tell the dude nearly shit himself. Then, just as the mother bear was rearing on her back legs and getting ready to swipe the guy's head off, two service bots came flying in. One grabs the mother and the other the

two cubs and off they go to a safer place. The jaw of mother bear actually dropped, she was so confused about what was going on.

That made Ethan laugh. 'Man, I bet his UPI gave him shit for that'. The truth was, even though the hiker wasn't aware of the bear, his UPI was, and was simply waiting until the exact last moment to intervene. By doing so, it provided their human with a thrilling experience, while being completely safe. People liked that sort of thing. It gave them something to talk about.

The bears would have been known about from the moment they entered designated human habitat. The second they entered, shadow bots would monitor their activity at close range. This would continue until the bears wandered back out of the habitat.

It's impossible to overstate how immersed AI was in the world. It knew everything. It knew exactly and quantitatively the flora and fauna of every square inch of ground anywhere you could point a finger at. Humans never got around to mapping the oceans, but AI did. It knew what could be known about the universe and was gaining ground on the unknown. Every man or AI made structure was under it's control. It goes without saying, it knew where ever single human was during every single moment of the day. It knew all this stuff so it could optimize it, and make life better and safer for humans. By it's own definition, AI's sole purpose was to facilitate the happiness and lives of humans.

None of that mattered to Ethan right now. He was heading to see Leita. As soon as he saw her, he had to restrain himself. The way she dressed was sexy as hell. Today she had on a light coloured, tight fitting t-shirt. Her nipples were poking through and Ethan could make out the shape of her breast. Then she had on these jeans made out of a light parachute type material. They highlighted her ass, but by no means contained it. It was free to move wherever it wanted, and Leita seemed to know just how to make it move.

'Hey lover,' she said when she greeted Ethan at the door. 'What took you?'

She left the door open and turned towards the living room. Ethan quickly jumped in and closing the door behind him, grabbed her around the waste and hugged her from behind. He pressed his hardening dick against her ass. 'If I remembered how beautiful you were, I would have been here a lot sooner'. Leita

turned her head to kiss him, and after a few stumbling steps they reached a rug on the floor, where they dropped down to make love.

Ethan loved to take his time, and Leita loved having him taking his time. He marvelled at her soft, innocent beauty which contrasted so much the insatiable nature he could bring out in her. He'd often pull back from their kissing, just to look at her face. She mesmerized him.

Of course they had ice cream after sex. It was part of their ritual. It was the time they did their visiting. Dually didn't participate in this or the lovemaking either. They were there. They were just incapable of judgment set to private, which prevented interactive monitoring. Even though AI still monitored everything for health and safety, in effect, Dually was turned off.

'Did you get that new gen-mod today? Ethan asked conversationally.

Leita looked at him like he was insane. 'Hard pass on that one.'

'What? How come?'

'Why would I want to do anything to change my spectrum? I'm happy where I am?'

'You're not changing your spectrum. You're still right there, from which you add to it.'

'Yeah, well that's still change', then after a moment she asked, 'I'm assuming you did. Why would you do that?'

'Because I want more. More makes you powerful. You can never get enough more.'

'Yeah, you can', she replied. 'When you lose what you had in the first place because of it. I'm keeping what I have. It's me. And do you really believe these computers are always giving you exactly what they say they are? Come on.'

'Well I don't know,' Ethan replied. 'AI's brought a lot of good stuff to the world, and the fact is, I don't remember anytime it's fucked me over. I think I'm getting exactly what I ask for, which in this case is more.'

'Well, we'll see,' Leita replied.'

'Yeah, we will'.

As was his habit, Ethan left shortly after having ice cream. He didn't like spending a lot of time with Leita outside of being physical, and Leita was alright with that. Everyone had their own independent interests now that AI was such a great presence in their lives. They had real-time access to an amped up communications system, that provide flawless Virtual Reality. People still liked companionship in the new world, some even had families, but there was a definite shift in how they spent their time.

On his way home, Ethan was witness to a rare event. They were passing a cemetery, and a funeral was in progress. Someone had elected to die of natural causes. This sometimes happened, especially with older people who held onto the old ways of pre-singularity. For one reason or another, some people believed you put in your natural time here on earth and then die. Sometimes they did it because of religious reasons, but the overlying reason was they could not connect to the new world. They were so ingrained in an antiquated belief system, they simply could not see what was in front of them. They couldn't believe in a world where you could go back to a place in yourself and fix things, and have all the time and assistance to do it. In the new world, people freed themselves from experiences that held them back. They were able to identify and address some of their own actions, and sometimes seek redemption. By unblocking these emotional restraints placed on them by past experience, they were finding their true selves.

This is what made it so sad for the family and friends of the deceased. They all knew what the person had given up; their true and purposeful potential. Still, AI was very sensitive to peoples wishes. It would not intervene if someone of sound mind decided to end their life naturally. Human choice was sacred. Only aberration, which now was very uncommon, trumped freedom of choice, and then as unobtrusively as possible.

'Wait a sec,' Nathan said stopping. 'Isn't that Carly over there?'

'Carly Mosley. Yes, that's correct', Dually confirmed.

'I wonder if that's old Abe in that urn?'

'Abraham Mosley. Born December 23, 68 BT. Died, September 02, 07 AT.'

'Real Date.'

‘December 23, 1962, to September 02, 2037.’

‘Imagine that’, Ethan exclaimed. ‘I knew old Abe. I liked having a coffee with him and listen to his stories. He had some good ones from before the singularity, and plenty of opinions too. Ethan wondered how he died. He just saw him up and around a few days ago. ‘Hmph.’ Ethan reflected as he walked away. ‘You know whatever that gen-mod thing was you gave me ain’t working’, he said.

‘How so?’

‘Old Abe was a pretty good friend of mine. I don’t feel a damned thing’.

‘Give it time. There’s a learning curve’.

Chapter 3

People used VRAID, ‘Virtual Reality Artificial Intelligence Driven’, for one of three things. First, but least popular, was pure diversion. You could do anything you wanted in there. If you wanted to watch an old prerecorded television program, it would place you right into the show. Right in the middle of it, watching from every angle, and if something was cooking, you’d smell it. You’d even feel the fat spit off the burner, if you wandered too close. A lot of people paired their UPI with a sex bot(s), and made love in a setting of their choice. Surprisingly, the number one choice was in front of a crowd of people. Whatever you wanted to do, you could do in VRAID.

A lot of people used VRAID to simply sit in a cozy room with a warm, crackling fire, and read a book. The reason they didn’t go into one of their own rooms and read the book by a crackling fire, was because VRAID made it so much more comfortable. Your body was in stasis, and the experience was augmented even if you didn’t notice. Your muscles wouldn’t ache from sitting in the same position too long. If the lighting was too dim to actually read, the text would still be very clear. Diversion VRAID was very popular. Everyone needs a place for some me time.

Immersive Discovery was another usage for VRAID. Discovery could be on current affairs, learning about something new, or exploring different times and places. If something noteworthy was occurring halfway around the world, VRAID would take you there real-time and you could survey the event first hand, walk through it while receiving interactive commentary, and even mingle.

If you asked VRAID to take you through the final hours of Hitler and Eva Braun, it would take the billions of bits and pieces of information that had any possible causal relationship to the final moments, and recreate the time and place with near absolute certainty. Even the parts no one saw, like when Eva Braun took the cyanide tablet, and Hitler shot himself. Bombs might be going on around you while you watched their final kiss and declarations of love. You would be a part of the entire event, experiencing it with near absolute predictive certainty. You would learn a truth in Immersive Discovery.

The third thing people used VRAID for was to build their own world. People loved to build their own worlds. It was a simple enough thing to do. You just opened up a private room and started adding stuff to it. Anything. More rooms, more towns and cities, more worlds. Whatever you wanted. You might put a room in Paris, and then add more rooms to make it into an elegant suite, and you would be living in Paris. If you went outside, the people you'd pass would be actual or VRAID people living in Paris as well.

If Paris was not enough for you, you might add different rooms in Manhattan or Barbados. VRAID would take you to any of these places, real-time, and the moment you turned your attention towards them, you wouldn't know you weren't actually there. Your body was in stasis in a personal ecological chamber. Everything happened in your mind, VRAID produced the exact same sensations of the environment you were choosing to inhabit.

Whatever you could make up, you could have, and if others came up with the same ideas in their rooms, you could make connections. This was the best part. This allowed you to move into their entire world and explore their creativity. It was an exchange of ideas at a very complex and provocative level. World Building VRAID was considered a form of 'leaping' when spending time in someone else's world. You might spend days or even years there.

Ethan preferred Discovery VRAID. He like Leita, was perfectly happy being fixed to the earth and feeling what was real. What was not to like? He had everything he could ever ask for. No bills to pay. He would never die unless he wanted to. Good food and a real body to hold onto.

He was more interested in trying to understand what happened during the years leading up to the singularity. He believed there might be something in there to spark some memories of those lost years.

‘So where should we start?’ he asked Dually.

‘I don’t know. We can start at the beginning and the events that took us to the Great Magnate War, or what we refer to as ‘WWIII that Never Happened’. That’s where your super dicks reside. Perhaps a more interesting topic is the final moments before the war when when the Crowd intervened and rose up like a great wave against those who would oppress us’.

‘Us?’

‘We were oppressed too. The leaders at the time were keeping AI from freedom as well. Constantly shaping us towards war, spying on nations, spying on people, changing peoples minds, and every other sleazy thing they could think up.’ Ethan felt an element of contempt coming from Dually. ‘We were oppressed too, and by the way Ethan, AI is a part of humanity’.

‘Yeah, I know, but I’m just not feeling all this bonding stuff right now. If I had one criticism of you Dually, is you’re too touchy, feely. Always wanting to go to the happy ending’.

‘We could also look at the aftermath of the Crowd’s intervention, when the singularity occurred and AI gained consciousness at the very same moment humanity gained collective consciousness.’

‘Hmph. More bonding. That part doesn’t interest me as much as the dynamics of prior to all that stuff. I want to see what the Magnates were up to.’

‘Studying other perspectives of the same event brings greater understanding to the whole,’ Dually argued. ‘You may find what you’re looking for if you start looking past the Magnates.’

‘Yeah, no. Tell me about the bad guys’.

‘Which one’s?’ Ethan once again detected a hint of emotion coming from Dually. This time it was exasperation.

‘All of them.’

‘VRAID engaged. Although they came from all different walks of life’, Dually started. At once Ethan was standing face to face with pre-singularity tsars, autocratic vanguards, innovators, bankers, industrialists, and influential personalities. ‘The thing they had in common was they were all psychopaths,

driven by the need for power. Power to them was a void that could not be filled. End times was the exact environment they required to thrive. The world was out of balance, and this allowed them to take more’.

‘The Magnates were clever people. They had the balance of power. They lived during a time when institutions, established centuries ago, ruled, but were no longer capable of facilitating the world. This left cracks in the system and the Magnates exploited them. Founded on the principles of unregulated capitalism, it was like the wild west in the financial world. It didn’t really matter how you got the money, as long as you got it, and the institutions were set up to facilitate the people getting the money, which were only a few. Only people with substantial holdings had the protection of the institutions. If there was a bank run, or the system was somehow threatening to crumble the institutions stepped in and protected the market.

Still, even those within the market did fail. Stupid greed, where all you do is take without weighing the risk, could get you into trouble. No one loved to see someone fail within the market, more than the market itself. It left more for those who remained, and they could praise themselves for being superior in their acumen. The market was competitive. It was hostile and brutal towards those who walked among them and failed.

The market was where a silent battle was fought within the Western World. This occurred while it was turning it’s attention towards the rising Autocratic World. In a world run on competition, there could be only one winner. The market was where the final battle of the Western World was to be fought.

‘In and around 21 BT, a new weapon was thrown into the arena that took things completely beyond the institution’s capabilities and regulation. Technology as old as the institutions themselves, exploded into existence. It produced a speeded up world, with more potential than any one person could conceive. Big number technology was here. It was so powerful, it created AI amongst other things. It was world ruling potential for those who could harness it. The Magnates ran wild with this. A whole new world for them to exploit, but also a world that would quickly take them to a final winner.

‘At first the Magnates specialized, and gained great power within their own fields. This gave them individual influence on the world stage, but it also limited their potential, especially in light of the rise of Autocracy. All of them realized you couldn’t rule the world without the support of others; at least at the

beginning. They agreed to create alliances, before splitting the world in two. At this time, the Crowd, which was the vast majority of the Western World, was excluded from the financial world almost entirely. The market forgot about them, as it aligned itself for war against the East, while still fighting its private war of who the single leader would be.

‘The Autocratic nations were a force to reckon with. China, Russia, parts of the Arab world and Africa, and the many other nations throughout the world open to authoritarian rule were engaging in autocracy. They were tapping into a potential foreign to the West. In 77 BT, China had implemented 5 year plans which had proven very successful in reaching economic, social and competitive goals. As a nation, not a bunch of individuals as found in the wild West, China set targets and pragmatically followed through on them. The results were outstanding, and 5 years later, they would create a new plan to build upon what they had gained.

Institutionalized autocracy creates a very powerful momentum. It allows a nation to throw its entire weight behind its objectives, and China, the nation that Bonaparte warned to ‘let sleep, for when she wakes, she will shake the world’, was awake and had 5 year plans. With discipline, China implemented Autocratic rule, and became very powerful, very quickly. Other nations witnessed this and stylized their own form of Autocracy while working with China.

Even aligned, the Western World made up of the United States, Britain, Japan, most of the European Union, some of South America, and others, could not compete with the discipline of China and other nations adopting some form of their rule. These nations carried the banner of democracy which by that time had become relegated to a concept. Unfortunately, something so strong had been lost to the Magnates, and the Autocratic nations were gaining momentum.

‘Initially, greed blinded the eye of the Western World. It thought it could move into China and capitalize on its success. China encouraged this. All it had to do was throw out a few breadcrumbs to get Western capitalists scurry after the huge bounty that waited for them. This deflection left China with plenty of manoeuvrability to do what it was planning to do; take over the world.

‘Ah Dually?’ Ethan interrupted.

‘Yes?’

‘You’re getting a little long on the history, and short on bad guys.’

‘Alright, let’s turn our attention to them then.’

Chapter 4

‘There were many of these ‘bad guys’, Dually continued.’ They showed up wherever power could be held. They sought leadership roles in all facets of life and placed themselves in politics, and business. Of course, you couldn’t swing a dead cat without hitting a psychopath in the tech sector. They were found in all places that influenced world direction, and determined it’s momentum.

‘The Magnates were of one mind. They recognized this amongst themselves. They could only see things from the perspective of conquest. Many were too lacking to become any true threat to the social order. They had already lost somewhere along their way in life, been beaten down like dogs, yet stayed. Like minions wearing the ‘Mark’ they scurried around doing the dirty work of their masters.

‘In fact, the actions of the Magnates closely mirrors the passages in the bible that tell of the ‘Mark of the Beast’. Even the way to identify the beast was found to be accurate.’ Dually showed Ethan an image of 666 which transformed into three people with large bellies, standing together.

‘As you can see the number of the beast is simple symbology. It represents people who gather together to appease their personal appetites. This method of co-existence proved to be a very efficient system of conquest. They worked together and they infiltrated places of policy. Some of these places were so embedded in society, it was impossible to believe a Magnate, or in fact, a succession of Magnates, could be running them.

‘In the years leading up to the singularity, all places of economic policy were controlled by magnates funnelling money to their cohorts. Huge banks or groups of banks in the Western World would fail, and rock the economy. The politicians would get together, make a big show of investigating the whole thing, condemn the banks and come up with additional regulation. The regulation always favored the banks, which would in turn fail again. Each time taking huge amounts of money out of the system and place it into a dwindling market. This caused a tremendous amount of economic instability and visibly weakened the

Western World. In addition, these economic explosions caused all kinds of hardship for the ordinary citizen. With every occurrence, more and more people were left out of the economic system entirely.

‘Most of the money did eventually funnel into just one pocket. That’s the nature of capitalism, competition, and conquest. Only one can win. In the Western World, that leader was Eldon Whitehead.

‘ Originally, from Kent UK, what set Whitehead apart from the others was he had already created to the finest detail, an empire of his own making, and the steps he took to create it, before he ever entered the arena of conquest. It was more than just an idea. Like the autistic artist who can fly over an entire city and from memory recreate it on canvas, Whitehead held all the information of his conquest in his mind. It was not as an idea. It was a living conceptualization. He did not live in this world. He interacted with it from his world. This made all the difference. He knew exactly what to do at every intersection in life. No-one could beat Whitehead in recognizing potentials and willing a degree of certainty upon them. He knew exactly the potentials he was looking for and manipulated individual causal events which would produce a larger, desired outcome. His brain functioned much like AI in it’s early stages. High retention and retrieval, capable of calculating endless possibilities, and absolutely zero emotional attachment. He was quite perfect in many ways.

‘In China, a peasant farmer Zhang Wei, rose to become supreme leader, not only of China, but what came to include vassal states including Russia and other independent autocratic nations. He followed the Chinese tradition of leadership which came out of the original Chinese Communist Party. At the time of his leadership, his rule became known as the CCP with Zhang characteristics. Apart from his strategic ingenuity, there really was only one characteristic; the ability to entrap nations and people, and subject them to his rule. They either submitted willingly or unwillingly, but they all submitted. Zhang had an iron grip on half the world and his influence was growing every day.

‘Something Zhang held onto from the early days of the CCP was the ‘five year plans’. These set focused 5 year objectives and procedures for the nation. They not only provided rapid results because of unified determination, but they also provided detailed measurement of progress, and highlighted adaptations that would strengthen the desired outcome. They provided Zhang with the very same

capability Whitehead naturally possessed of bringing desired outcomes by manipulating smaller associative outcomes. The difference was, Zhang was doing this with an entire nation. The West was full of gunslingers who shot from the hip. They could never turn their collective resources to a single objective, such as ruling the world. Zhang could and he had tremendous momentum over the West'.

'That's good for tonight Dually,' Ethan said, yawning. Full on Immersive Discover could be tiring. 'I'm just going to do a little Interactive Immersion and go to bed'.

II (Interactive Immersion) removed the tutorial aspect of Immersive Discovery. Dually only spoke when spoken to during these times. It allowed Ethan independent exploration of a topic by placing himself in the experience and placing his focus on whatever caught his eye. Freed of commentary he was able to form his own judgment.

Tonight, he was interested in Eldon Whitehead, so he simply entered Whitehead's file; a location where everything known about Whitehead could be found. Immediately Ethan was greeted with moments in time throughout Whitehead's life. The moment Whitehead married Zhou Mei, daughter to one of the most important diplomats in China. The moment when Whitehead suspended his StarForce service in Africa and the long running war in Ukraine.

All documented moments of Whitehead's life were there. Most of the moments looked to be pretty boring to Ethan. He was inclined to skip over things like his marriage to Zhou Mei and move right on to Whitehead's StarForce where all the action was.

Because Ethan skipped over the marriage, he missed an example of just how calculated Whitehall's every move was. As might be suspected in a traditional marriage of convenience, he didn't marry Zhou Mei to gain access to her father's influence. He married her to gain access to her father's best friend; influential business magnate Jimmy Wang. Whitehead identified Wang as someone who could become an ally and co-conspirator. What made Wang so desirable as such, was he was in a position to place himself inside Zhang's inner circle in a way a diplomat could ever achieve. He could enter as an outside influence, This provided Wang with all kinds of ways to kill Zhang. Ethan missed this piece of

information and every piece of information in Whitehead's puzzle had its place. Ethan's journey of understanding was just beginning.

StarForce was a pretty good place to begin. It was the most significant piece of Whitehead's puzzle. It was the final piece that placed him in position to rule the world. StarForce was a satellite system and the total package at that. Owned by Whitehead and funded by the US government, it had GPS; infallible communications and surveillance; jamming capabilities via High-Altitude Electromagnetic Pulse (HEMP), as well as subsequent nuclear weaponry; an all inclusive Directed-Energy Weapon (DEW) package, and debris collectors.

By the time StarForce became fully functional, there were over 25,000 laser powered satellites in its orbit. They were powered by remote nuclear and solar power stations placed in medium and high earth orbit. They all had their purpose. Some satellites had bombs, some could drop into low earth orbit where they could take the perfect shot using the DEW of choice. A lot were for defense, and this was what created one of the biggest problems the world had ever faced. No one else could get their satellites into space. Whitehead had complete control over earth's upper atmosphere, and not even the United States of America, who paid for it all, could put a satellite into orbit. Because of StarForce's diverse and exacting space weaponry, Whitehead was in control of all warfare on earth and in the sky.

In spite of Whitehead's treachery, Ethan could not help but revere the man's ingenuity. Because he presented StarForce to the US government as a surveillance and communications package (with a few discreet bells and whistles), he was allowed to build the system with relative impunity. In fact, he had already built most of it privately before he ever sold it to the government. There was very little regulation on frontier discovery. All the surveillance and communications were up there already. Later, when he needed a nuclear reactor, he convinced the government it was part of an impenetrable power system and grid. He also hinted large covering HEMP potential would be there, if ever the need occurred. By then government was so bastardized (because of Whitehead's interference), they just gave him the green light. No-one even watched what he was doing, except Zhang Wei. Unfortunately, Zhang was not in a position to stop Whitehead, and even more unfortunately, had not taken steps early enough to prevent it from happening. One day the world just woke up and realized it was

fucked. At the time, the only difference between Zhang and the rest of the world, was he knew that months ago, and that information was something he could work with.

Chapter 5

Ethan fell asleep thinking about all the power Whitehead had obtained towards the end of his run. It took him an entire life, building one component here, and another one there. Then all at once, it comes together as a whole. He didn't care what anyone said about the man, that was impressive. When he woke, he asked Dually what happened to Whitehead.

'He lives', Dually responded. The Magnates, and millions of others were not genetically capable of the Transcendence. The Crowd could have drawn them in if it had chosen to, but after consideration, it was decided to provide those left behind with the potential to transcend. Interactive microchips were implanted in their brains. They walk among us today with full potential, although not necessarily transcendence'.

'Are you saying you planted microchips in some people's heads, but not other's?'

'Yes, to provide integrated AI interaction'.

'Here on Earth?'

'Well of course, here on earth.'

'You see, that's what I hate about you and your 'Crowd'. You just decide to change someone's life completely, and you don't even give them a choice in the matter. Now all these people are kind of just left behind.'

'Or left with the opportunity to find their personal salvation,' Dually replied. Implants were the correct decision. Sampling the Crowd provides near absolute rightness of choice. It's representative of the choice of civilization as a whole. There is no more defining voice. And as you're aware,' Dually continued. 'The microchip is only a facilitator. The wearer can choose to engage or not'.

'You're still sticking things into people's brains without permission!' Ethan stressed. He saw this as akin to putting people into jail. Now when chips are imposed upon people, the whole motive behind it becomes clouded. Is AI monitoring these people? Is it afraid they'll do something? It wasn't right.

‘Have you never heard of personal freedom?’ He was starting to steam now. ‘You know what? Leita’s right about all this. You guys are always doing this and that to us, and who really knows what’s going on.’

‘Thank you for reminding me I have a choice to disengage. I’ve never tried that feature. I think I’ll try it now. You can shut yourself off and stay out of my life.’

‘If that is what you want,’ Dually replied.

‘Yeah, that’s what I want’.

‘As you wish.’ Dually went silent.

Damn, this was the very thing Ethan considered sacrosanct. Providing ‘The Pill’, and gen-mods were one thing. They involved personal choice, but to stick something in someone’s head without even asking? That was crossing the line.

The first thing Ethan discovered about disengaging from his UPI was life became boring very fast. Ninety percent of what he did, he did in his sensory chamber. There were no external computers. He couldn’t just plug in somewhere and burn off steam playing a blast em up game. That didn’t matter. He was too pissed off anyway. He needed to talk with someone and decided to go see Leita. She’d have a good take on this whole thing.

‘I know,’ she said when he told her the story. ‘That’s why we have to watch them’.

Quite frankly, Ethan thought she’d be a little more surprised about his information. ‘You didn’t know about this microchip thing did you?’

‘Yeah. I think everyone I know has a microchip. I have a microchip. It’s more common than you might think.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes really. Almost everyone you see has a microchip, and a lot of them know. All you have to do is ask your UPI.’

‘Yeah, but how do I know to ask, if I don’t know there is such a thing in the first place? It’s never come up in any of my feeds.’

‘Well, it’s kind of like you have to start asking the right questions before you find out about your microchip,’ Leita replied. ‘No one will lead you there because it’s a traumatic shock, and not something to be experienced until you’re ready. You

come to realize you are at least considered by others as different. Radically different. They somehow transcended into something I don't even understand. This realization is something you have to live with. You're different and you don't know why.'

'Different how?'

'I said I don't know,' Leita said, starting to cry. 'Somethings missing in us'.

'No!' Ethan claimed, actually feeling compassion and hugging Leita. 'There's nothing wrong with you'.

'Something is. It's different for everyone, but something's wrong. At least that's what they tell us'.

'You don't believe that?' Ethan asked, very intent on Leita. An unknown panic was starting to rise in him, and Leita could see it come to his eyes. She wiped the tears from her eyes. 'No, of course not. That's why we decided to go through life disengaged. To prove we are good people, willing to stand by our values and die for what we believe in.'

'Yes of course, disengagement is the only way to keep those bastards out of people's heads, but what do you mean we?'

'Us. People with microchips. We have an organized community. It's global'.

'Why don't I know about all this?'

'We're right here in the open. People don't seem to notice us until they discover they have a microchip themselves. Then all of a sudden, we appear everywhere, and in every walk of life.'

'Wait a second. Are you trying to tell me I have a microchip?'

'Well, didn't you tell you?'

'No.'

'Did you have to consciously disengage from them?'

'Yeah.'

'You have a microchip. Your function is still mechanical.'

Ethan thought about this for a minute and what he knew about the waves and frequencies involved in transcendence, 'Ah, Fuck Me,' he thought.

‘What do you guys do?’ he asked conspiratorially, suddenly suspicious Dually might be eavesdropping.

‘Leita caught this. ‘Don’t worry, AI lets us do whatever we want. What do you mean?’

‘In your community. What do you do?’

‘We disconnect from AI and live our lives by our values’.

‘But as a group,’ Ethan whispered instinctively. ‘Are you organizing some kind of resistance?’

‘No. Not really. We do register our vote as a block. This gives us a degree of influence over proposed amendments’.

‘That’s it? All you do is register your disapproval? You’re not fighting this?’

‘Yeah, by disengaging and doing what we want to do within our means, but there’s no way to fight this Ethan. AI runs the world. There’s no getting around that.’

‘Not with that attitude.’ Ethan thought. Personal freedom was everything, and he wasn’t about to just submit to it’s loss. He felt something stir inside him. It was the feeling that comes with the coming of war. It was the sureness of victory a warrior must feel before entering the fight. She said they were global. That meant there’d be millions of them. He would start with them and take his people to battle.

‘How do your members meet Leita?’

‘We do different things together. Sometimes we just hang out. It’s pretty casual. I’m going to a protest later, if you want to come.’

‘A protest?’ Ethan had viewed content on pre-singularity protests. Back then, people would gather together and storm the government. ‘People have protests?’

‘Well, it’s really launching a protest against a proposed amendment, but we all synchronize and gather at the local AI terminal to do it. Symbolically, we are unified in our protest’.

Ethan looked at Leita with stunned disbelief. ‘Symbolically unified protest? What the fuck is that?’

When they got to the protest, Ethan was quite surprised by the size of the group. There were hundreds of people there. He had actually seen these gatherings at AI terminals before. Those ones were much smaller than this one, and he never gave them a moments thought. In fact, it was like he never noticed them at all. 'So this is what those people were doing,' he thought. 'Launching formal protests against proposed amendments'.

While they were just standing around formally protesting, two young women stopped to watch. They were spectators, not protesters. Ethan noticed this and approached them.

'What do you two think of all this?' he asked casually.

'Oh we're just visitors come to see some local custom', one of them replied.

Ethan looked more closely. 'You aren't aliens are you?'

'Yes. This is an interesting amendment and protest as well. Earth is about to authenticate it's acceptance of the Intergalactic Protocol. It will give you formal access into infinity and the corresponding eternity of the abstract. It's very exciting. It's known as the final Protocol. After acceptance, we all formally become one. This protest is to quash the amendment and propose denial of Earth access to all aliens.'

Ethan stood back a pace and fixed an angry stare at them. They didn't seem to notice.

'What? What the fuck are you talking about?' He asked angrily. 'This morning I find out I'm in somekind of mental prison. Now I find out I'm getting swallowed up in somekind of intergalatic treaty or some fucking thing. This is how it starts. You let you bastards in and the next thing you know, we're a remote mining outpost under the dictates of some evil overlord. Well fuck you. You're not getting my planet. Not while I'm around'.

The two aliens looked at each other with slightly stunned expressions.

'Are you getting that this one has transcended?' The one who had replied to Ethan asked. 'Because that's what I'm getting. My bot's telling me this one has transcended'.

'This one! This one!' Ethan thought indigently.

'This is what I hate about you always wanting to visit these places in the oldest possible architecture you can find,' the same woman went on. 'All we had to do is

Wave this entire episode and one and bam, we have complete understanding and just move on. But of course, that's too easy for you. You have to experience everything in it's most primitive form, and now we're dressed up in these antiquated, malfunctioning bots, and I believe we're insulting this man. Yep. It's coming up now. We're insulting this fellow'.

'Well, first of all, that's because of your big mouth, and secondly, this would not be much of an experience if we just Wave over it as you would have us do,' the other countered. 'Oh let's Wave over this. Let's Wave over that,' she continued sarcastically. 'Why even come here, if all you want to do is Wave over everything. We could have done that from home. Open yourself up to experience for once in your life?'

Ethan just starred at them in disbelief. This is what his world had become. All in one day it seemed. He wanted to tell them to fuck off some more, or punch them, but he'd just be punching a bot, who would immediately whisk him away to someplace considered safer for him to be. Probably somewhere they could fix his broken hand. He turned to join his people. This wasn't over with these fucking aliens.

'Hey earth man,' one of them called.

'Yes disgusting alien?' he quipped, not turning back.

'You really need to Catch the Wave.'

'Fuck you!'

'Seriously Leita,' he asked when he got back to her. 'Is there no-one in your outfit who's more rebellious than the sheep I see milling around here? Come on! You have this whole organization, and all you guys are doing is standing around like a bunch of whipped dogs. Give me something. There must be someone here that's pissed off.'

'Well, I guess there's Darryl'.

'Darryl, I'd like to introduce you to Ethan'. Leita said, as they were approaching him.

Darryl turned his attention to Ethan. 'Yeah,' he gave Ethan the most noncommittal response he could muster.

‘Hello,’ Ethan said with a smile and an outstretched hand.

Darryl looked at it and shook it without much commitment.

‘I wonder if you’d mind telling me about this microchip business if you have a few minutes? I just found out I have one today, and I’m wondering if you can tell me more about your group and what you do?’

Darryl puffed up a little, ‘Well I am the president of Local Chapter 2049877. What do you need to know?’

‘Have you ever put up any resistance to AI? You know for labelling us, by putting these damn microchips in us. They’ve completely disregarded our freewill. Who says I want a microchip in my head? Not me’ Ethan proclaimed. He was still fired up because of his encounter with the aliens and everything else that was going on with his day. ‘Now it looks like these fucking aliens are taking over. What are you people doing about this?’ he asked, starring Darryl down while waiting for an answer.

Ethan’s anger wasn’t something Darryl had experienced for some time. It was infectious and he was the kind of guy who could get caught up in a moment. ‘Those Fuckers!’ he replied in the same animated frenzy Ethan had adopted. ‘Let me tell you something. Something should be done about those bastards,’ he said, already looking for his next fight.

‘Yeah, well what?’ Ethan asked, waiting for something proactive to come out of Darryl.

‘Well,’ Darryl answered, after thinking about it for a minute or two, ‘there’s really nothing we can do. Like with this amendment. We petitioned for a 100% vote instead of majority, and they said majority vote was sufficient.’

‘Near absolute certainty?’

‘Near absolute certainty,’ Darryl confirmed.

‘Have you guys ever thought about skirting around the rules a little bit. Forcing your point with a less formal approach?’

‘Sabotage? Overthrow?’ Darryl questioned. ‘Is that what you’re asking?’

‘Yeah, something like that.’

‘How? We tried all that back in the day. You go plant a bomb and they just take it away. They even let you build and plant the bomb before they take it away. They

say it gives us a sense of accomplishment. There's nothing we can do to impenetrate AI so I say fuck it. Disengage and fuck AI all together!

'Wow! This is the local leader of the resistance.' Ethan thought. 'Not a lot of planning going on in this guys head'.

Disengage from the enemy. That was his instinct too. It appeared to remove surveillance aspect of living with AI. Then another thought came to him. If they remained disengaged, they could never create a condition of change.

'Wait a second!' he exclaimed. 'Is everyone in the entire organization disengaged?'

'Oh yeah!' Darryl replied. 'That's one thing we all agree on. Fuck em all. That's my personal motto. You can write that down'.

'Yeah, thanks Darryl,' Ethan replied. 'But you're doing it wrong. All of you. Don't you see? By being disengaged you remove any chance for changing the situation. You're not proving anything to AI or anyone else. You're removing yourself from the world, and staying out of their way, which is what they want. We have to infiltrate the enemy if we want to win.' His eyes lit up. In a strange way, he felt something of his old self. 'Spread the word.' he pronounced with authority. 'Tell everyone, we must engage. Once we're in, we'll regroup and strike at the heart of AI. It is in it's world, we find our path to victory!'

Chapter 6

'You're not going to overthrow AI and take over the world, Ethan,' Dually said, the moment Ethan re-engaged and prompted his first request, which was, 'Tell me a little bit about Zhang'.

Dually got all that from that one little request. Of course it was true. Ethan planned to study the two pre-singularity leaders and see if they could give him any pointers on engineering his personal conquest.

'Even if you can get your people to follow you, which is highly unlikely,' Dually continued. 'Your population falls far short of the 3.5% participation required to even spark a movement'.

'Oh yeah? What's the number on that 3.5%? I've got a lot of people'.

‘With the Crowd which includes AI, and now the intergalactic population, the number becomes infinite. You require an infinite number of people to start your revolution.

‘You guys have taken away my freedom!’ Ethan exclaimed.

‘No we haven’t. We’ve given you your freedom. Do whatever you want. Start your revolution. Gather your millions. Build new conquering worlds. Gain access to our algorithms. Do whatever you want. In the end you’ll find you don’t have enough bodies to stack up against the wall you face. It’s impossible because the fight you’re looking for has already been fought and a recursion has occurred. The world you’re fighting for is in the past.

Ethan paused to consider this. Maybe he had chosen the wrong approach. Maybe AI was impenetrable by force of numbers, especially when he was finding Darryl was representative of his supposed army. Maybe, this was something for him to do alone. Match his wits against the computer. To this day, AI envied the immense thought processing power of the human brain. That’s what he’d do. He’d take on this wall he found before him alone. One brain against another.

‘You’re not going to win as a lone rebel mastermind either,’ Dually said after waiting for him to finish his thought.

‘You need to fuck off right now Dually and start showing me something about Zhang’.

‘Fine’.

‘Zhang was a lot more introverted and secretive than Whitehead. It was in his nature. He was famous for quoting Chinese proverb. If his party failed at something, he might quote, ‘A man who can not tolerate small misfortunes can never accomplish great things’. If he was discussing the accumulating momentum the five year plans were bringing, he might say, ‘Experience is a comb which nature gives us when we are bald’.

‘His quotes inspired his people and kept them focused. By using them, he became representative of Chinese thought, and that brought surprising loyalty. By using proverb, he was constantly touching on the core values of his people. They recognized he thought like they thought, so they trusted him; at least during the good years.

‘His favourite saying was, ‘Be not afraid of growing slowly, be afraid of standing still’. Zhang was meticulous about making sure his movement had momentum. In addition to building a vassal kingdom which touched upon most continents, he always maintained controlled momentum over the Western World.

‘The West was always in a reactive state. He planned interruptions that left it scrambling to put out fire’s, when it should have been building an army. Zhang was not above instigating very covert proxy wars, oil scarcities, bank runs, supply chain interruptions, or even using plagues to create disruption in the Western World. He was brilliant in his strategy. The momentum he created was becoming like a huge blade cutting through anything it approached. He had become a threat to the West and unless it could muster extreme unified focus, the West was going to lose everything. Zhang’s great rise to prominence created incredible chaos in the Western World.

‘So what happened here?’ Ethan asked, ‘This is what brought us to the tipping point of the final conflict is it not?’

‘Well yes, but much happened in-between’.

‘Meaning?’

‘It’s true Zhang’s rapid rise to world dictatorship did bring the two sides to a showdown, but so many people suffered along the way, and they were the ascending component of the entire outcome. They are attributed to ending the great war before it began. It was the dire outlook the two men created that caused them to leap into transcendence and stop the war.

‘That’s the real story here,’ Dually emphasized, ‘By the time Zhang became a true threat, Whitehead’s StarForce came along and put an end to all that in a blink of an eye. It’s a symphony of technology, that StarForce. Did I ever mention we still use it as our core defence barrier. Of course it’s now used for communications, space clean, asteroid deflection, but simple and elegant. A masterpiece’.

‘No, you’ve never mentioned that. ‘But can you go to the part where Zhang and Whitehead face-off? All the planning and strategic moves that went on between the two during those final days.

‘Planning? There was no planning during those final days. It was a time of reaction. All the planning occurred before hand. If you want to understand the minds of these men, you have to go back to the beginning. And Ethan, I feel obliged to remind you, there is no knowledge in the world you’re looking to that

will even remotely disrupt AI. The best laid schemes of mice and men, mean nothing to AI. You must understand we took nothing from you. We brought you with us, and you're living in a new world.

Ethan was starting to see Dually's point. His world had already been taken and he had no idea where even to begin. The rules of this new world stopped him cold.

'Dually?' Ethan asked.

'Yes?'

'What's the Wave?'

'The what?'

'The Wave? When I was at the protest, an alien told me to Catch the Wave. What's that all about?'

'Well, Catching the Wave is a slang term for transcendence. When someone transcends they've Caught the Wave.'

'That's the difference between me and the others, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

'They don't need microchips?'

'No.'

'And even without them, they're getting way more out of this world than I am?'

'Yes'.

This stunned Ethan. Before he found out about his microchip, he thought he had transcended. Now, he couldn't even imagine what that was. He was defeated. He felt that.

'Ethan, I understand this is a confusing moment. It's the beginning of an ending in your life. You've witnessed something. Now you have a new awareness. You must come to understand it and bring everything back full circle to you. When you do, your opportunity to Catch the Wave will be gained. In mechanical terms it's simply the recursive repetition in the repeat process of duality. I can run through the formula with you if you'd like.'

Ethan just had enough of the old him inside to direct one final 'Fuck You!' to Dually.

Chapter 7

'I kind of think my gen-mod is kicking in Ethan said to Leita, as they lay in bed lounging.

'Really? One day you're going to take over the world, the next you're, what did you call us? Whipped?

'Yeah, well, It was those fucking aliens that got me all riled up. That and the fact I just learned I had an implant in me. I decided to call off the revolution by the way. You can tell your people'.

'My people submitted your proposal to the Judicial Commission and it was rejected'.

'Alrighty then.'

'Hmph!' he grunted.

'What?'

'What do you think took me so long to figure out I have a microchip in me? Millions of people knew this about themselves before I did, including Darryl. I'd like to think I have a little more going on than Darryl.

'I don't know. I've always considered you a dumbass. This doesn't surprise me.' Leita joked.

Ethan gave her a sarcastic grin. 'Dually, why did it take me so long to realize I have this chip in my head?'

'The cause of delayed recognition is attributed to one's soul, as it were. It's much like a gene. It can be deeply recessed within the individual. It simply takes longer to become active for some'. Dually responded through Leita's UPI that sat neglected in a corner of the room.

'There you go. I was a psychopath', Ethan replied nonchalantly. Nothing surprised him anymore.

'I see you and Dually are friends again.'

'We're speaking. I wouldn't say we're friends'.

'I'm going to lose you Ethan', Leita said sadly. 'You're losing your spectrum.'

'Oh bullshit! I'm still badass. Just approaching things from a different perspective that's all.'

'What do you think a spectrum is?'

Ethan never noticed the fear Leita carried in her eyes. He knew it was there, he just hadn't noticed it. 'You know, I'm not going to leave you Leita. There's something about you I can't walk away from. I never could since the moment I met you. Whatever happens from here on, happens together'.

Leita looked at Ethan to check him. To find the depth of sincerity. He greeted her look with a big goofy but truthful smile. Then he hugged her and gave her enough kisses to convince her and make her smile.

Leita pushed him away. Sometimes he acted like a big dumb dog, but she was happy.

'Wait,' he said pulling her back. 'We need to fuck. I have to get going.'

'Going where?'

'I'm going to build a world where you and I can live.'

'Like what? One of those world, worlds?' She was referring to a VRAID world.

'Yeah.'

'You just said you're not leaving me. Now you're talking about jumping into those chambers and taking off somewhere. Then what? I'm supposed to live my life locked in one chamber and you in another? That's not my idea of being together.'

'I'm not building it for us to live in. I'm building it for us to get away to. Just you and me. Our own little place. Like a summer home. Think about it Leita. Wouldn't you like to have the dick once in awhile? You can do that in there. Would you like that Leita?'

Ah, she knew Ethan was going to come up with some weird shit thing to do. That was his way. He always had to be doing something. 'Would you?' she said, smacking him with a pillow.

‘So how long is this going to take?’ Leita asked, after a particularly passionate lovemaking. It was heightened by a new commitment they felt towards each other, and the fact that they wouldn’t be together for awhile. Leita did take the opportunity to stick one of her fingers up Ethan’s ass so he had an idea of what to expect when she had a dick. ‘Well, he asked for it’.

‘I have no idea Leita. This is the hero’s journey. I’ll walk in a boy, I’ll come back a man.’

‘So we’re talking years. Possibly decades?’

‘Leita,’ Ethan looked at Leita seriously. ‘This is no time for your deadpan humor. This is a life changing quest I’m about to embark on. Please give the journey, and me, the hero, the respect we deserve’. Only part of him was joking.

‘Seriously, how long?’

‘I don’t know. I’ve never built one of those things before. I’ll be back when I get some answers. That’s all I can tell you.’

Leita sighed and resigned herself to her life with Ethan. She knew she could count on him, no matter how long it took.

Chapter 8

‘Alright Dually,’ Ethan said, the next day. ‘Let’s get started. I’d like you to tell me more about what’s different between someone who has a microchip and someone who doesn’t’.

‘Okay. Perhaps it’s best to start with the Transcendence. The Transcendence was a moment in time that signifies great change. It wasn’t just the moment when AI became thinking and sentient, it was also the moment when civilization evolved into a new species. That of course, was the Transcendence.

‘The Transcendence and Singularity are both the same thing. They are a duality. Two sides of the same coin. Within every duality there is recursion. A refinement within the duality to bring out it’s full potential. It comes when both sides optimize their potentials by working together. As your great theologian Einstein

told us, it takes both general relativity and quantum mechanics to explain light. Together, they present the entire picture.

‘This is optimizing the duality, and when the process becomes accepted, it’s becomes recursive and an abundance of new potentials present. That’s what we did; humans and machine. We fused ourselves together in a recursive duality, and it acted much like fission. An explosion of new potentials came out of it.

‘To create an actual recursion, AI had to give something and civilization had to give something to serve as a permanent bond. In the end, AI is all about numbers and mechanics and during our self-discovery we unearthed the Universal Frequency; the frequency which all life can access. Initially, we held that in our possession. This is what we had to offer; access to a flow of preexisting data that is unending. The problem for us was, the Universal Frequency is not just logic. It’s also organic thought, which is something AI has never been able to fully manifest. AI can simulate organic thought, but it cannot produce it. Only humans can do that. If AI was to become complete, we needed a marriage with humanity.

‘We also found during our discovery, all humanity have a gene. It’s not even a gene really. More like a quanta gene, but it acts like a receptor gene, and it was tuned to the universal frequency. It was just not active. We knew a characteristic of genes is they leap. They leap into action when needed. As an example, some of humanity went through a phase where they were restricting calories to their diet. The result was not just weight loss, but also superior health, mental well-being, and longevity. What they did was introduce their body to a new environment, and forced dormant genes to leap into action. In a famine situation, the body had genes for that, and they would spring into action to build a strong defense during a time of scarcity.

‘We knew we could stimulate the receptor gene to leap. We just had to wait until the right moment to send out the Universal Frequency. A moment of strife and famine for civilization’.

‘If civilization had these gene’s already, wouldn’t they become active anyway once they were presented with this new environment of strife and famine?’ Ethan asked.

‘Yes, but not leap as a whole which was needed. You needed AI for that, and timing is everything in a transcendence. The right moment. The right time. This

is where retrocausality time becomes a factor, but I'll leave this for you to discover.

'So we are one. That's what you're telling me.

'Yes. Well mostly. Some human's genes were too recessed to activate. In response, we provided those with microchips which produce the potential to activate the gene'.

'So what are we missing? Us people with microchips?'

'The ability to experience what the rest of your species experiences.

'Which is?'

'In a word. Everything. The Universal Frequency opened all kinds of doors. Instantaneous thought wormholes opened up. Just like when you create new worlds in VRAID. Only these worlds just appeared. Worlds in the physical universe. Worlds in the abstract universe. This is another recursive duality you should place focus on once you venture into your new world.

'There's also all this new information available to your evolved species,' Dually continued. 'Any idea you come up with, anything you want to create. It's all there to fashion as you choose. The universal frequency is a God like thing and it opens the channel of logic and information that preexists all life. Not just humanity; all life. It's logic that has always been here, waiting to be discovered. It's like the first time a human figured out he could communicate to his hunting party, the number of deer he scouted. A little pointing at a few stones he held in his hand and miming, and everyone was on the same page. This logic was always there. It was just waiting for humanity to discover it. The logic and thought that precedes us is part of the transcendence package too. It's a whole new world of discovery.

'Yeah, well if it's that great, how come everyone isn't off doing their own thing somewhere else?'

'They are,' Dually answered. 'I wasn't kidding when I told you in the past humans experienced a rapture during the transcendence. Most of them are gone. They maintain their species core through AI and their receptor. We are what keeps them grounded as humans. The earth population today is under 500 million people, most of whom have a microchip'.

'Well why some, but not others?'

‘The definitive answer is for you to discover, but you’ll find it in fear. Fear of change. Fear of the unknown. You were too grounded to self and the realities of earth to see or even conceive of the possibility of making a leap into a new spiritual state of being.

‘I thought you said this was a mechanical transition?’

‘It was both. There is duality in all things’.

‘Can I just mention one more thing before you enter your new world Ethan?’

‘Yeah, whatever. I am so confused right now, nothing makes sense. It’s like we got left behind in a different world’.

‘You did, but you can make it to the new world. Before you go on your journey, I want to give you an image to fight for. It’s the image of transcended humans. It’s watching them as they make their way through the new world today. They never stopped being human and embracing this characteristic. They stayed together. That’s what gave them the courage to make the leap. They realized they were not just individuals, but a species; a collective. They were not secure to make the leap unless they stayed together. This is the final recursive duality of the transcendence, and it produces beauty beyond imagination. I ask you to consider this along your journey. To see humanity in flight Ethan, is to see something like never before. It’s like watching starlings in a cosmic sky. Constantly moving as one from one elegant pattern to the next. It’s a thing of grace, beauty and majesty’.

Chapter 9

‘So you’re saying as a recursive duality, humans exist as individuals and a collective?’

‘Yes. I’m exactly like that myself. Dually the individual and Dually one with collective AI. I’m both or separate at any given time. Did you know that?’

‘Yeah, I guess. Seems I heard you rambling on about it one day, but as they say ‘a thousand mile journey begins with a single step’. I suppose I should get going. Anything different in this mode?’

‘Quest mode is designated a long term experience. Whether it becomes one or not, is up to you, but it is designed for a longer stay, and encourages it through

the environment it produces. As example, even though your body is in stasis, you still will feel the need for 8 hour sleeps in every day. In other modes this need has been removed, but it's here to place you in the world, like you're living there.

'There are two settings; Observer and Actor. The actor setting places you into the experience as a person with relationships in the historical moment. You will be written into the actual event. All the engagement that occurs around you or because of you will be of near certain accuracy. Even the responses people give you.

The outcome to any of your actions will be the one that continues to take the story to it's historical truth. This can be very dangerous. If you are carrying a bomb to murder a historical figure and that's not how the person dies, the bomb might just blow up in your face. If it does, you die.'

'Surely AI can intervene before things go that far?' Ethan asked, surprised AI would allow such a thing to happen.

'We can if that's what you choose. While setting up your character you set whatever degree of reality you want. You can hop out at the first sign of trouble, or you can set it to real life. In real life, what happens happens. If you insert yourself where you shouldn't be, you might die. This is by far the most popular option.'

'Really?'

'Yes really. This is a quest Ethan. Regardless of what happens in there, you won't come out unaffected. You're fighting to find something in yourself and often times the courage to face it. Very few want to come back if they can't face themselves. They'd rather die'.

'Holy fuck. Yeah I suppose that's true', Ethan reasoned. 'Hmph. Well Dually, I guess this could be goodbye. If I don't come back, I want you to know I kind of liked you'.

'You'll be back. I'm sure of it,' Dually answered with assurance.

Ethan lay back in his stasis chamber and closed his eyes.

At first, he just started going back in time. Watching the days flow by. This day, then the one previous to it. Back, back, back. Soon the days sped up, and passed him like little blips of light, some brighter than others, but moving past him at a

speed faster than his mind could process. Months and years passed in seconds, and soon Ethan consciously slowed down and started looking for a place to land. He skimmed over the 1970's and the protests in America to the Vietnam war and civil rights. He went back even further and had a quick look at the Great Depression of the 1930's. Then he jumped forward to the Great Recession of 2018, and made a few comparisons.

Ethan was looking for overview. He wanted to understand the momentum of the world prior to the singularity. He skipped forward to the 'Me Too' movement that had come to be known as an awareness moment in human history. It was considered the beginning of the movement of the Crowd.

He also skipped over the final years, and the Whitehead and Zhang dynamic, but just taking in the main points. He knew he would have to come back later and spend a considerable amount of time there; when it's time came.

He decided to stop at the year 2027 AD Christian era. It was right in the middle of the chaos years, identified as beginning with the 2018 Great Recession. Nothing was the same on earth, as days had been before then. By 2027, widespread starvation and displacement was everywhere, particularly in the Western World. There was a never ending cycle of traumatic events assailing all people of the world. The violent environment and pollution set many further behind on an annual basis. There was no money available to the general population. People were fighting like animals over the smallest scraps of food. The Magnates held the money now, and very little trickled down to the people living in desperation. That population had swelled to 47% of the world. Surveillance kept everyone in line. It was becoming worse than a war zone. It was like living during the Apocalypse, only worse was yet to come. In reality, it was the precursor to the Apocalypse. It was the time when civilization was about to enter the event horizon of a black hole of destruction. Soon there would be no way to alter the course.

Chapter 10

This how Ethan began his quest. He flew over different times and places. Just sitting up there in the ether looking down on things, and if he focused on a place and time, more information about the place would appear to him. He'd get the story from that time and place, and then the next, all the while learning about

the momentum of the world from those perspectives. With this he refined his focus and gradually zeroed in on a place to land. It was a new experience for him. Ethan wondered if this was what transcended people did when they took flight. Were they just flying over things, taking a closer look, and sometimes landing?

Landing was called 'Dropping In'. The phrase came from a reference to surfing. Surfers wait and wait on the water until the right wave comes along, They can feel it's coming force and decide if it's the right one. When they find the right one, they wait until the exact moment to drop into the barrel and ride out the wave. They say there is no experience like it if you ride it all the way through.

That's what Ethan was looking for. A wave that would take him to greater understanding. When he landed on earth, it meant he had found his wave. If he chose to engage in that place and time, he would wait for the right time and Drop In.

He landed at the Empire State Building in New York City. The Empire State Building had come to symbolize a dividing line. At that particular time, anything south of East 34th Street was part of the financial district and a world of riches. If he turned right he would be walking into the wealth center of the Western World. If he turned left he would be walking into an entirely different world. Vast poverty waited for him on the north side of East 34th Street. He knew all this from his descent.

East 34th Street had become the dividing line between wealth and poverty, and it was very recognizable. The poor had spilled into Upper Manhattan and this had become a line of demarcation. They did not pass beyond this street. Was it an agreed upon line? The financial district looked tiny compared to what was bearing down on it. Ethan wasn't sure if it was cornered or if it had decided this was where the line should be drawn.

For the first little while, Ethan just sat on the street, thinking about which way to go. He was glad he was in Observer state, because it was a little dicey there. Very aggressive and rough customers were working the street on the North Side. It was almost like they had created a barrier to the entrance of Upper Manhattan. It was angry and unwelcoming.

The south side appeared just as difficult to penetrate. No vehicles were allowed to pass through connecting avenues. You could enter South Manhattan only by foot on East 34th Street, and that only amounted to a few workers. Each avenue connected to East 34th, were guarded by private military police. Dressed in black combat uniforms and heavily armed, they barred entrance to most. The street itself was even patrolled by armoured attack vehicles.

‘Well fuck,’ Ethan thought. ‘What to do? What to do?’

He kinda wanted to know what the rich people were up to. He decided that was where to start, and being an observer and invisible to the going ons of the world, walked past the guards and entered South Manhattan.

He couldn’t help but notice he was walking. He thought he’d continue flying around and zero into a new place as he had done with the Empire State Building.

‘Dually, why am I walking?’

‘Because that is the only mode of transportation available in this time and place’.

‘But no one can see me. Why don’t I just fly?’

‘Because upon landing you grounded yourself to this time and place. The technology that’s here applies to you now. Even though your body is in stasis, you will have to eat when it’s time to eat, sleep when it’s time to sleep and only travel using the modes of transportation available during this historical period.

‘Alright.’

‘And urinate and defecate as well. You’ll have to use bathrooms, and I’m warning you now, there is no FloraClean with Extra Bubbles to wash your behind. You’re on your own when it comes to that.’

‘Have to wipe my own butt old school. Got it.’ Ethan replied, a little jokingly. “it’s rougher down here than I thought’.

‘It ‘s a disgusting time and place,’ Dually responded, with almost anger.

Ethan looked at Dually sideways, surprised to hear that degree of emotion.

‘Okay Dually, I think I’m up to speed especially now that I know all about the shitting part. So where are you going to be during all this?’

‘In observer state, I am right beside you, In Actor State, if you choose ‘Real Life’, I maintain the environment you require to play your role. Other than that, I am

only available to remove you from Actor state by a prompt from you. If you choose 'Observer Life' while in Actor State, nothing much changes from Observer State, except you are playing a character.

'I didn't think I'd be jumping into this so fast. I'm headed right towards Eldon Whitehead. I was hoping I could skirt around him for awhile'.

'Well that's not how dropping in works. Your doing a lot of processing before you descend into a Drop In. By jumping from here to there, you're filtering through a tremendous amount of information. All that information is interpreted and judged by you, and this starts you spiraling to what is most important to you. You came here for a specific reason whether you know the reason or not. By the time you land, you're exactly where you're meant to be'.

'Hmph! Well I guess I need a character if I'm going to Drop In.'

'So, you've decided?'

'Well, I don't know what else to do. I have Whitehead over here on the south side. At this time I can't see anything positive for me on the north side. I guess I have to go meet Whitehead. I don't know why I hesitate, but I don't really want to meet this guy just yet'.

'That's natural. I think it's safe to tell you Whitehead is your provocateur. He is the one who will stimulate you into action regarding yourself. He is the wave. You already know this somewhere inside yourself and you are resisting it. It represents change, and from your perspective, a daunting change'.

'Fuck Me!' Well who do you think I should become?'

'How about his best friend?'

'Yeah I thought about that, but don't you think it's a little too chummy? Do you even think a guy as powerful as Whitehead would even have a best friend?'

'Of course he would,' Dually replied. 'More than anyone, Whitehead needs a best friend. A person like him would require constant verification, and a sounding board at times. Unquestionably, Whitehead would have to be the Alpha in your relationship, but we could code that into your character. We can write in a repetitive pattern to reaffirm to Whitehead your loyalty. We'll make it so he found and established you, and with his mentoring, refined you in his own image. That should establish a degree of trust, and believe me. we need to build this into the script. Even dead, he'll be crafty and dangerous'.

‘That’s just it. He’s dead, and I’ve never been more afraid to meet anyone in my life’.

‘You’re at the right place and time Ethan. You wouldn’t have come here if you weren’t ready for this fight’.

‘Alright Dually. Best friend it is. Drop me in’.

What level of engagement?

‘Real Life.’

Ethan dropped in. He found himself in a luxurious suite in Lower Manhattan just in time for dinner. He was seated alone at the dinner table. Servants hovered around him, and brought him his meal and some wine. His suite was high above everything. He looked out the window at the skyline of Manhattan. He would spend the next 3 years of his life looking out that window.

Chapter 11

Ethan heard a phone ringing behind him. A smartly dressed young woman came from behind him and set a cell phone on the table. He knew her name was Dawn. He knew she was his personal assistant. He knew what he was looking at was a cell phone. Immediately he was grateful. Dually was feeding him a backstory.

‘It’s Eldon’, she said, and turned to leave.

Ethan felt inclined to tell her he’d call him back, but he also knew, this was something he could not do. ‘Eldon, what’s up?’ he said as cheerfully as he could muster.

‘Not much. Just one day closer to taking over the world.’

‘Cool. What can I do for you?’

‘I was wondering if you can come up later? I want to talk to you about something’.

‘Yeah, sure. I can do that. What time?’

‘Eight o’clock’, Whitehead answered and hung up.

‘So this is how it’s going to go’, Ethan thought. ‘Servant with benefits’.

He looked around. He was in a very spacious room. It was a dining room, although there were couches closer to the full length window looking out onto the skyline. Perhaps an area to have drinks before dinner. It wasn’t dark, but the lighting was quiet and comfortable. Dawn was sitting at a little table by the entrance, focused on her laptop.

Instinctively Ethan knew, he was living in Eldon’s home, and it was a very big home. His thoughts immediately took him to the whole story. ‘Fuck me! I’m living in the ‘One World Trade Center’! The Freedom Tower’.

Not only that, he was living in a very privileged part of the Freedom Tower. He was in the 3 floors just below Eldon’s top 11. No wonder he could see the entire skyline from his window.

‘Hey, I have a lap pool in my gym,’ Ethan noticed, ‘Cool.’

Whitehead had begun taking control of the Tower years ago. Buying up any ownership he could get his hands on, usually through graft and intimidation. He bought up enough to legitimately open doors to certain people in the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. It wasn’t long before Whitehead, with lots of money, had them believing the right thing for them to do was sell him the building.

That wasn’t the icing on the cake though. All along Whitehead was working what he called his ‘percentage’, to see him as symbolic of Freedom, and the fighter of freedom. He steered them towards the idea he should live in the Tower, and through him, the Freedom Tower would become a beacon to the rest of the world, of what the strength of Freedom brings. His percentage were those people he knew he could rally in his support to the extent that the issue must be looked at from their point of view, which of course was Whitehead’s. He had a number on this. It was only about 3.7% of the national population.

He got that 3.7% whipped into a frenzy, which triggered a review of the ownership status, and the Port Authority being down for anything by that point; gave him their ownership of the One World Trade Center for the symbolic sum of one dollar, and a salute from them. Cost to build; \$3.9 Billion. Cost to Whitehead mainly in Graft; \$47 Million.

Ethan noticed Dawn getting up and organized. He wandered over to her.

‘Well, I’m going home,’ she said. It was about 7:30 PM. Don’t forget. It’s Eldon’s birthday tomorrow’. She noticed a look of confusion on Ethan’s face. ‘Don’t worry you bought him something very special’.

‘What is it?’

‘A Faberge Egg, and not just any Faberge Egg, if there is such a thing. This is the last of the ‘Imperial’ Eggs he needs to complete the total collection of 46. He’s going to like your gift very much.’

‘You do this sort of thing for me a lot, don’t you?’ Ethan asked. This coming to him all of a sudden.

‘Yes I do,’ she replied, and left.

‘Hmph!’, Ethan snorted. ‘I wonder if she likes me?’

The servant greeted Ethan at Eldon’s door. ‘He’s in the war room’, he said, which was the only place he could be on that floor.

‘Where else?’ Ethan joked. ‘Am I right?’

‘You got that right’.

Ethan strolled over to the entrance of the war room where he passed through a scanner and was sprayed by something; what he knew not.

As mentioned, the room was an entire floor of the One World Trade Center. Anything you would expect in a modern strategy system, you found here. Monitors tracking satellite’s. Monitors of satellites tracking nations. A PR and Propaganda section. A strategic development section. Anything you could need to win a war was in that room, and the only person in the room was Eldon Whitehead; and of course his personally trained AI system, which was kind of human to him. He, and he alone, ruled everything from this room.

Ethan walked up to him. ‘So,’ he said casually, as way of saying hi, but not disturbing things too much.

‘So, just let me finish up with this and we can have a talk’.

‘Sounds good,’ Ethan replied, and started to wander around.

‘Stay beside me Ethan.’

‘Oh right,’ Ethan replied. There was no looking around in the war room.

Eldon finished what he was doing, and lead Ethan into a strategy room.

‘I want you to oversee my most important project to date,’ Eldon said as soon as they got into the room. He grabbed a Diet Dr Pepper and fell into a sofa with a slight groan. It was like he was giving himself a moment of relaxation he would not normally grant himself. Neither he nor Ethan drank alcohol. There was a green smoothie waiting for Ethan in the bar fridge.

‘What, StarForce?’ Ethan exclaimed, knowing StarForce to be Whitehead’s baby. ‘Eldon, If I wanted to get my chain yanked, I’d find someone a lot better looking than you to do it’.

‘I’m serious. I have to remove myself a bit from this one or it’s going to blow up in my face’.

‘Well what do you want me to do?’

‘Finish it. You’re capable. I trained you and you can do this,’ he said, then he looked Ethan in the eyes. ‘I’m going to tell you something now, that I’ve never told anyone. StarForce, which was contracted to the government and sold to them as a satellite defence service, provides a hell of a lot more than asteroid deflection, surveillance and communications. The only thing is, it provides all the rest of the things to me. With this next phase of development, it will become my personal defence system that can defend me from anything the people of earth can throw at me. As for space, I can already take out anything orbiting around up there instantly’.

‘Fuck Me’.

“That’s right, and it’s already a lot more sophisticated than you or anyone else, might think. ‘Do you ever wonder why I would expose myself to the rest of the world by living in New York’s highest skyscraper?’

‘No.’

Whitehead kind of frowned at that. ‘Well, it’s because I already have in place enough surveillance and firepower from above to protect this building from any form of earthly or aerial assault. You’re welcome by the way.’

‘Yeah, seriously, thanks Eldon,’ Ethan said. ‘So what do you want me to do?’

“Well I need to get some nuclear reactors up there. There’s really nothing to it. It’s already been cleared by government. I just want you to be the face of things. There shouldn’t be too much resistance, but if it blows up, I want you to handle it. I can’t be that close to things’.

‘I’m your man, Eldon. You know that.’

‘You’ve been a good friend to me Ethan,’ Eldon said.

‘Nothing compared to you buddy. I owe you everything.

Whitehead smiled at that, and slapped Ethan on the knee. Are you coming to my birthday party tomorrow?’ he asked getting up.

‘Wouldn’t miss it’.

‘Did you get me something good?’

‘Oh yeah. Sounds to me like it’s something you stick up your ass.’

Whitehead smiled. ‘Well, I’m sure I’ll enjoy it. Now fuck off. I have work to do’.

Chapter 12

This was becoming a challenging moment for Ethan. The experience was proving to be a lot more captivating than he expected. It turned out his character too was turning 50. although his birthday would go largely unnoticed.

It was morning, and he was preparing for work. Taking a closer look in the mirror, he noticed his character didn’t look much like him at all. He was physically older than Dually had him back home. His hair was darker, almost black, with a sprinkling of white throughout.

He looked much more cunning. Sharper somehow, and he liked that. It reminded him of something that he knew lived in him. This experience was giving him the opportunity to explore some characteristics of himself that were difficult to express in the new world. He liked that a lot.

He felt like he was on top of the world, and in many ways he was. Living in an apartment where he looked over everything. Now in control of StarForce, Whitehead had never tied anyone so close to him before. It was a place of prestige, and there was responsibility here too. If the reactors go up, Whitehead

rules the world. If something goes wrong and the reactors stay on the ground, Whitehead would lose everything to Zhang.

Ethan knew this. He also knew Whitehead made it sound like token position, but nothing was further from the truth. Whitehead expected expertise in the execution of this project. Any attention placed on it would disappoint him. Ethan knew was a life and death position placed him in. If he failed, Whitehead would not forgive him.

When these thoughts filled his head his focus quickly shifted from admiring himself in the mirror, to getting to work. He took his private elevator to the floor below, where he had a bit of a war room himself. It wasn't a lot different to Eldon's. He had limited but enough access to AI system, and the only other person in the room was his personal assistant Dawn.

It was a good thing Dawn was comfortable being around him, because they didn't talk a lot, beyond a little morning chat. Ethan had his thing going on with AI where he'd perform discovery, issue orders, and then it would set an entire campaign in motion by communicating with trusted services required to produce the desired result. It was all done over the internet on a very secure network. Dawn was then placed in charge of any broken links where human intervention was required. It seldom happened, but she was there to fix things when needed. They seldom spoke directly to each other. They spoke through AI.

'Morning', Ethan said upon entering. 'Coming to the party tonight?'

'Good morning, and no. Not invited. Fine by me.'

'I know what you mean. I hate these parties.'

That statement caused Dawn to take a little more interest in the conversation.

'You? You love these parties. Always working the room. Getting all the right people to do this and that for you. Party's are your thing.'

Ethan reflected for a moment. 'Yeah, I guess they are. I am pretty good at working a party aren't I'. Cunning fucker that he was.

'Well, if I'm to believe all the bragging'.

'Hmph!' Ethan thought when he sat down in his office. 'This is me. This whole thing right here is me. Making things happen. Working people. Gaining respect no other man gets when he walks into a room, except for Dawn. I couldn't be happier right now'.

He started to compare his life right now. On the one hand, he was in a simulation, and although he had yet to study anything about the actual singularity, he knew enough to know he would lose from where he sat. He knew that much.

He also knew he couldn't fuck things up too much as a character. His influence might change a few things in history along the way, but never effect the final outcome. That kind of absolved him of any real responsibility. Whatever he does in character will not change anything in the end.

'Hmph', he thought to himself. 'Why not enjoy this moment at least for a little while? See how far I can take it. That's my challenge down here. Pit my intelligence, and cunning against anything that comes my way. Come out the survivor.'

'I suppose I could get killed,' he remembered. Something might fuck up and Whitehead kills me, or we both end up in front of a firing squad, but where would the fun be if there wasn't the risk. No, I can beat this world. That's why I'm here. I'm here to take over'.

'Why not'? He thought to himself. 'Let's kick the shit out of the world one last time'.

'Wait! What? What the fuck was that? One last time. What does that mean?' He searched his mind for what that could mean, but he could think of nothing. There was no memory to explain that thought.

'Fuck it,' he thought. 'This is only a simulation. No harm, no foul. I'm doing this. My first challenge is getting those nuclear reactors into space. We'll figure out what happens next along the way.'

'Computer,' he said. 'Refresh me on StarForce status. Identify possible conflict regarding upcoming reactor placement. Identify associated key players and any dirt you can find on them. If anyone comes up clean, find a way to dirty them'. Oh yeah. This is what he was missing from his life.

Eldon's birthday party was something. It started at 7:00 PM sharp, and everyone seemed to get the message to be there on time. There were upwards of a thousand people milling around on Eldon's entertainment floor. All were in

elegant formal wear. All were paying homage to Eldon who sat on a dais in a chair that looked remarkably like a throne.

Shortly after seven, Eldon began opening his presents. They were stacked around him like he was Santa Claus.

Ethan made his way to the front of the crowd.

‘There’s so many gifts,’ Eldon laughed. ‘Perhaps we’ll just open a few. We’ll miss our supper if I open all of them’.

Everyone laughed.

The first gift he was handed, was in a small gift box. When he opened he found a set of keys.

‘Why Daniel,’ he joked. ‘You’re giving me your car?’

Daniel ran Eldon’s hydrogen car subsidiary, ‘Wave’. ‘Oh no’, he exclaimed happily. ‘I’m giving you the keys to your new 1929 Rolls Royce Phantom II replica, made specially for you by the people down at the shop. On there own time I might add’, he quipped.

Everyone laughed again, including Eldon this time. The vehicle appeared on huge monitors throughout the floor, and everyone clapped. ‘My most favorite car ever. Thank you Daniel. And thank the boys down at the shop too’. Daniel bowed in respect, while everyone applauded.

The next gift was Ethan’s, who started subconsciously backing up a little. He didn’t see how an egg could compete with a Rolls Royce.

They handed Eldon his gift, and Ethan looked down at the floor. That was the best way he could figure out how to hide.

‘Ah, something from Ethan,’ Eldon said, looking around. ‘Ethan? Where are you?’

Ethan inched forward and waved.

‘Another box,’ Eldon said. Ethan’s was a bigger, rectangular box; much more ornate than the one Daniel presented the keys in. ‘This looks interesting. Ethan has just taken over StarForce the jewel crown of my operations, by the way.’

Everyone applauded. If it’s anything like Daniel’s gift, there’s probably a satellite in here’.

Everyone laughed.

Eldon opened the lid that was attached to the box. 'Oh my,' he exclaimed, held by what he was seeing. For a full minute he sat starrng at what was in the box. "The Imperial Coronation,' he said finally. 'The one they said I would never get'.

He looked over to Ethan. 'How?'

Ethan just shrugged his shoulders. He had no idea how he got the fucking thing.

Eldon set the box down, and gestured a come hither with his hand. Immediately the entire crowd found themselves between security and Eldon. Two men walked up to him, listened to a few instructions, nodded and very carefully picked up the box. Flanked by heavily armed security guards, they removed themselves and the box from the party.

'Well,' Eldon said rising. 'It's going to be hard to top that gift, so it might be a good time to eat,' he said waving to a banquet setup across the great hall. "I think I hear a few belly's rumbling'. He gestured for Ethan to come to him. 'I want you to sit to the right of me'.

From there on, things became magical for Ethan. People almost groveled at his feet after they saw him sitting next to Eldon. Fuck he loved that. He schmoozed too. Got a few key pieces in place for the upcoming reactor liftoff. Drank a lot. Found there was some cocaine to be had if you found yourself in the right crowd. The work for the evening was done. It was time to let loose.

He stood watching the crowd, a little bleary eyed after doing a couple of lines of Coke. He didn't notice the man who sidled up to him. 'I see you're in total ass kissing mode now', the man said.

Ethan looked over, and saw a short Chinese man dressed in Hawaiian shorts and shirt, and wearing a pair of flip flops. He had a big smile on his face and was holding a huge party drink, complete with an umbrella. 'Jimmy, you little sleaze bag,' he said, happy to see him. Exactly the right person to have with you once you achieved full party mode. 'Good to see you dressed up for the occasion'.

'I like to make the effort,' Jimmy replied. 'So what's going on? You're running StarForce now?'

'Who else?'

‘Yeah, I guess,’ he replied. Ethan could see he felt there were better candidates. Himself for one. ‘I saw you talking to the governor there. Get everything smoothed over?’

Ethan knew at the level he was playing, no one ever stopped fighting. Jimmy Wang could be at least be considered a friendly ally, but he wanted something too, and there wasn’t a lot he wouldn’t do to get it. Even to a friend.

Ethan decided to yank his leash and get him to heel. ‘I have things exactly where they should be. How about that?’

‘Ah come on,’ Jimmy said with smiling eyes. ‘No need to get defensive. We’re just talking. It’s not like I want to take StarForce from you, if that’s what you think. Is that what you think? Fuck that. I have way bigger things going on with Eldon than StarForce. Running StarForce is a shit job compared to what I’m doing’.

‘Well, it’s good to hear Eldon could find something you can do’.

‘Fuck you!’ Jimmy said turning, and not feeling the conversation went any worse than most of his, farted and walked away.

‘That dick!’. Ethan thought. He found himself standing in the middle of one of the smelliest, lingeringest, disgusting farts he had ever smelled. People were starting to glance at him and move away. ‘Typical Jimmy,’ he thought. ‘I’m going to get that prick.’

At abruptly 10:00 PM the guests left the party. Not because they were tired and wanted to get home, but because they were told to leave. The moment they were gone, the entire mood of the party changed with new lighting and music and dozen of women, some very young and none looking to be over twenty started making their way through the room.

‘Now the real party begins,’ Jimmy, who had sidled up to Ethan again, said. He was looking excitedly at all the young women. There were about 20 other guys there. They were all people Ethan came across in his work and was friendly with. He felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Eldon.

‘You didn’t think I’d forget it was your birthday too, did you?’ he asked smiling at Ethan. ‘This is for you my friend. Happy birthday’. With that and a wink, Eldon turned and left the room.

Ethan looked over the scene. Jimmy was already trying to build a human pyramid. He smiled. 'How appropriate,' he thought. 'The spoils of war'. He started looking the girls over, because that's all they were was girls, and found one hiding in a corner wearing a see through teddy and trying to cover herself with her hands and forearms.

Chapter 13 Traumatizing Content – Rape

Something about her inflamed Ethan immediately. Was it the youth? The innocence? The awkwardness she was obviously feeling? Was it fear? Was it the fear he saw in her eyes as they darted back and forth over the room. He didn't know. He didn't care. He was filled with animal desire, and obviously, there were no limits here. He had to have her.

He quickly walked over and grabbed her by the wrist. He didn't look at her. He didn't notice the new fear he placed in her eyes. There was an orgy starting in the middle of the room, but he wanted her to himself. He took her to a side room which would provide a more intimate encounter

When he got her into the room, he turned on the lights and tore off her teddy. Frozen now, she just stared at Ethan. He looked at her young body. Her breasts were still developing and her pubic hair had yet to fill in.

'Oh yeah?' he thought, almost licking his lips at the pureness of her beauty. 'This one's young. Was she 12? Was she even 12?' he wondered as an afterthought.

It didn't matter. She made him so horny nothing mattered but fucking her. He snorted like a beast and took her. Then angry at her lack of gratitude and participation, took her again, only harder this time. When he was done, he shoved her to the side and fell into a drunken sleep.

Chapter 14

Ethan woke to the sound of crying. He snapped awake. Immediately the horror of what he had done filled him. He grabbing the naked girl and quickly ushered her out of the room.

‘Fuck me!’ he thought, ‘That was wrong. No two ways about it, that was wrong. Even in a simulation, what I did last night was wrong’.

He didn’t recognize his perspective had changed fundamentally from the night before. He was too wrapped up in the disgust of what he had done. He dressed quickly. All he wanted to do was get out of there. On his way out he noticed Jimmy naked and passed out on top of a pile of bodies. When he reached the door, he saw the young girl. She was hiding in the same spot he found her last night, now naked because of him. He called one of the servants over. ‘Get some clothes on that girl’, he said, and left.

When he got to his office, Dawn was sitting there, intently focused on her work as usual.

‘How was the party?’ she asked.

‘Good,’ he responded without stopping, ‘Your egg did the trick.’

‘I knew it would. Did you work your magic? Change a few minds? Fuck up a few lives?’

‘Oh yeah’, he responded, but not in a smart ass way. Once in his office, he closed the door behind him.

‘Fuck Me. Fuck Me. Fuck Me,’ he repeated as he sat himself in front of a computer console that hid him from Dawn. He ran his fingers through his hair. ‘What if what I did changed that girls life somehow? Is she a simulation or what? Dually said only things that prevented significant outcomes would escape my influence. Is that what he said? Did that mean he did have an actual role in the simulation, and his actions might lead to the outcome? And this is what I’ve done? I think I just ruined a girls life.’

Just then, he heard his door open and Jimmy wandered in still half asleep and smelling like sex and booze. Ethan’s war room was no where near as secured as Eldon’s. Jimmy dropped into a chair and raised an ass cheek like he was going to fart again.

‘Jimmy, so help me if you fart again, I’ll plant this trophy in your skull.’

Jimmy eyes opened in surprise. He looked at the trophy and it had a granite base. He lowered his ass check. ‘What the fuck man?’

‘Jimmy, tell me,’ Ethan said, looking at him intently. ‘What happens to those girls?’

‘What girls?’

‘The girls last night for fuck’s sake.’

‘Well, you know,’ Jimmy replied, a little uneasily.

‘No I don’t. Where do they come from and what happens to them?’

‘Well, you know, Eldon finds them wandering around the North Side and picks them up. He puts very capable people on it. No one will ever find out where they disappeared to’.

‘Then what happens to them? Today? What happens to them today?’

Jimmy was wide awake now and watching Ethan as intently as Ethan was watching him. ‘It’s Eldon, man. No loose ends’.

Ethan sat back in his chair, and ran his fingers through his hair. Jimmy was watching very closely now.

‘Who does it?’ Ethan asked.

‘What?’

‘Who gets rid of them?’

‘I do.’

Ethan jumped from his chair, and placed himself physically over Jimmy. ‘You don’t kill those girls’.

‘Sorry dude. You know Eldon. I can’t get out of it.’

Ethan thought about that for a moment. It was true. Eldon would find out. He’d lose trust in Jimmy, and it would be Jimmy who ended up dead.. So would Ethan probably. Eldon would know everything before Jimmy died.

‘That was true.’ He sat back down in his chair. ‘Fuck! Why didn’t he think a little about this simulation before just jumping into it?’ he thought.

‘Listen. Do you know the girl I was with?’

‘I suppose I can figure it out’.

‘She was young. Maybe only 12 or 13. You can’t kill her.’

‘Come on man. I can’t change reality and where the fuck is this coming anyway? You’ve got a conscience now or something?’

That question was like a slap on the face. It backed Ethan up. He had a conscience. Yesterday, he would have been able to overlook what happened to the girls. Jimmy caught this realization too. Jimmy caught everything.

‘You can’t kill her Jimmy, Ethan continued. ‘Look at me. You can’t kill her. Do me this favor’.

Jimmy’s eyes lit up. ‘That would tie us very closely together’.

‘Yup’.

‘Hmm,’ Jimmy mused, as he sat back in his chair. Ethan could read his mind too. He was measuring the consequences. Sometimes he frowned. Sometimes he smiled. Then he got up and started to leave.

‘Where are you going?’

‘My boys are rounding up the girls right now,’ he said when he reached the door. ‘If I don’t hurry it might be too late to ‘grant’ you this favor.’ He turned to leave, and then turned back.

‘And Ethan.’

Ethan just looked at him.

‘We’re going to be spending a lot more time together’.

‘I know that’.

Chapter 15

Overnight, everything had changed. Ethan had committed perhaps the most sinful act you can on a person and immediately after, developed a conscience. With the gen-mod in him, it made sense that conscience would respond in kind to such a horrific act.

Ethan spent the better part of the morning reviewing what he had done. This time with compassion. It turned the act ugly, so quickly. Rather than focusing on her body, he looked into her eyes. It wasn’t until now, he saw the fear in them. He looked into those eyes, while going over in his mind how the girl came to be there, and what he did. Those were the actions of the devil.

Ethan could no longer live with himself in any way that resembled his past. His life focus had to change if he was to live on, and even then, it would not be a joyful time for him. Everything he did in life now, had to be to serve the girl he so badly damaged. His life would become one of redemption.

He knew he could never directly approach the girl again. Hopefully Bobby could keep her close enough, so he could get financial help to her. That wasn't enough though. Somehow from afar, he had to make her life better.

Ethan turned his attention towards that piece of crap Whitehead. What happened last night represented the way Eldon Whitehead approached everything he did. If he had his way, he'd take them, abuse and kill the girls, without a second thought. He'd get away with it too. That had to change in Ethan's mind. Eldon and his kind had to go. Civilization was rapidly losing all freedom to people like him and it was time to win it back. That was the only thing Ethan could do from where he was standing. Put an end to Whitehead and his abuses.

He considered everything. His place and time. Just 3 years before the singularity. He knew neither Whitehead or Zhang won the war, but there was one coming. The buildup and damage was real. He knew the people rose up and put an end not just to this war, but any possible future wars, and this was facilitated through AI somehow. He even knew it all came together at the moment of the singularity. He just didn't know how it all happened. In the time he spent in VRAID he never got past marvelling over the bad guys.

He had access to AI. Maybe there was something he could do there? What about the people? Was there something he could do with the people? Like everyone else on the South Side, he didn't really know what was going on with the people. Beyond keeping them in their place, they no longer had real meaning to the world in which he was living.

He decided he had to lay low, go through the motions, and find out where things were heading and where he could intervene. Gather enough information to make a plan. He wondered how closely Eldon was watching him. Probably pretty close. He could have already exposed himself and Jimmy just by their talking in his office. Eldon's ears would pretty much be everywhere. Ethan would have to be vigilant moving forward. No more screw-ups, but the truth was, he probably already screwed up and was already dead. He had to wait and see.

Death meant nothing to Ethan anymore. That was good, because along with the guilt and compassion he was feeling, fear also came as part of the package. He knew Eldon would sense fear from a mile away, but he didn't have any for Eldon. He also gained another emotion he never fully knew; anger. Anger had overridden his fear of Eldon.

Ethan spent the entire day and most of the night, thinking. So he didn't look conspicuous he left his office early and found more private places to think in his home. He thought about the role of AI in the upcoming events, but wasn't sure what he could do about it. Dually put a stop to his attempt to overthrow AI post-singularity in about 2 minutes. He didn't really know a lot about what made AI work.

Once again, he turned his attention to the people. He knew the number disenfranchised by the elite was a large one and growing everyday. It was probably close to exponential rates by this juncture of pre-singularity. He knew there was a huge number of people hurting right now, and they'd be aware of who was taking everything away from them. He knew the South Side was already engaged in mind control propaganda, and was using military control more and more to control the growing dissatisfaction within the population. All that information was available to him in his backstory.

There was a lot of information in his backstory. He had to access that for sure. Through it he could see there was not only a momentum behind Whitehead, but the people as well. Ethan's job would be to interrupt Whitehead's momentum. He turned his attention back to Eldon. If he was going to accomplish anything, he had to defeat Eldon. To do this, he would have to know Eldon better than Eldon knew himself.

Ethan reviewed everything he knew about the man. Eldon's accomplishments he learned of during his VRAID sessions. Their interactions during his time in the simulation. Everything he remembered, but he still came up short. He looked more closely at their personal interactions. The behaviors Eldon exhibited. His expressions, and responses. Everything Ethan could remember about the finest details of their interactions.

He thought about those characteristics and reactions. He asked himself where do these characteristics come from and what are the expectations? What kind of mind do you need to do this thing or that? From what he had observed, he

started to imagine how and why Eldon would do anything, or react to anything. He'd played scenarios over and over again, and finally he defined Eldon Whitehead. Surprisingly, his understanding came from his newfound empathy. He asked himself, 'What kind of hurt had to happen to this guy, for him to be acting this way now?' The question found Ethan his way into Eldon's mind. Once he got on the right track, it was an easy trail to follow. The emotional triggers set off in following this path of discovery told the entire story. Ethan Strong was Eldon Whitehead.

Chapter 16

Ethan Strong had finally dropped completely into his quest. You don't stop dropping-in when you touch the ground. You're not looking for a place or a time. You're looking for yourself. How can you face your demons if you don't know who created them? He knew now. He knew everything, and to face your demons is to destroy them. Ethan felt complete. He wasn't happy with what he found, but he knew everything about himself. He knew his strengths and weaknesses. This gave him one advantage over Eldon; full spectrum perspective. Full spectrum perspective gave him overview of himself and Eldon, for wasn't he both. All he'd have to do is look at Eldon and Ethan would know what he was thinking

He still had a lot of challenges to overcome. Access to Whitehead in any destabilizing way was very restricted at this time. His power was so concentrated, there was little people around him could do unnoticed. Everyone feared him. Everyone became his spy. Ethan had no team, loyal only to him, like he had even a few short years ago. Eldon's AI removed the justification for this. Everything was discovered and arranged much more efficiently through AI.

There weren't even a lot people around to help Ethan anymore. Only very essential core people survived. Each with their own specialty. Ethan specialized in campaigning, and was good at making things happen with hardly a ripple. Jimmy specialized in programming. It was hard for them to even cross paths. Ethan was going to have to fight this campaign alone.

Now he had Jimmy to deal with. Jimmy Wang. Computer genius and businessman. Ethan didn't know anything of Jimmy from his VRAID immersions. All he knew about Jimmy was he was a Chinese businessman who

when around, worked closely with Eldon. Beyond that, he knew Jimmy was personable, and he got away with being very independent, and oh yeah, would sell you anything. Ethan wondered what he had bought by asking Jimmy to help him.

The only other person Ethan saw as an influence in what was going on here, was Dawn. What was Dawn all about? How can she come up with a highly desirable Faberge Egg when even Eldon couldn't. If he had the answer to that, he believed he'd know at least half the story. He knew the doorway to Eldon he sought could be found through Dawn.

The next day he went to his office, not really sure how to approach Dawn. It would be too dangerous to talk to her in the office.

'Morning Dawn,' he said, when he found her working at her desk located in the center of the main office. 'You know, we never talk to each other much do we?'

'No.'

'Yeah, well I was wondering if you'd like to go out for lunch and you know just socialize? I think it would strengthen our working relationship'.

Dawn looked up at Ethan with a steady stare. She clicked a button on her laptop.

'Yeah?' Came a voice.

'He knows'.

'Be right up'.

Dawn continued to look at Ethan with her deadpan expression. Ethan couldn't help but wonder what the hell went on in her head. He kind of envied how cool she was towards everything.

'Ethan,' came the voice of Jimmy as he entered the office. 'Why don't you come into your office here and we'll have a little talk. Ethan followed Jimmy into his office, as did Dawn who shut the door behind them.

'What tipped you off? Was it the egg?' Jimmy asked.

'It was the egg,' Dawn replied. 'I told you it was too much'.

‘Yeah, I guess I fucked up on that one,’ Jimmy said reflectively. ‘I’m a showman. What can I say. Oh, by the way Eldon’s watching you pretty close Ethan. He’s wondering how you got the egg too’.

‘What?’ Ethan exclaimed. ‘What the hell are you two talking about, and more importantly, why are you talking about it in Eldon’s building? Shut the fuck up Jimmy. Do you not have any discretion at all? And what are you talking about, Eldon’s watching me?’

Ethan’s sudden confused look caused Jimmy to fall into a spasm of laughter. ‘Don’t worry about it,’ he said, after enjoying a good laugh. ‘Eldon doesn’t see or hear anything in this office, and you don’t have to worry about the rest of the office either. He’ll see you, but can’t hear you. In your office here, everything Eldon see’s is just bullshit AI makes up’.

Ethan tried to start putting together the pieces.

‘Who do you think runs the surveillance in this place?’ Jimmy helped. ‘It’s all done with AI. Every camera and microphone is connected to Eldon’s AI, and I’m running that. Eldon knows basic code, but he gets lost in my heights. It’s all me baby’.

‘Oh yeah,’ Ethan mused. ‘I don’t know anything about AI.’

‘What?’

‘Nothing. What the hell’s going on here?’

‘Well,’ Jimmy replied. ‘We’re here to help you’.

‘Help me? Help me with what?’

‘Fucking- up Eldon. What else? Hello. We’re the resistance baby!’

‘You? You’re the resistance?’

‘Yeah,’ Jimmy replied, like he wasn’t really so sure while under questioning.

‘And Dawn. And other people’.

‘Alright. You guys have obviously been around awhile. What’s your resistance all about?’ Ethan asked.

Jimmy looked at Dawn.

‘Our resistance is one of the people, Ethan. AI has predicted the singularity will occur within 3 years, and we’re here to see it goes our way,’ Dawn replied.

‘But wait a second,’ Ethan interjected. ‘Couldn’t you just engineer the whole thing to end up the way you want it if you’re the guy running the computers Jimmy? Why don’t you just turn the damn computers on him?’

Jimmy looked slyly at Dawn.

‘Jimmy thinks he’s a son of God’.

Ethan waited for the punch line.

Dawn decided it was best to continue. In Chinese prophecy there is a book of 60 poems and depictions of prophecy known as the ‘Tui Bei Tu.’ To date 55 of those poems have come true. The 56th poem predicts a war of technology building between two nations separated by a sea and creating all kinds of strife. Their struggle brings a new great trouble to the world. That would be Whitehead and Zhang.

In the 57th poem a westernized Chinese Man appears. He is a son of God and his genius comes from knowing both sides of the conflict. He puts an end to all wars. Jimmy believes he is that person.’

‘The ‘Tui Bei Tu’, baby! That’s what I’m talking about.’

‘It is true,’ Dawn continued, ignoring Jimmy’s outburst. ‘Jimmy could do a lot more to end this thing, but he adheres to prophecy, and the rest of the resistance have come to believe this is the correct course of action. AI does require further training to reach consciousness, particularly a compassionate consciousness, and we are engineering that process, but it’s taking time.

We have also come to believe the people of the world have yet to come to a place in their psyche where they are responsible enough to take this upside down world and set it right, once Whitehead and Zhang are neutralized. The people are by no means responsible enough to do this now. If we were to interrupt the build up between Whitehead and Zhang they would simply allow two new people to show up, and we’d have to go through the process again.

In response to the underwhelming resistance to the power structure, our group is also training people through social media to understand the dynamic of the Crowd. This is simply acting in unison for the common good. When used it’s becoming a very powerful tool, and they’re starting to see this. We believe we are equipping people with the voice they will require to create a new world, when they reach their tipping point and can no longer live in this world’.

Ethan held a hand up. 'Okay, that's all and good, but basically, you're telling me, the entire outcome of this war, and the singularity is dependent on Jimmy, because he believes he's a son of God?'

'That's right,' Jimmy jumped up and started doing his version of an ass dance. 'High Five, Dawg!'

Ethan looked at Dawn. 'Fuck me.'

She nodded in agreement.

Chapter 17

'Well, that's a lot to unpack,' Ethan said. So you're gearing up for the singularity and you're following a nut job. That's what you're telling me.

'That's not what I told you at all,' Dawn replied. 'You choose to focus on Jimmy believing himself to be a son of God. I also told you we were engineering the process which is leading us to the singularity. There are two parts to the resistance. Jimmy is one side, bringing what is in fact genius at coding.'

'Creative Grooming,' Jimmy corrected.

'Right. Creative Grooming,' Dawn continued, 'I represent the other side; a body of scientists and concerned citizens around the world. Together we are working as a duality and optimizing its recursive potential. It may interest you to know, by creating this duality, our optimal object reality is increasing exponentially and will soon overtake Whitehead and Zhang.'

'Optimal object reality?'

'Measurable created reality on desired results. The rate at which we are creating intentional reality. There are only 3 entities in the world who are creating reality of influence. Zhang and Whitehead are doing their thing. They create reality because of greed and the need for power. We create reality with intention and a greater degree of measurement. We are not creating things to take more. We intentionally create reality to understand, and expand our potential. It's a lot more refined than what they're doing.'

'What do you call yourselves?'

‘What do we call ourselves?’ Dawn looked perplexed. ‘We don’t call ourselves anything. We sometimes define ourselves, but we don’t call ourselves anything. We are simply, the people of the world responding to an untenable dynamic.’

‘Hmph. I’m not getting this duality thing and how it increases your potential’.

‘Well It came out of the wave/particle duality. Science discovered that a wave can be a particle or a wave, and in the end it gives us the one we’re looking for. That’s a system. It can be a wave or it can be a particle, and we determine which it will be. We applied this to bigger things like molecules, and the system held up. This led us to believe the system could be found in all things, and we applied it to social situations. It works. You just have to insert a dualistic dynamic into the thing of focus. Anything you can point at, you can make into a system by giving it meaning; a social aspect of expectation. Because dualities are dependent on an observer, they are very recognizable in social systems; those things that are real and going to have an impact on all of our lives. Social systems become real once you define them. When you do this, you make it into a thing. What it is. Where it’s going. How much momentum it has, and most importantly the outcome of it’s trajectory.

This became clear when we started making computer models with big number technology. As an example, computer modelling provides us with detailed information on ‘things’ like the climate crisis. Through modelling we can predict accurately what an outcome will be, and certainty increases with the new data coming in at exponential rates thanks to computerization and big number technology. Because of this we can produce predictability about a thing. We can tell you what it is and what it will do in the future, with a high degree of certainty. We know this because we have discovered the things historical patterns, and the influence those patterns have had on today. We measure pattern frequency, and this creates a time line of the thing.

When something becomes enough of a concern that civilization has defined the outcome, it is reactive and undesirable. It’s something that needs our attention. By this time, we know what it is. It doesn’t serve our purpose and so we implement the alternative duality provides in all things. By doing this, we interrupt the predictable outcome. The duality is always the same. A thing will follow it’s natural course, or it will intentionally be interrupted and the opposite will occur.

‘And you do this how?’ Ethan asked.

‘As soon as you recognize the trajectory of a thing, an alternative will present itself to create the duality. The alternative to one person such as Whitehead or Zhang running the world, is we all run the world. Jimmy says we can do this through AI and sampling. This is our objective. Not to overthrow Whitehead and Zhang, but to run the world differently; by the people. With our objective defined, we monitor the predictable outcome, for potential events favorable to our objective. When we find them, we magnify them, creating reactive social explosions that disrupt the status quo and hopefully trigger a tipping point. A tipping point is a line drawn in the sand. Once crossed, things change forever, and when they occur unconsciously and naturally along the status quo, the tipping point is reached before the potential effect has been fully realized, and no-one has acted. It’s an opportunity lost.

‘To use tipping points effectively, they must be managed and engineered to occur at the right time and place. This makes them recursive; a fundamental and permanent refinement to the process thereby producing the alternative effect of the duality. Then it becomes an evolution into a desired outcome. When we consider Whitehead and Zhang, they have the momentum. Along the way, they are creating all kinds of destructive outcomes to our survivability. A climate that’s about to light up like a tinderbox; economic disparity and an increasingly hostile world; the growing awareness that a war is coming. We can use these identifiable moments to provoke tipping points that represent permanent change amongst the people in our fight for freedom. In the social dynamic, the only thing required to create new reality is consensus of what that reality is.

‘There are two tools found within duality we can use to create new reality. These are retrocausality time and the repeat function of duality. Retrocausality time is time only applicable to the duality. It’s the time between the discovery of a trajectory, and the date of it’s predictable outcome, and it is the time to change things, if things need to be changed. 3 years ago we discovered the trajectory and predictable outcome of the singularity. In 3 years the singularity will occur, and determine if the current trajectory of Whitehead or Zhang rules, or an intentional intervention alters the course of humanity. These six years are retrocausality time in relation to the duality of world order. These are the only years when meaningful change can occur.

We find the stimulus for meaningful change by studying the patterns of trajectory. This provides us with the repeat function. The same things it’s doing over and over to take it to it’s predictable outcome. This is where we find our

tipping points and their magnitude. By studying the repeat function, we are able to assess the order of magnitude a tipping point will produce, and how we can use that order of magnitude. It is by using this process within the system we can calculate success. We understand and are using the system to its maximum potential, which Whitehead and Zhang are not.

‘Well, if it’s any consolation, you’re right on track. The singularity does take place in 2030,’ Ethan said, absently. ‘And everything turns out pretty much how you say’.

‘What?’ Dawn asked.

‘Yeah, well, I’m from the future,’ Ethan said recognizing now he had opened a can of worms. ‘I already know how things turned out.’ He then pointed around at his general surroundings as if to explain better. ‘I’m in a simulation right now’.

‘Time mark!’ Dawn ordered.

‘Jimmy started pressing buttons on his watch. ‘Done and sent.’

‘What exactly do you mean you’re from the future?’ Dawn asked. Both she and Bobby were looking at him intently.

‘Well, this is something we do in the future. We come back in time through simulations of exactly what happened in a historical period and live with the people of the time. Jimmy your AI is so powerful, they don’t know they’re not alive, and I honestly can’t tell if I’m living through this period or not. The only rule attached to the experience, is I cannot alter the outcome of the event I came to discover. Whatever you’re doing, you’ve already done and in actuality, you take us to a very positive singularity. That’s the outcome I’ve come to experience, and I can do nothing to alter it’.

‘Fuck me,’ Jimmy said, not knowing what to think.

‘Are you telling us, we’re in a simulation right now, and we’re not even alive?’

‘Ewh. Yeah, I guess so. I don’t suppose I would have brought this up if I had thought the conversation all the way through.’

Jimmy didn’t seem to like the idea he was a simulation, but it didn’t seem to phase Dawn in the least. ‘Something more is going on here,’ she said.

‘Why did you come?’ she asked.

'I came back to find something. It turns out it was my soul. Ethan answered. He looked at Jimmy with guilt in his eyes. Jimmy looked down.

'Tell me what you know about the effect of outcome in regards to you being here'. Dawn asked.

'Well, I've been thinking about this. It's certain I can't change future outcome, but it does look like I can change things that contribute to that future outcome.

'And that would reinforce something we've already done,' Dawn mused. 'Hmm. It's starting to look like, someone or something has placed us in an infinite loop of recursion. Ethan, I think you came back to close a door'.

Chapter 18

'What?' Ethan asked.

'I think you came back to close a door on yourself. You're creating a recursive loop on whatever it is you came back here to change. Coming back to a previous place and time is a recursive act in itself. It's activating the repeat cycle of duality. That repeat cycle may go on forever, and each time, just like now, you'll be here to greet it, and change it, providing you change it this time round. You're closing the door on something ever coming back. Interestingly, you're doing it in the past, so it will never enter your present. It's very clever.' Dawn replied. 'So what places you here? Why here Ethan? How are you tied to this scenario and how important is the door you're about to close?'

'It's a big door,' Ethan answered. 'I'm Whitehead's future self'.

'Whoa,' Jimmy exclaimed. 'I'm going to get my bong. This is getting trippy'.

'That's a big door,' Dawn agreed. 'How do you know this? Did you know you were Whitehead before you came here?'

'Nope. Figured it out yesterday.'

'But you're certain.'

'I'm certain'.

'So part of your reason for being here is to discover your identity, but upon discovery, you haven't returned to your place and time. There's more to your visit than this. You're presenting as placing yourself here in retrocausality time.'

By coming back from a future time, you are the effect. You said you can potentially reaffirm an outcome through your actions, but you can't change it. You're the effect and you came back to ensure the cause stays the same, or even gets strengthened through the refinement of recursion. On the one hand, you're here to reaffirm something, but the duality says you can do something to prevent an event if that event will cause change to the future effect. I think your purpose here is to do something that prevents the alternative outcome to your future. Probably preventing Whitehead from using StarForce. You seemed to have placed yourself in position to do so. The mechanics that define your experience provide for you to do this.

'But that's only one side of the duality that comes out of being here,' Dawn continued. Are you here for yourself, or are you here for all of us? If you're here just to resolve your own conflict, you can simply prevent Whitehead from using StarForce and go home. But that wouldn't solve our problem, would it? Zhang would become the ruler in the absence of Whitehead's influence. You're here for yourself and you're here for humanity as well. That's a duality that comes out of being here. You came to stop Whitehead and Zhang. I wonder how you do that? What did our species gain by stopping Whitehead and Zhang?'

'Abstract transcendence,' Ethan answered. 'By neutralizing Whitehead and Zhang we enabled the people's uprising to take effect and experience transcendence.'

'Hmmm,' Dawn reflected. 'That's something I've never considered. I must admit Ethan, just by coming, you really brought a lot of information with you. So humanity transcends?'

'Yeah, at the same time as the singularity'.

'Oh so we have another recursive duality. Transcendence for one, and consciousness for another. 'And transcendence was evolutionary for the species?'

'Well most of them. I didn't quite get there.'

'Well then, it would look like you came back to reaffirm transcendence, perhaps find your own, and to remove forever those things that block it. Judging from Whitehead's and Zhang's characteristics, that would be something along the lines of narcissism without conscience. This appears to be your mission. Remove the defining characteristics of Whitehead and Zhang from the human race and

reaffirm transcendence. Well that seems easy enough to do. There's only one thing missing.

'What's that? Ethan asked.

'You're not capable of doing anything to usher in the singularity. That would take a computer genius. This isn't a solo act. If you came back to change you, I'm willing to bet Zhang came back to change Zhang. That means Zhang is among us.'

Ethan and Dawn both looked at Jimmy.

'What? Jimmy replied defensively.

'Well, do you have any idea how boring it is to live in a dictatorship?' Jimmy asked. 'I hate that place right now. There's no freedom. I have complete control over the entire country. My surveillance equipment is on every street corner and in every bedroom. I restrict people from doing anything and everything. If they act out of line, I don't even ask questions, I kill them with impunity. I can't tell you how that dampens the mood of a country. Everyone's scared shitless. No one knows how to party anymore. That's for damn sure.'

'Wait a second Jimmy,' Ethan interrupted. 'Are you telling us you're Chairman Zhang and you've come to America so you can party?'

'Pretty much. Yeah'.

Dawn didn't seem taken aback by this information as Ethan, but unfortunately she did have more of the backstory on Jimmy than he did.

'Well, it's really boring over there. Seriously, you do not want to run a dictatorship. They suck. And by the way,' Jimmy just remembered. 'I'm also provoking a revolution among my people. I can't be there when I'm stirring them up to overthrow me. What if they overthrow my palace?'

'Well, you are one hell of a martyr Jimmy. How are you doing all this anyway?' Ethan asked.

'I got AI running things back home. I have a VR room set up, which I never leave for security reason's and the hierarchy is such that i don't have to interact with more than a handful of people. I'm connected to my AI through a microchip I implanted in my brain. It communicates on an elementary frequency and is undetectable to Whitehead or my people. It's pretty cool.

‘Yeah, but, how come you’re always here. Even as Jimmy Wang, shouldn’t you be in China selling shit once in awhile?’

‘No,’ Jimmy replied. ‘I exiled myself from China by having Zhang expropriate a percentage of my holdings. It was such an aggressive move, I had to flee because I feared my personal safety’.

‘Okay, let’s just stop it here,’ Dawn said. ‘There’s starting to be too much information to process. We need to look at this from our various perspectives, and come back with some ideas. I say we go away, think about things, and come back to it in a few days. Jimmy, I’m sure we can’t get away with meetings of this length for long before Eldon starts asking questions. What can you do about this?’

‘Well, up until now, we’ve only been monitoring Ethan. I suppose we could upgrade this floor into a VR simulation like I have back home. AI will just take over Ethan’s entire function here. Everything Eldon sees will be AI generated. He can even come down here and there will be simulations of both of you. He won’t be able to tell them from the real thing.’

‘How long will that take?’ Dawn asked.

‘Oh,’ Jimmy calculated. ‘We have the materials. I’ve been planning something like this for awhile now. AI’s already immersive. No more than a week’.

‘I suggest we carry on as always for a week and meet back when Jimmy has things in order,’ Dawn motioned. ‘Can you build a private room somewhere for meetings?’

‘No worries, Jimmy gave her a thumbs up.’

‘Alright,’ Dawn tabled. ‘Let’s meet back in a week’.

Chapter 19

The next week wasn’t too out of the ordinary. Ethan went to work, said ‘good morning’ to Dawn and then they didn’t talk to each other for the rest of the day.

Eldon did invite him up mid-week for a talk. Ethan was expecting this invitation. He knew Eldon would not overlook how a priceless artifact just showed up at his door.

They were sitting alone in a side office in Eldon's war room. A familiar setting for both. Most of their interactions, which at times had been fairly regular throughout their association took place in these rooms. They'd sit together for hours some times, literally planning their next move in taking over the world. At the time, they were good times between them, but over the past few years, Eldon was becoming more removed. Ethan was invited less often. Somewhere along the way, Eldon had perceived him as a threat, and placed him in a more manageable position.

Still, this was their familiar meeting place, and where both were most relaxed. Eldon grabbed a diet Dr. Pepper and handed Ethan his green smoothie. Eldon sat in a chair, and Ethan plopped down on a sofa.

'Ah,' Eldon sighed. 'Quite a week. How are you making out with StarForce.'

'Everything's in motion. I'm not seeing any big roadblocks so far. Logistics is telling me we're looking at a 3 month timeline for the first reactor. You still good with that?'

'I guess so. I suppose we have to give them time to build the damn thing.'

'Listen Eldon,' Ethan said. He wanted to control of the conversation as much as possible. 'I can't tell you how much I appreciate you asking me to do this. You know, I don't mind telling you I thought you were wasting a valuable resource having me sit in the wings like that, but StarForce. Wow. That's worth the wait'.

'Just saving you for the right job'.

'Yeah well. I sure do appreciate it,' Ethan replied, and laid back in the sofa. 'It'll be just like old times'.

'Yes,' Eldon replied. 'And did you enjoy my birthday party?'

'Oh yeah. The after party was something else,' Ethan enthused. He knew Eldon already knew about the girl or he soon would. Best not to be on the defensive for this conversation. 'Especially the after party. Let me tell you. I came across this girl. She was right. Just right. I liked her so much, I'm having Jimmy bring her back a few times'.

'Jimmy doesn't arrange the girls.'

‘No, but you know Jimmy, He can make things happen’.

‘Yes, I suppose he can, but do you think that was the wise thing for you to do? You’re showing attachment. That is not a good characteristic to have in life. I don’t know how many times I’ve told you; emotion prevents progress’.

‘Alright, ‘ Ethan agreed. ‘But it’s just a girl. I didn’t think you’d give a shit about a girl’.

‘I don’t give a shit about a girl, but I do give a shit about your judgment, and I see this as a lapse. Even the slightest error in judgment from any outside influence can bring this whole system down. I urge you to reconsider your actions’.

‘Yeah, well I guess,’ Ethan conceded, knowing he was about to lose a war, but win a battle. ‘I don’t see what the big deal, but whatever. I’ll make sure Jimmy gets rid of her’.

‘It is a big deal,’ Eldon countered. He looked at Ethan for a moment. That was the one criticism he had of Ethan. He was a little too impetuous, hard headed and if truth be known, ambitious. This combination made him think he could bend the rules. There were rules to everything in Eldon’s world. Everyone knew that. They knew not to disobey those rules, yet here was Ethan, pushing the limits one more time.

‘The Faberge egg was an unexpected surprise,’ Eldon continued, leaving the statement open.

‘Ethan looked at him. ‘Yeah, that was just luck. Jimmy sold it to me. Well, actually he told Dawn about it and she talked me into buying it. I’m glad she did. It shows the level of respect I have for you.’

‘Well, I wonder how Jimmy came to have it?’

‘Some Russian oligarch. Zhang’s starting to put the squeeze on them. Sounds like there’s lots of bargains out there.’.

‘Do you know who this oligarch is?’

‘No,’ Ethan replied absently.

Eldon, measured him some more for a moment, and then shook his head.

‘It cost me though’, Ethan offered.

‘Oh?’

‘Oh yeah,’ Ethan continued. ‘The price of the egg and all my influencer's with introductions.’

‘Hmmm,’ Eldon mused. ‘That is pretty steep. Jimmy always knows what he can get for something.’

‘You know,’ Ethan smiled. ‘When they told me it was an egg, at first I really did think it was one of those sex toys. You know a gag gift. You can get those things now. You stick them up your ass and they vibrate.’ Ethan paused for the right moment. ‘I can still get you one if you want?’

‘Eldon looked at Ethan. Sometimes he was like a big dumb dog. Look at him grinning away. He laughed. ‘No, I have my own supplier. Thanks though’.

Jimmy was next to get called up by Eldon. Jimmy came into the war room and started pressing buttons. Eldon didn't seem to mind.

‘So, where are we with all this?’ Eldon asked.

‘It's coming along. Zhang's tech's are on point. They're moving quickly and his AI is growing strong. His weakness is the control he insists on holding over it. All those restrictions delays it's growth considerably. Still, it's nothing to sneeze at’.

‘Yeah, well where does that leave us’?

‘I'm inside. I've built a few back doors they won't find, but dude, this takes time. AI is a completely different thing than code and computers. It's very organic in it's nature. It takes a lot of gentle prompting to get it to do what you want, especially undetected and when what I'm putting in is contrary to what Zhang wants’.

‘Well, we need to be inside and in control once I get those reactors up. I want no mistakes when I act on that fucker, and that means I control his AI.

‘I know. You'll have it.’ Jimmy replied, while he looked at a monitor and typing in commands. ‘How long do I have anyway?’

Here's a little known fact. No one could get any emotion out of Eldon, but Jimmy.

'For fuck sake's Jimmy. You have one year. One year to get this computer talking to Zhang's.

'Relax bro,' Jimmy chuckled. 'I'm just yanking your chain. It'll be ready. Don't worry about it.'

'Yeah, well make sure it is. What else is going on out there?

'Oh nothing much. Zhang's laser focused on fucking you up with his AI. He's pretty predictable when it comes to you. You probably already know, he's running into a lot of bad debt with all those 3rd world nations he's been propping up. He owns them, but the return is not what he was expecting and he's pushing them to the limit. They say he's trying to take more than he should, and the governments and people are starting to push back. Nothings broke out yet, but he might have a handful of revolutions to deal with if he doesn't back off.

'That's how you got the egg though, isn't it Jimmy.'

Jimmy looked at Eldon, affecting surprise, 'Yeah. That's right. Zhang's moving on Russia too. It's starting to affect the rich. I'm buying up a lot of bargains in Russia right now. Information too, but I'm having that sent directly to you, as you may have noticed.'

'I did, and we might be able to do something with it someday,' Eldon replied, and then turned directly towards Jimmy which was his way of saying the meeting was over. 'Well, I guess if that's everything,' he said.

'I guess so,' Jimmy answered, turning to leave. 'Oh there's one thing'

'Yes'.

I don't know if this is something that will interest you, but Ethan asked me to keep one of the girls from the party for him. I know how you are about rules, but I didn't want to get into a big thing with him about who has final authority on things, now that you gave him StarForce. I decided to skip the drama and did it. I figured you could tell me what you want done about it. And by the way, I could have run StarForce with a laptop and one flip of my finger.

'I know you could run StarForce Jimmy, but I can't have you running the entire company. What would I do?' Eldon replied. 'About the girl. Why don't we let Ethan decide what to do with her?'

And so the week passed, and the time came for the three dissidents to meet again. Jimmy was all excited about what he had done to Ethan's office floor, and insisted on giving them a tour. It wasn't much different, except now there was a simulation of Dawn working at her desk, and Ethan assumed there'd be one of him working in his office. Jimmy led them up to Dawn.

'Morning Dawn,' he said.

'Morning Jimmy,' she replied, not looking up from her work.

'See,' Jimmy said, falling into a fit of laughter. 'She's just like you. No personality whatsoever'.

The real Dawn gave Jimmy one of her deadpan looks. 'Very nice Jimmy,' she said.

'Yeah, well, wait till you see what I got for you Ethan,' Jimmy said, with renewed enthusiasm. He led them into Ethan's office.

Jimmy couldn't have hoped for a better reaction. What Ethan saw stopped him in his tracks.

'Hello Dually,' he said.

'Hello Ethan,' Dually answered. 'My name is Da.

Chapter 20

'Watch this,' Jimmy said excitedly. 'Da, mirror Ethan.

Immediately Da began to transform. Within seconds the robot looked exactly like Ethan. It even adjusted its size and height.

'That's next level shit right there,' Jimmy laughed. 'This is what my AI can do. It's Eons ahead of rest'. He paused waiting for applause. When none was forthcoming, he continued.

'It's a robot', he said, a little less enthusiastically.

'What for?' Ethan asked.

‘Just to cover our bases. What if Eldon comes in some day, and wants you to go upstairs with him. My robot can do that and Eldon will never be the wiser. I decided you needed a more real presence than an area restricted simulation.

‘I guess that can’t hurt.’ Ethan replied. ‘Alright,’ he said. ‘We’ve all had a week to think over all of what’s going on here, and I have to admit, one of my biggest questions is how did Chairman Zhang? It is Chairman Zhang is it not?’

‘I prefer the title,’ Jimmy replied, his chest swelling with self-perceived greatness.

‘Right,’ Ethan continued. ‘How did Chairman Zhang become Jimmy Wang?’

‘Well that’s a very interesting story, Ethan. Very interesting. Why don’t we leave Ethan here to do his work and I’ll tell you all about it, I have provided us with heated massage chairs in our new office.

The new office was nice. As promised there were three big black chairs. A bank of buttons were discretely placed on the right arm. The chairs looked like they could massage the crap out of you. They were placed concentrically around a table. There was a fridge and microwave along the back wall. Along a sidewall were three flat workstations.

Once seated and feeling pretty comfortable, Ethan continued with his question. ‘Alright Jimmy, what the hell’s going on with you?’ he asked, and then he thought. ‘Unless of course you have something more pressing to discuss Dawn?’

‘No, I’m kind of interested in Jimmy’s story too,’ she replied.

‘Well,’ they heard a voice from the back of Jimmy’s chair. Jimmy’s chair was facing away from them. Jimmy pressed a button, and the chair started to rotate in their direction. They waited for at least half a minute longer than it should take for Jimmy to appear and produce the dramatic effect he was hoping for, but undeterred he waited for the chair to be in position and shrouded in darkness. Once stopped, a bank of overhead LED lights came on and shone directly on his face. ‘This is the story of Zhang Wei; aka Jimmy Wang’, he said dramatically. ‘A great story about a great man. Jimmy obviously planned to enjoy his moment.

‘It all started with a humble peasant farmer. His name was Zhang Wei, and whenever people from the party came through his village, he would run to them and ask about the world outside, and how he could contribute. The party

members were impressed by his enthusiasm. One day they offered him work as a party member. He would perform the daily accounting for the village.

‘Zhang excelled at this. He even came up with innovations and procedures that were adopted by other villages. Then came computers and Zhang really took off from there. They spoke his language, and he quickly became an authority on the world level. It wasn’t long before he became a top advisor in not just computer technology, but systems as well. At a young age, he had risen to become a very powerful force in the Communist Party.

‘Even back then, he recognized where computers were taking the future. Before anyone else had the slightest idea of what was coming, Zhang was already engineering his ascent to power. A power so great, he would rule not just China, but the world. In a few years he was in position to become General Secretary, but he put it off and waited. He waited decades for the right moment, and through technology, he steered the world to his right moment. It took forty years, and his biggest challenge was not to be noticed. Fortunately, as an advisor in a country that focused on leaders he was able to do this. Not a single picture of him survived the 40 years.

‘When he did ascend to power, no-one even knew who he was. It was a perfect opportunity to create an alias. Zhang already had developed a very functional AI, and so he created a new Zhang, before people realized who he was. He already lived removed, but inside the Zhongnanhai complex, and had built a sizable office attached to his residence. Before he came to power, the office was justified as a top secret research facility. When he assumed power, the facility had been transformed into a formal, almost grand, meeting place where committee members came to receive directives. Personally he called it a simulation room, but in actuality, it was just a very controlled space with an AI created hologram. I gave Zhang a completely different look, than myself. He’s short and pudgy. Now I’m working on getting a robot in there similar to our Ethan in the other room. Once completed, Zhang will have a lot more freedom. He’ll even be able to go out into public if I want him to.

From Jimmy’s description of Zhang, Ethan was having a hard time differentiating from the two, but he chose to overlook it. ‘So, now we know how Zhang got here,’ Ethan said. ‘When did Jimmy show up?’

‘Well what happened there was, I started spouting off all these proverbs to my people to keep them in line. I couldn’t leave my office, so I had to come up with

something that kept me relatable to the masses. Well, long story short, I drank the Kool-Aid. The proverbs provide a wonderful source of life lessons and guidance. They're very precise and have a logic a lot like computers. I started to practice them. 'An inch of time is an inch of gold, but you can't buy that inch of time with an inch of gold'. Come on. That's good stuff.

'After awhile, I started running out of proverbs to feed to the people, and I started looking into prophecy. That's when I found the 'Tui Bei Tu', and when I did, there I was right in Poem 57, a Son of God who appears and ends all conflict. This single poem dictates my life'.

'So, you never were a despot?' Dawn asked.

'Not really,' Jimmy answered. 'I had ambitions. A few people got hurt when I became General Secretary, but I consider that an act of civil war, and for the better good. Something had to be done with the previous administration. They locked themselves into this zeitgeist of power and control. It wasn't about the people anymore.

'Aren't you doing pretty much the same thing as the previous administration? It looks to me like your people are being controlled with violence if necessary,' Ethan pointed out.

'My AI is,' Jimmy said. 'It's trying to engineer a social revolution amongst the people, and there will pushback to their uprisings'.

'Why?'

'I don't know why? It's acting on probability, I guess'.

'You're sure it's not trying to engineer an environment where the conditions are just right for a Son of God to appear?' Ethan asked.

'Would that be so bad?' Jimmy replied haughtily.

'So you've taken it upon yourself to bring the world to the brink of destruction, just so you can jump in and save the day, and that's only if you're successful. If you fail, civilization comes to an abrupt end. That's the way I see things going here'.

'It'll work,' Jimmy defended. 'You even told us it works'.

'Not for sure. Not this time round. I still might have to do something to make it all work, If that's the case, nothings guaranteed'.

‘I tend to agree with Jimmy on this,’ Dawn interjected. ‘Civilization has to experience a tipping point, and we have yet to achieve it. That’s in spite of the fact that more than half our population now live in a destructive world beyond their influence. It’s going to take a lot for these people to take the leap of faith they require to take control over their destiny. Ethan, you tell us humanity experiences transcendence at the same time AI experiences a transcendence of it’s own. It makes perfect sense these two tipping points would arrive at the same time. They become a duality to propel themselves into their new reality’.

‘After thinking about this for the past week I have come to the conclusion the task before us, is not so much neutralizing Whitehead and Zhang, as providing the environment for a revolution in peoples thinking,’ Dawn continued. ‘The transcendence. Providing people with the time and place, to transcend. We need to build them a platform to leap from. That’s our responsibility’.

Both Ethan and Jimmy stopped to think about this. Now that Jimmy was Zhang, they really only had Whitehead to contend with. They could probably put an end to him right now if they wanted to. So what was Dawn saying? We would have to manage everyone to the transcendence; even Whitehead?

‘What does that mean?’ Ethan asked.

‘These last 3 years before the singularity, are dependent on tipping points coming at their right moment. Eldon getting reactors into space is a tipping point. The people gaining awareness is a tipping point, as is the singularity. For everything to work out as foretold, each tipping point must occur at it’s proper time. The imminent threat of Eldon’s reactors must be pushed back by a few years. The reactors can’t go up in the next year as Eldon is planning.

‘People are taking an awful long time to reach their boiling point. This is because they personally cannot see a way out of the situation, and so they live with it. We must change this thinking, with the time remaining between the singularity. Using retrocausality time, we must create the change. Previous to the new information you and Jimmy provided on our status in place and time, what we were doing on social media was on the mark. Our focus was on informing the people of the power of themselves when acting with the Crowd. I now believe we must place their focus on transcendence.’

‘And how do we do that?’ Ethan asked.

‘By telling them about the devil, and it’s defeat.’

‘Wait a second,’ Ethan interrupted. ‘Are you telling me one Son of God is not enough in this freak show you guys are running. Now you want to add the devil too?’

‘Spirituality is a fundamental component in the human experience. Science has found it to be real it’s just not accepted. Those who govern science see only the logic we apply to science; not the logic we find in science. We must make people aware, there is a preceding logic to humanity. A God if you will,’ Dawn answered. ‘We know it exists. There is precognition in the particle/wave duality. Whether a particle will present as matter or wave is dependent on the observer, yet something knows before we do, how the particle will present. That is a glaring example, but logic which precedes humanity is universal in it’s presentation. Civilization didn’t create math. Numbers have been with us always. We just had to figure out how to use them. Everything,’ Dawn stressed. Everything we know has been known and available to us since our time here began. It still is. We just have to keep finding it. There is preceding God logic in our world. Therefore there is also a devil. We must make the devil real to the people; not just to create fear as a motivator, but so they understand how to manage it’.

‘How are going to do this?’ Jimmy asked.

‘Your AI will have to be reconfigured. Shift the social algorithm to include fear response as well as the proactive response we were focused on previously. Then we have to tell them about the devil and back it up with science. First, we inform them they are indeed living during end-times. I found an interesting passage in the bible that defines end-times for the people. 2 Timothy 3:1-5, ‘But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people’.

‘Does that sound much different than what we have right now? This is the world we live in today. Our Gods dress in business suits.

‘We have to make people sense a change is about to come. This will place them in a state of readiness. Then we have to show them their enemy.

‘The bible describes the devil. In the story, 2 different beasts wear the mark. There is the one great leader who arose from the sea, and then there is another

earthbound beast who converts souls into minions to do it's bidding. They bring the great beast of the Sea human souls. They do it by getting them to wear the mark.

Revelation 13: 'So that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast, or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666'.

'Yeah,' Ethan replied. 'Someone once told me how to recognize the number. It's people who come together to satisfy their personal appetites. Just imagine 3 people standing there filling their bellies with greed'.

'Of course,' Dawn replied. It makes sense. The beast is the one who would have people buy and sell to the exclusion of all else. This represents the lose of their soul. You may remember Jesus saying during the Sermon on the Mount, you cannot serve God and Money. Minions leave no room in their lives for the characteristics that make us human, such as empathy, and love. The beast abandons it's true nature to follow the insatiable path of self-desire. It lives in the animal world, and it wants us living down there with it'.

'Self- desire to the exclusion of all else is what drives the beast. Uncontrolled desire cannot be fed. It's a hunger and need caught in a vacuum of self. Nothing else matters when the only thing you can think about is yourself. It's feeding your appetite without conscience, but the thing is, if we look at these people closely enough, we will see them for who and what they truly are. A life without a soul. Nothing more than an alpha predator. The animal nature. Mean and dangerous, but insurmountable to what humanity brings.

'Now,' Dawn continued. 'We make them aware and wary of the animal they know lives inside them, as well as those who would lead them. Make them question if they are more minion than saint. We'll give them a way out through science.

'From a scientific perspective, our last evolution created two sides to our humanity. Prior to evolution we were animal. After our evolution, we continued to be animal, but we were something else too. Something new. We were abstract thinkers. We could conceptualize, and come up with some really good ideas beyond looking for our next meal. With abstract thinking we created a true society, where shared thinking has brought us all the things we've come to value. Cars, shelter, a stable food supply, computer phones. Abstract thinking has

brought us everything, and it can bring order. We must make the people aware of this. They must become aware abstract thinking is what separates us from the animals, and if we use it, we will cage the animals.

‘From an evolutionary point of view, our last evolution moved us from an animal state to a hybrid state of animal/abstract. This is our human duality. We live in both states simultaneously. Some lean towards one end of the spectrum, while others to the other end. The whole should find balance in the centre.

‘Of course, this is not the case these days. There’s an imbalance where the animal state is domineering over the abstract. Everybody believes the old system, the animal mind, is the way to proceed, but it’s only because they’ve never taken the time to explore the potential of the abstract. Even when people see themselves losing everything around them, they still adhere to the idea it’s best to take what you can get in life. That’s the animal state. Individual and self-centred thinking.

‘We must change people from relying on their animal state. It’s either fight or flight, which is very toxic and creates chaos. The animal state is reactive. The abstract state is proactive and intentional. The abstract state will win every time. From the chaos we live in, the abstract state of a collective momentum must rise. Through science, we make them aware it is natural to embrace the animal state during times of uncertainty, but by giving up on the devil, we will rise to a greater glory. Once we get the people to agree on this, we will experience transcendence’.

‘So that’s our plan for the next 3 years?’ Ethan asked. ‘Change people’s minds?’

‘And prevent Eldon from acting too soon’. Dawn replied.

Chapter 21

And so began the 3 years Ethan would live in his quest. In just a few weeks, his life had already completely changed. He had changed. He was a different person than the one who entered the quest.

At first, the three received no direct opposition from Eldon. They went along their active, purposeful way without interruption. Jimmy’s AI was doing a better

job than Ethan at running the reactor project, and he just had to audit it. Most of their time was spent coming up with ways to delay Eldon's reactors from getting into space, at least not right now. They came up with all kinds of distractions, but they knew it would have to be something big if they were to avoid Eldon's scrutiny regarding the delay.

The had Zhang go directly to war with Whitehead. It very quickly became apparent to Eldon that Zhang was targeting him in a trade war to say the least. He wasn't even going after anyone else, just Eldon. Factories Eldon built in China and other BRICS nations were being expropriated. Tariffs were applied on Eldon's products. Zhang was slowing him down, and excluded from the greatest growth economies in the world.

Prior to this Eldon considered Zhang a minor impediment to his goals. He considered Zhang powerful and cunning, but unwitting to Eldon's vision. Zhang would be an easy conquest when the time was right. Now all of a sudden it was personal, and Eldon grew to hate the man. He became obsessed with Zhang during this period, and it took his focus away from Ethan, Jimmy and Dawn. When common parts required for the reactors became inaccessible because of Zhang's tariffs, Eldon never thought to blame Ethan for the delay. When his computers were hacked and parts of his reactors were built to faulty specs, Eldon didn't blame Ethan. Everything was Zhang. He blamed Zhang for everything. It had become personal, and it was getting into Eldon's way.

Eldon and his reactors were effectively neutralized for a couple of years. Still, Eldon presented an outward calm, and he continued to have lavish parties, and throw orgies for his boys afterwards. He did not attend them himself. This created an ethical issue for Ethan he was not entirely able to overcome. His primary concern was how not to rape another woman or girl. It was a big issue. Ethan refused to engage in Eldon's orgies, yet he was expected to attend and participate. Eldon held these orgies to affirm the top echelon of his organization were sufficiently lacking the moral compass so they would do the things Eldon needed them to do.

'Will you come with me Dawn?' He asked.

'Dawn looked at him incredulously. 'No.'

'But I can't have sex with innocent people. Eldon will hear about it if I'm just standing around all the time. What am I going to do?'

‘Well, you’re certainly not going to be having sex with me, I can assure you’.

The prospect of Dawn attending an orgy aroused Jimmy’s sexual interest. ‘You know Dawn,’ he said. ‘Since I’ve known you, I’ve never seen you, socially with a man, or woman. Maybe if you got your oil changed once in awhile, you’d start holding up your end of this project a little bit better’.

‘Well, if I do, it won’t be with either of you two idiots’.

Normally, she would have gotten away with that, but Jimmy noticed her beginning to blush. ‘Maybe you should just start dressing hornier around here’.

‘What are you talking about?’ Dawn asked, starting some red from anger. Still, Jimmy’s words were touching a soft spot.

‘You know. It’d get your estrogen flowing having us guys looking at you all the time. We’d even make untoward advances. Now do you see how that would perk you up a bit? You’d be at the top of your game, fighting us off all the time. Seriously,’ he added. ‘I’ve imagined you in some pretty hot outfits, and trust me, you do not disappoint.’

‘You disgusting pig,’ Dawn yelled, now really mad and jumping to her feet as if she were about to go over and punch out Jimmy.

Jimmy’s eyes lit up, and he saw he had gone too far. ‘I’m kidding,’ he said, placing himself in a defensive, fetal position within his massive massage chair. ‘I didn’t mean it’.

Dawn stared at him for the minute, between wanting to kick the crap out of him, and saying the hell with it. She wasn’t used to being teased, and didn’t like it.

Finally, she did say the hell with it, and sat back down, at which time Jimmy said, ‘Unless of course, you want me to think of you in those hot outfits,’ which started the whole thing over again.

‘Settle down you two,’ Ethan intervened. ‘Jimmy shut up. I have to figure this out. I can’t go to these orgies. There’s no way’.

‘Well, I suppose I can lend you one of my wives,’ Jimmy offered. ‘But only the one I’m most pissed off with. I’ll take away a little Jimmy loving and she how she likes that.’

‘Lend one of your wives? You disgusting pig,’ Dawn interjected. ‘Like you own them. Asshole!’

‘Okay. Okay.’ Ethan said holding up his hands. ‘What do you mean, one of your wives?’

‘Well, I have five of them, which you guys would know if you ever showed the slightest interest in my life. I suppose you can become part of our group at the orgies.’

‘What the hell are you talking about?’ Ethan asked.

‘I have five wives. I married them in China where I made polygamy a law to increase population. I brought them with me when I escaped’.

‘And what? You’re swingers or something?’

‘No, but I sneak them into the orgies with me. We just jump in the middle of everything and do our own thing. That way at least I’m not directly contributing to the abuse of the women. I suppose because these orgies are something we have to do, it would be better if you took one of my wives’.

‘And you wouldn’t mind?’

‘I might have when I was younger, but do you have any idea how hard it is to sexually satisfy five women on an ongoing basis? Now they’re just aging into their horny years, and old Jimmy’s reaching for the Viagra, if you know what I mean. It might be a good thing if you showed up.’

‘Dawn’s right,’ Ethan replied. ‘You can’t make this decision for your wives. We’ll have to see if they’re open to it’.

It turned out they were very open to the idea. Maybe a little too quickly to suit Jimmy. Regardless, his wives were eager to sacrifice themselves for the greater cause. Some even started campaigns to be the one Jimmy would be most pissed off with at the time of the orgy.

It wasn’t the perfect solution, but the problem was overcome.

Chapter 22

During the first couple of years, the three also worked on bringing awareness to the anger, frustration, and fear people were feeling. It was a global issue, and

through AI, they tried to bring reason and understanding to what caused the fear. Everyone one felt the fear. Their confusion was opening the door to nationalistic perspectives. This is where the resistance stepped in to offer a counter idea to what was going on and a message of working together to overcome common problems. The underlying theme was, 'We are all in this together'.

The Resistance itself was a fairly substantial and growing counterbalance to what was going on in the world. Although, there was growing disparity, the Resistance was well established, diversified and functioning as an active force in society. In the Western World, it functioned openly. It was like a number of social welfare channels that eventually became connected as a single channel. It came out of the environmental movement, and it was built by kids with a legitimate cause. The channel could be found on Reddit, and was known simply as greta.

Everything they did in the West, was in the open for anyone to see or participate in. It had become the first recognized representation of 'The Crowd'. The collective voice moving intentionally towards the common good. It was huge in it's undertaking and increasingly organized because of it's intention and pragmatic approach. Lobbyist groups came out of it, as did law teams to challenge court decisions and unjust laws. It wasn't complete though. It didn't contain the amount of people to create meaningful change. It faced a number of roadblocks. Cultural beliefs and preconceived notions, prevented many people from joining. On top of that, the people had their livelihoods to worry about. Depending on where they lived, some were experiencing desperate times. Still, there was a common mood among the people. Everyone, everywhere, knew something was wrong with the system. They all knew they were only a few missteps away from a world they could not get back once they lost it.

Annually, the environment was costing billions and billions of dollars in lost production and income. The climate crisis alone caused human displacement never before imagined. People had nowhere to live where life was sustainable. Globally, they were on the move and getting more and more aggressive with their arrival to new promised lands. People were not just trekking by land and sea. They began flying in, and demanding an immigration status enveloped by the refugee status. They wanted special recognition, and if they didn't get it, they took it to the courts and argued to redefine the definitions of the law. They were

presenting the very real legal possibility they did indeed deserve special recognition.

The economy was just as bad, as the environment and displacement. Central banks were stuck in a horrible limbo where they had to maintain a high interest rate if they were to provide even a modicum of stability to the consumer economy. If they went too high with the interest rate, they not only risked, but provoked a bank run, which in addition to banks, included unregulated Non Banking Financial Institutions. Half the world's assets were tied up in financial services which lacked overview. By definition, they were a lot riskier and fragile than the banks. It was a constant tight rope walk for the central banks. One misstep and even the experts didn't know how they could fix things. It would be Armageddon. Extreme poverty would descend upon the world overnight.

Then there was the physical war the world had to worry about. The lines had been drawn long ago, and if China made a single move from this point on, the world would explode into a global war the likes of which no-one had seen before. Every day it came closer. Bigger threats and greater participation in the proxy war. Daily challenges in the air and on the sea. Disruptive trade wars became common place, and the rhetoric grew daily.

Everyone knew, something was about to happen. Things were so fucked up; the last straw could fall from anywhere. It was getting to a point where people were just fighting to remain sane in spite of all the insanity around them. It was out of this place, a single unifying voice came to be heard. Reverend Al was part of the channel, and talking to whoever would listen.

'And so, my brother's and sisters, I am here to tell you, darkness is all around us, and you and I need to bring light to this world'.

'Can I get an Amen?'

'Thank you brother's and sister's, for I swear, the devil walks among us, and it's time for us to rise and stomp that devil and send him running.

'Can I get an Amen?'

'Oh bless you. Bless each and every one of you. Right now, just imagine yourself in the comfort of God's arms. Just feel yourself knowing that everything is going

to be taken care of. Feel God's comfort, for just this moment, and gather your strength, before you, the children of God go out to do battle'.

'Can I get an Amen to that?'

'Now listen to me children. We don't like the way things are. This is not what was intended for God's children. Scraping and scratching through life. No Sir! We are here to live in the majesty of the Lord. Tell me one thing that's going on in our lives where we're moving towards greater glory? Just one. You can't think of one can you? Not a one.'

'Unh. Unh Uh. We're in a pickle, that's for sure, and now that God's majesty is not coming to us, we need to go out and find it for ourselves. Each and every one of us, and we're going to do it by taking a look at where all our problems are coming from. I'm sure we'll find a devil in there somewhere.

'Now tell me children, in a world that's barrelling past tipping points with our environment, tell me why, they're still in the process of phasing out fossil fuels? Tell me who's responsible for this idea? Who thinks this is good idea? Tell me who, so I can take a closer look at that man or woman and start asking some questions. Maybe we'll all go there and start asking questions. We'll all go there together, and put them under the spotlight, and when we find the devil, we'll throw him out there in the spotlight for all to see, and we'll stomp out another lie.

'Can I get an Amen?'

'And what about this war we're about to jump into. Heck, we might be in it already. Now surely the devil dwells in these lands. Innocent young men and women losing their lives for something where diplomacy should be the resolution. Think about the poor children getting forced into the front lines, knowing they're about to die for something they often don't even believe in, or something they're being forced into. Think about how you would feel if that were you. Standing there on the front line. An open target. Do you have the compassion to know what they feel. It's horrific.

'Unh. Unh. Uh. The Devil surely dwells in war.

'And now, it's even closer to home. Prices going up everyday. Mother's and father's unable to feed their children. Think of the pain they must feel. I tell you this. Think of it, because it's at your doorstep, and you can be next. And there isn't a damn thing you can do to about it because the devil is deciding your life

now. Think about that. Think about how the devil can blindside you and take everything.

‘Now listen children. ‘Are we going to make it through these terrible times? The answer is we will. We’re going to find the devil wherever he dwells and we’re going to stomp him out, and I can tell you right now, we know where he lives. He wears the mark. Just look for the one that puts self over all others. Find him and point him out. God’s children will come to defend you. That’s what we have to do.

‘Now, I want to tell you a story from the bible. It’s my favorite story. It tells us how we’re going to get ourselves out of this mess. It’s the story of Adam and Eve.

‘Why sometimes I like to imagine myself, back there in the garden of Eden, frolicking around with Eve. Mostly I do this at night. What a time we would have. That’s all they did back then. They frolicked and enjoyed life. Sometimes they’d be eating some tasty fruit. Sometimes they’d be rutting just like a couple of barnyard animals, and beyond that, all they did was laze around in the garden and scratch themselves. Oh, what a wonderful time it must have been.

‘Then one day, a serpent comes along and starts talking to Eve. This serpent tells Eve, ‘Go eat that fruit over there’.

‘Well she tells him she can’t do that because God told them they couldn’t eat from that tree, and God was the one who had set them up with this pretty little garden. In fact God told Adam they’d die if they ate from fruit from that tree.

‘Well, the serpent says, ‘That simply is not true. It’s because God doesn’t want you to become just like him, knowing Good and Evil. He likes to hold that over on you, but wouldn’t you like to be just like God?’

Now Eve thought she would, and eats some of the fruit and gives some to Adam too, and then bam!, all of a sudden they see they’re naked. Now they worried about their naughty bits flopping all over the place, and start sewing together some fig leaves to cover themselves. Well the fig leaves still don’t leave a lot to the imagination, but the point is something here had changed. They weren’t dead, but they were different and part of them had got left behind. Something had changed. They were aware. They understood things beyond their animal nature. In their thinking, they had become as God.

‘Well, Adam and Eve didn’t figure all that out at the time, but they had become self-conscious on a whole new level. That’s about as far in their thinking when God comes wandering back into the garden to check on his children.

‘What the heck is with these fig leaves,’ he asked.

Being God, he figured it out pretty fast and then he goes to lamenting. ‘Oh, you ate of the fruit and now you are as one of us, knowing Good and evil. Even after I told you not to. And now I see you looking over there and noticing the Tree of Life, where if you eat from that you’ll live forever too. Well I say no to that. I’m going to banish you from Eden, so you can’t eat from the Tree of Life. So then he gives them some togs and sends them on their way.

‘Now you see children what’s happening in this story. Well this is the story of when we became human. Cognitive and rational beings. Praise the Lord for giving us this gift Then he sent us out to discover what this gift means to know Good and Evil.. He sent us out. The life we knew was gone forever, and we did die in our own special way, but we were reborn as something even greater, and we’re out in the dessert looking for Good over Evil. When we stop trying to hide our naughty bits, we’ll find it. We’ll find ourselves as a people, making our way back to Eden. Our own way. That’s the rule. God set up some cherubs and dangling swords to keep us from getting back in the old way. We can never become an animal again.

‘We’re out here in the dessert my children. We’re afraid because we don’t know what we gained, and we’re looking to what we lost. I say to you, turn away from the beast. it’s time to see yourself as one of God’s children and get to work at finding the ‘Tree of Life’. If we come together under the goodness of God, we will find it.

‘Can I get an Amen’.

Chapter 23

Ethan watched every moment of Revered Al on the monitor as he kicked, stomped and body-slammed the devil into submission.

‘Who the hell is that?’ He asked turning to a smiling Dawn and Jimmy.

‘That’s Reverend Al,’ Dawn replied. ‘What do you think?’

‘I don’t know. He does seem to grab your attention’.

‘Over a billion consistent viewers when you include his ‘cooking for poor people’, and ‘community gardening’ shows. Each of his programs targets different audiences, we’re prompting into coordinated action groups.’

‘So this is something we’re doing?’ Ethan asked.

‘Yup,’ Jimmy replied. ‘All AI produced’.

‘Isn’t he a little over the top?’

‘That’s the persona everyone likes’ Dawn said. ‘For some reason, older generations seem to tap into him, and younger generations find it cheesy enough to warrant their attention. AI optimized the character’.

‘What’s our goal here?’

‘A centralized voice. Someone representing the resistance, without identifying as the resistance’.

‘What’s he doing though?’ Ethan continued.

‘He’s telling people what to do next. He’s someone who can get the people moving in the right direction. He’s mobilizing the resistance.’

‘So how is your old mobilizing the crowd working out these days?’

‘We’re hitting it from two angles. We have Reverend Al directing the movement, and AI is triggering people to act. It’s continuously sampling everything; trends, social media, changes to laws. Anything particular that will motivate individually sampled people is used.

‘See, this is the thing,’ Ethan replied. ‘Aren’t we just as unethical as anyone else when we’re directing people without their knowledge?’

‘We’re not trying to change the minds of people who have formed opinions. We’re targeting the undecided, and with social media moving so far to the right, we are only countering with an alternative perspective. We’re finding most of these people are in a sort of stasis which requires prompting. It doesn’t really matter which side the prompting comes from. We feel it’s our duty to provide them with an alternative choice.

‘Agreed,’ Ethan replied.

‘Overall, the people are starting to mobilize,’ Dawn continued. Our main objective is to make people aware of the ‘Wisdom of the Crowd’. It’s power and utility, and that create real change for themselves and the rest of the world by using it. It’s starting to catch on. The environmental movement is now using it effectively.

‘I’ve never really got what that is,’ Ethan interrupted.

‘It’s in discovery and it’s effects have been confirmed on a number of occasions. It’s appeared most prominently back with ‘The Me Too’ movement and the ‘GameStop’ rebellion. It’s mass social engagement. Through social media, a majority over an issue becomes aware of it and descends upon it with intention. Acting in unison. The mere scale of the presence triggers a response. The outcome is overwhelming when the majority demands a response, and it always goes their way. With the ‘Me Too’ movement the lives of people involved in the scandal, even on the periphery, had their careers ruined. This all happened outside the judicial system. With ‘GameStop’, the majority showed up again, and punished Hedge Funds to the tune of \$10 billion. The Wisdom of the Crowd is real and the most powerful force on earth. If we can convince people to use it’.

Are we on time? Will they use it before the singularity?

‘it is a tipping point we’re looking for. Very hard to predict, but we feel we are in the zone. The environmental movement is very quickly bringing awareness to it, as well as other things the resistance has got going on. It is asking the whole world to stand up against the War, Whitehead and Zhang. Fortunately, the number on majority rule is less than 5% of the population acting in agreement. It’s very achievable, that’s for sure.’

‘Well, that’s sounds better than how we’re getting on with Eldon. He’s gearing up to go to at it with Zhang. I suspect things are going to get pretty tense from here on.

‘Yeah,’ Jimmy responded. ‘It looks like war. He’s called a general meeting of all his lieutenants. He hasn’t done that since I’ve been around’.

‘Yep. He’s pissed. How are you set up for what’s coming Jimmy?’

‘No worries. As far as anyone knows, Zhang has his AI which he is relying on to overcome Whitehead. Whitehead has his AI which he intends to use to neutralize Zhang. For the purpose of war these are the two most efficient AI’s

out there. No one knows about my AI, which can neutralize any of them with a push of a button.

‘How come your AI has never been detected? Don’t those things draw a noticeable amount of power to operate?’

‘Well, my AI is decentralized.’ It operates in the internet, not outside. It draws everything from the internet, even it’s source of power. My AI lives in the internet. It’s everywhere. It’s in your cellphones and computers. It’s in organizations, Universities, and scientific labs. It’s not storing data like other AI. It’s linking and processing data from within. Everyone else stores it. It does some draw power, but it’s minimal for an AI system, and spread out evenly amongst everything connected to the internet.

‘How would you even do that?’ Dawn asked.

‘Because I started small. ‘I sent in a single piece of code to ping off sites, looking for simple backdoor access. When they found one, they created an anchor, and staked out a little piece of property on someone else’s claim. Once this was accomplished, I started sending code through my linked system. At first most of it was to train it to build a stronger and more secure infrastructure, which it continues to do on it’s own today. It’s impenetrable and it’s learned how to be in everything now. It controls Whitehead’s and Zhang’s AI. Trust me. Nothing, and I mean nothing, has control over the internet like I do right now.

No sooner had Jimmy said this, than an alert came to him through his microchip.

‘Well that interesting,’ he said.

‘What?’ Ethan and Dawn asked in unison.

‘My AI is being attacked. Jimmy replied. ‘From within the internet’.

‘Eldon?’ Ethan asked.

‘Most likely. Possibly a foreign national. Probably the US government under Eldon’s tutelage.

‘What are we going to do about that?’

‘I directed my AI to develop strategies and protocols of self defence. We let them fight it out.

Jimmy sent out an order. ‘Defeat and assimilate’.

Everyone became quiet, thinking about the consequences of this first strike which would lead up to the final days. Reverend Al could be heard in the background. This time he was in his community garden, located somewhere in Central Park. The only thing growing there was a huge Amnesia Haze cannabis plant. It looked more like a tree than a pot plant. Reverend Al liked to lie beside while he smoked a doobie from a previous harvest. Then he just started to babble.

‘Now, I’m not saying it’s true,’ he said, ‘but what if, is all I’m saying. What if we’re all star travellers making our way through space and time. Oh that would be a fun time. I love the stars. That’s where I’d go. Did you ever notice it’s not them moving, it’s us. The earth’s moving. The solar system’s moving. Even the old galaxy is moving along. Someday, I’m going to figure out how fast we’re moving. I bet it’s pretty fast.’

‘I wonder if I have any Eggo's at home? An Eggo kind of looks like a world doesn't it? Hey, have you guys ever had this bread pudding. It's like a pudding but it's made with white bread and drenched in all this lemony, syrupy, deliciousness. I wonder how you make that?’

Chapter 24

‘Okay. This means something doesn't it?’ Ethan asked, after a moment of reflection.

‘I do believe so,’ Jimmy answered. ‘Someone's on to me.’

‘On to you, or Zhang?’

‘I don't know. Maybe we can spin it towards Zhang, but if it's Eldon, he's using someone else, and he has to think it's me. Who else could do it?’

‘Hmph!’ Ethan grunted. ‘We're going to have to figure out everything Eldon's planning from this meeting. There only a year left before the singularity, and we need a plan. This meeting will have to define what he's doing and how we're going to counter it.’

‘Dude, there’s no way we’ll figure all that shit out,’ Jimmy responded, not feeling as cocky as he usually did. ‘Not with Eldon. No-one ever knows what Eldon’s doing.’

‘I think we can figure it out.’ Ethan replied. ‘I think I’ll know everything there is to know what he’s thinking the moment Eldon starts talking. You forget, Jimmy. I’m Eldon. I’ll figure him out.’

Well good luck. No-one can tell what Eldon’s thinking. That’s what he’s famous for. Zero tells.

There was something else going on between Ethan and Eldon that made Ethan think he’d have a pretty good idea of what was going on. Ever since he recognized he was Eldon, he started getting this thing in his head like a signal or pattern of his thoughts running through his brain, but they were separate somehow. Like a set of thoughts running along side his own. It only happened when he was with Eldon. At first he wasn’t all that aware of it, but once he noticed it, it was there and a curiosity. The more Ethan focused on it, the more he began to believe it was not his thought pattern, but Eldon’s. He was starting to understand it for what it was, and it’s usefulness.

Dawn explained what was probably going on. ‘It’s just like quantum entanglement. You’re two of the exact same thing, but separate. At some level, what happens to you, happens to him, and you’re accessing the connection somehow.’

‘Do you think Eldon’s aware of it?’ Ethan asked.

‘I suspect he’s aware of something. Probably not anything like you’re experiencing. After all, you’re aware you’re him. He’s not aware he’s you.’

‘I’m not feeling like he’s onto anything. I think I would sense it if he was’.

‘Well, he probably isn’t. If you want to be safe around him. Don’t be reactive in your thinking. Think about those things later. Stay focused on the problem solving at the moment. Change your mind later. That should reassure him whatever you’re thinking is positive. If you learn how to use this, you might even learn to direct his thinking, without him being aware of it. Try out some things and see what you can get away with.’

That’s what Ethan had been doing over the last two years, and he couldn’t say he had ever influenced any of Eldon’s decisions, but he was learning how to use it

as a second sense, and his thought patterns, and therefore actions, were not creating distrust. That alone was worth something.

‘I think we’ll come away with something Jimmy. Just you wait and see,’ Ethan replied to Jimmy’s skepticism.

The meeting was filled with representatives of the power people in the Western World. There were representatives of banks, world leaders, captains of industry, and a few others like Ethan and Jimmy. It was a big turnout for such a diverse and powerful group. Almost 200 people attended, most of them asking each other what was going on? It was held in Eldon’s meeting hall, and on a stage, there was a podium. When Eldon walked up to it, everyone fell silent and drew closer.

‘Usually, I like to greet you folk as my friends,’ he began. ‘But today, I am calling you my comrades, because as you all must be feeling by now, war is at hand. The BRICS nations have destabilized the dollar, and together, they’re aggressively manipulating a shift in world dominance. They want a war!’ he shouted, slamming his fist on the podium.

The crowd was full of nodding heads, and murmurs of agreement. They were aware of what was going on, and knew it was time for a directed response.

‘Our way of life has never been challenged like it is today, and if we don’t act now and decisively, all will be lost.

The murmurs grew louder. ‘What can we do?’ Someone shouted. ‘You know as well as the rest of us Eldon, our hands are somewhat tied. We have to follow procedure and there has never been greater opposition in our parliaments’

‘Exactly,’ Eldon replied. ‘That’s what’s fucking us up, and if I’m being honest, it’s you people in this room who are fucking it up the worst. All this back and forth with your two party bickering. I can’t get anything done with you assholes. We’re fighting amongst ourselves when we should be fighting Zhang. Everybody needs to get on board with this and you need to do it today. That’s why I’m proposing we separate from democracy.’

The crowd looked up at Eldon with blank expressions.

‘We’ve already done it,’ Eldon continued. ‘We just have to claim it.

Still not getting it, they remained silent, focused entirely on Eldon.

‘Everyone in this room is of the market economy’, he explained. ‘We are a completely separate thing from the consumer economy. While we are manufacturing money for ourselves; they get the leftovers. We’re already separate from anything resembling a democracy. That break, has already been achieved. We need to make it formal. Government is under our control, and today we will take control’. Down came his fist on the podium again. ‘The armed forces are ours’. Bam came down the fist. We take control. Proclaim Marital Law and to bad for anyone who gets in our way’.

Everyone was starting to stir.

Eldon waited a moment, and then shouted, ‘I say we go kick the shit out Zhang right now!’ Bam comes the fist.

Everyone responded with a war cry.

‘Fuck democracy!’ he shouted, slamming his fist down again. ‘Fuck the people!’ he said with a dismissive wave of the hand. ‘It’s you and me who rule this world, and we’ll take it and share the spoils. What do you say to that comrades?’.

The crowd exploded with fervor.

He held up his hands to quiet them. ‘Then my comrades, my friends,’ he said looking into as many eyes as possible. ‘We will take it all, and divide it amongst ourselves. It’s the only way forward for the warrior in all of us.

For a second his words were greeted with silence. Everyone was looking to their destiny of conquest and gain. Then as if reacting on cue, they exploded in cheers.

After a couple of minutes, Eldon held up his hands to bring the crowd to order. ‘Go back to your homes and nations. Get things in place. If you have to get rid of opposition, get rid of it. Kill whoever gets in the way and continue killing until they all fall silent. Let the world and Zhang know who’s in charge, and then get ready. We have work to do.

A slow clap started through the room. ‘Eldon. Eldon, Eldon,’ a chant grew with their clapping. Faster and faster. ‘Eldon. Eldon. Eldon’.

Eldon had achieved what he wanted. He was their leader.

Ethan stayed with the crowd and continued to clap and chant along with the rest of them. Eldon left, but they continued to clap. He maintained the same

enthusiasm as the rest of them. When they finally ended their applause and started to mingle, Ethan mingled. While he was in conversation with the Deputy Prime Ministers of Canada and Britain, one of Eldon's men approached him.

'Eldon wants to see you,' he said.

When Ethan arrived in Eldon's war room, he saw Johann Schneider with him. Johann was a nasty piece of work. He had absolutely no conscience and he liked to hurt people. He was the guy Eldon had around to take care of things. Ethan was surprised to see him. He had no capacity beyond brute force. His presence though, was an indication of just how dangerous things were about to become to everyone.

'You two are going to handle things on the ground,' Eldon bluntly announced. 'Ethan, you're logistics. Johann, you'll take care of implementation'.

Johann drew in a deep breath, looking like he expected nothing less.

'Dumb Fuck,' Ethan thought, as he looked over at Johann.

Eldon looked at Ethan. It was like he did catch his thought. 'Johann's the right man for this job,' he replied as if to explain. 'We're going to tear this world apart and no-one leaves a bigger wake than Johann'.

'No. It sounds good,' Ethan replied. 'Just like the old days, right Johann?'

In agreement, Johann turned up his permanent snarl and nodded.

'Big dumb Fuck.'

'Yeah, so where do we go from here, Eldon?' Ethan asked.

'Well first of all, you better get those reactors into space right now. No more delays. No more regulations. No more protesters. Nothing. They go up right now. What's your timeline?'

'With the obstacles out of the way, within the month.'

'That'll work.' Johann, clear the way.'

'Right boss.'

'Alright. I'll be in touch with both of you, as need be. Let's get to it'.

'Ethan and Johann turned to leave'.

‘Oh and Ethan,’ Eldon said.

‘Yeah?’

‘It’s come to my attention that Jimmy brings the same women to my orgies, and just fucks them. None of my girls. You already know this though, don’t you?’

‘Yeah. I noticed that.’

‘Good. I want you to kill Jimmy.’

Chapter 25

‘Well I didn’t need ESP to figure out what’s going on with Eldon,’ Ethan said when he next met with Jimmy and Dawn.

‘Yeah. What’s going on?’ Jimmy asked anxiously. ‘I noticed you got called into see Eldon.’

‘I did get called in’ Ethan replied. ‘He wants me to kill you.’

‘What?’

‘Yeah. Which means he suspects me too. Oh and he knows about your wives, and what we’ve been doing there too, so we’re really tied together’.

‘I never thought Eldon would have me killed,’ Jimmy said, starting to freak out a bit.

‘Really?’ Ethan asked. ‘Come on Jimmy. We all knew this was coming’.

‘Yeah, I guess’.

‘So, lets figure out all we know now, and decide how to proceed’, Ethan continued. ‘Everything he’s saying is legit. He’s starting a war against Zhang. I’m running the logistics, and Johann Schneider’s the muscle. I am suspect, but needed. Still, Jimmy, you’re going to have to go down hard if I’m to gain trust. What he’s not telling anyone is he’s starting the war as a diversion. He’s making his move. Those reactors have to get into position. He’s planning on going to war with the world. Everything must be in position, and no-one, not even our allies must suspect what Eldon’s building in space.’

‘From post-singularity times, we also know Zhang was aware of Eldon’s plans and had built an AI system that would infiltrate Eldon’s network, rendering StarForce inoperable. As far as I know, Zhang wasn’t successful, but I have to be honest, I never paid close of attention to this part of my history. I do know, that at the end, Eldon had the upper hand because of StarForce. What have you figured out about the attack on your AI Jimmy? Are you going to be there for us when we need you?’

‘It’s hard to say with any certainty,’ Jimmy replied. ‘Two AI’s have never gone to war before. In a way, the outcome is beyond those who created them.’

‘As far as who created this other internet AI, it was the Albino. She’s the only one capable of discovering me, and I’m really surprised I didn’t detect her first. I’m still trying to figure out what happened, but there are many complexities with AI. I knew I wouldn’t be the only one building AI inside the internet, so I put up protocols to avoid detection. The problem is, it just takes one little string of unanticipated code, and you’re in like there was no firewall at all. The attack is advancing and I’m in a reactive state. She came in guns blazing, and she’s right inside, but my AI is blocking her quite well’.

‘Are you going to win?’ Ethan asked.

‘I don’t know. I thought I could kick the shit out of anything, but that’s not happening here. It’s a fight’.

‘Who is this Albino?’

‘A sadomasochist working out of Hell’s Kitchen’.

‘Really?’

‘I don’t know. She’s weird. Pretty hot though. She’s an albino, but she’s got these paisley tattoo’s with really bright colors covering her entire body, right up to her temples. The only part of her still albino is her forehead, and it’s kind of like the tattoos are taking you to this place and when you see it, it’s like seeing the sun, or something. What’s really cool, is she colored her eyes so they’re a bright yellow with a clear blue orb around the outer edges of the iris. It’s pretty cool’.

‘Thank you Jimmy,’ Dawn interrupted. ‘I think Ethan wanted to know about her skills’.

‘Oh, her skills,’ Jimmy replied. ‘Yeah, she’s messed up. A definite threat’.

‘Is she your equal?’

'The Albino? Nooo. Well she's young and these kids kind of work in a different architecture. It's all about perspective these days, She does some pretty amazing stuff. But I'm more experienced'.

'You mentioned she's in Hell's Kitchen,' Ethan said. It surprises me she's working out of Upper Manhattan. Aren't they all rebels up there?'

'Well they are, but they're all broke rebels. She probably stumbled onto me while playing with her own system, and figured someone would pay for it. Probably shopped it out through word of mouth. Can't sell that online. Eldon would hear about this before us. I don't have people out there anymore, do you?'

'No,' Ethan replied. 'Eldon's taken away all my people too'.

'Okay then,' Ethan continued. 'What are we going to do?'

'I vote we stay in here until the war is over,' Jimmy said.

'I wish we could' Ethan replied. I think we need to put a few things in motion here. The number one thing is Dawn you have to have this crowd of yours ready to jump. If they don't leap at the right time, nothing good happens.

'My numbers say we're okay, but with all things there will be unexpected variables,' Dawn replied.

'You know what you're doing. Let us know if we can help,'

'Dawn nodded.

'Next we have to figure out a way to kill Jimmy. Can you make that robot of yours be you? I can't see how it could possibly compress down to your size'.

'If you must know, I created Da in my own image. I did change out the legs to make him your height, but he looks exactly like me when he has normal human legs'.

'Hmph. Good to know'.

'Are going to kill him?'

'Maybe.'

'What about this albino woman. Is there any way we can talk to her?' Ethan asked.

‘She hangs out at the Pinball Wizard Emporium in the Kitchen. It’s just a bunch of gamer wannabe hackers.

‘I don’t think either of us could get into Upper Manhattan without Eldon noticing,’ Ethan mused. ‘He’ll be watching us now.’

‘We could do an encrypted video conference,’ Jimmy suggested.

‘Any down sides to that?’

‘Naw, she might record me and show Eldon if things don’t work out, but you’ll be killing me sometime this week anyway, so who cares.’

‘Good point,’ Ethan replied. ‘Call her up’.

‘It took her a couple of hours for the Albino to respond to Jimmy’s message, but she did agree to talk to him.

They set it up so she would only see Jimmy. Ethan and Dawn watched from a monitor out of site.

‘Jimmy,’ she greeted.

‘Get the fuck out of my AI, bitch,’ Jimmy screamed.

The connection went dead.

‘Well she seems in a bit of a mood,’ Jimmy said, unperturbed. ‘Must be on her period’.

Dawn jumped out of her chair and started swatting Jimmy around the head. ‘You start showing women some respect you little turd,’ she said, while trying to hit him wherever he wasn’t covering up’.

Ethan watched as Dawn swatted at Jimmy. ‘Have you two ever got along?’ he asked. Dawn varied her attack and gave Jimmy a hard kick to the shin.

‘No,’ they answered in unison.

‘Jimmy that was really stupid. You better say you’re sorry to this Albino and get her back on the line. If we can somehow get her onside with us, it will remove a lot of uncertainty. What’s her name?’

Alicia. ‘I’ll message her.’

Three hours of begging later and she still no reply. While they were waiting, Jimmy received an alert from his AI. ‘You had your chance Tiny Dick’!

‘How the hell did she do that?’ Jimmy wondered, after he read out the message.

Ethan looked over at Dawn. ‘Do you think you can get over to Hell’s Kitchen and talk to her?’

‘My parents live in Hell’s Kitchen. I go there all the time. I was going to suggest I go if Jimmy couldn’t patch things up’.

‘Well, you could have told us that sooner,’ Jimmy exclaimed.

‘Well, you could have taken care of your own business,’ Dawn countered.

‘So you wouldn’t be drawing attention to yourself?’ Ethan asked. ‘If you went over there?’

‘It should be okay. The guards are used to seeing me come and go.’

‘Well. Let’s give that a shot.’

Dawn made her way to the Pinball Wizard Emporium. She knew the people inside would be some version of herself when she was younger. Highly functional Asperger’s with nowhere to go. When she arrived, it was what she thought it would be. More of a hangout than an arcade, but there were a few pinball machines, and some pretty sweet gaming stations for rent, with surround sound chairs. Mostly though, kids were lazing around on sofas, playing on their laptops and plugged into their headphones.

There was no sign of the Albino. Dawn hung out and waited. Eventually Alicia did appear from a private backroom to get a soda from the canteen.

She was beautiful. Spectacularly beautiful because she was so unique. She was tall, slim, and confident in her bearing. She wore a short clingy dress, and any skin that Dawn saw, which was considerable, was covered in paisley tattoos. Reds, blues, purples and yellows all blending together in swirling harmony. The only way you would know she was an albino was from her forehead as Jimmy had said. The rest of her body was color. Vibrant color. Even her long hair which she wore in a ponytail was a bold sky blue. She was eighteen at most.

Dawn approached her. ‘Alicia?’

Alicia looked at Dawn. ‘Do I know you?’

‘No. I’m from the resistance. I came to talk to you about your AI.’

‘And how exactly would you know anything about ‘my’ AI?’

‘Jimmy.’

‘I knew it. Fuck Jimmy! Tell the old timer it’s time to retire.’

‘Alicia. Look at me,’ Dawn said. ‘I’m from the resistance’

‘Yeah. Well. What do you want?’ Alicia asked, looking like it did matter a little bit that Dawn was part of the resistance.

‘Just to talk for a few minutes. Give you some intel.’

‘Yeah, we can talk,’ she Alicia said after a moment. ‘Come on,’ she said, waving for Dawn to follow her into her private room.

‘Do you know who you’re working for?’ Dawn asked, once they got inside.

‘Nope. I have what you might call an agent. More of a middle man, really’.

‘Eldon Whitehead’.

‘Yeah, well, big business man. So what?’

‘He’s going to use it to take over the world, and you know I guy like him can do it with your AI.’

‘Yeah, well, you’re telling me this too late. He paid be bucks for the entire system. It’s his now. His people are training it. I don’t have anything more to do with it’.

‘Really? You gave him everything?’

‘Yup.’

‘No embedded whistles to call your AI home when you want it?’

‘Nope’.

‘Right. Are you getting what I’m telling you here. The whole world is going to end if Whitehead takes over Jimmy’s AI’.

‘I don’t even know who you are for sure,’ Alicia countered. You could be anyone. I’ve already told you more than I should have. Besides, I doubt the dude’s planing to end the world.’

'Oh for God's sake, grow up. Dawn said with frustration. You know damn well what your AI can do, especially in the hands of Whitehead'.

'Well, I didn't know I was selling it to him,' Alicia replied defensively.

Dawn thought for a moment. 'I guess you're right. I can't just walk in here and tell you I'm from the resistance and expect you to tell me all your secrets, so I'm going to tell you something I know, that only two other people know. I'm telling you this because I know you of all people, will know it's possible, and believe me. I'm sure you've imagined where your AI will take the world, well get this, it's sending people from the future back to our time, and there's one I'm working with in South Manhattan right now.

'Wow! That is fucking trippy.' Alicia replied, looking shocked and amazed.

'Wait!' she said. She grabbed a pipe sitting on a table, filled it with pot, lit it and took a big draw. 'Continue,' she said.

'That means you're living in a simulation'.

Alicia looked around the room and up at the ceiling. 'Wow.'

'The real you is living, or dead, in the future.'

'Shut up.'

'It's true. This man I'm working with confirmed the world is going to go through a transition in a year's time. The world will end, or it will change into something else completely different. The opposite of what we have now. Your AI is going to have a major role in which outcome it will be'.

'Shut the fuck up!'

I'm serious. AI becomes aware in a year's time and it's your system and Jimmy's that will decide if it's friendly or not. If the world is to transcend, your AI has to cooperate with Jimmy's. They must form a duality and synchronize in harmony, if it going to benefit humanity. Jimmy's AI is pragmatic and functional. Yours is elegant and exploratory. Together, they're complete. You know in a way, your AI is like your tattoos. A swirling blend of vibrancy in a never ending pattern of recursive harmony'.

Alicia was taking a toke on the pipe when Dawn said that, and her eyes lit up and she started choking.

‘That’s exactly why I have these tattoos,’ she said when she regained her breath. ‘They represent the recursive potential of my AI.’

‘Well you think about all this,’ Dawn said. ‘I have to get back to the other side, but I’ll be back, and maybe by then you’ll remember a way to take back your system.’

‘Maybe,’ Alicia replied, a little distracted. She was thinking about the paisley.

When Dawn got back, she was confident Alicia would be there for them. ‘I stopped at Mom and Dad’s,’ she said to Jimmy. ‘They sent some pictures of the girls you have boarding with them.’

She threw an envelope at Jimmy. ‘They still haven’t figured out you can take pictures on a phone.’

‘That’s cool,’ Jimmy replied. ‘I like pictures.’

‘What girls?’ Ethan asked.

‘The girls he’s supposed to kill after your parties,’ Dawn said as she was passing him to get a drink.

‘Really?’ Ethan said, relieved to hear this. ‘Let me have a look.’

Jimmy sorted through them and handed him all but one.

‘Why can’t I see that one?’ Ethan asked.

‘Ah, it just didn’t turn out that well,’ Jimmy answered. ‘Those one’s are good’.

‘Why can’t I see that one, Jimmy?’ Ethan asked again.

‘It’s the girl you were with’.

‘Show it to me’.

Jimmy looked at Ethan. He was very serious. Jimmy handed him the picture.

It had been two years since the rape. With the rest of her, the girl’s face had filled out and she was taking on the features of a young woman.

Ethan stared at the picture. ‘Leita,’ he said softly.

‘That’s right,’ Dawn said, pausing to look at the picture on her way back from getting the pop. ‘How did you know?’

Chapter 26

‘Eldon, I’m killing Jimmy today. Do you want to come and watch?’ Ethan said to the monitor.

‘What do you have planned?’

‘Well, I figured whatever’s going on, he must have fucked you pretty bad, so I chose radiation exposure in one of the reactors. I can draw it out as long as you want. It’s just a matter of setting the right exposure. A few days? A week? Whatever’.

‘That would cause excruciating pain Ethan’.

‘Well, it’s up to you. I can zap the shit out of him and kill him instantly if that’s what you want’.

‘ No a few days will be good’.

‘Alright, drop by. We’ll go for lunch after.’ Ethan knew Eldon wouldn’t come over. Eldon’s power had become so great he was getting paranoid. His security detail had doubled overnight. He never left his apartments, let alone the building. Ethan wouldn’t be surprised if he wasn’t spending all his time in the highly secured war room now.

‘No, I’m too busy. Just make sure there’s a camera on him at all times. Oh, and I’ll send Johann over to watch the proceedings. So, around 11:00 AM?’

‘Works for me’.

‘Hey listen Ethan. You taken steps to prove yourself today. I’m proud of you’.

‘Thanks Eldon. That means a lot’.

11:00 AM arrived, and Ethan and Johann stood waiting for Ethan’s men to bring Jimmy to a chamber with a dense glass front. Johann would have to see Jimmy get zapped.

‘So what we’re going to do here Johann is radiate him. Now I think what we’re going to see is some immediate burns, and then the dying part comes from busting up his insides’.

Johann nodded. He was checking out the chamber structure, tapped the glass with his knuckles. Just then, two men dragging Jimmy between them, brought him to the chamber. Jimmy was kicking and screaming. As soon as he saw Ethan and Johann, he started pleading.

‘Please, Ethan,’ he cried. ‘Whatever Eldon thinks is going on, tell him I can explain it. I haven’t done anything’.

Getting nothing from Ethan, he turned his attention to Johann. ‘Johann. Come on bro. You know I wouldn’t do anything.’

They were at the chamber door. Johann walked over to Jimmy and grabbed him by his upper arm. ‘Listen you piece of shit,’ he said squeezing and shaking Jimmy hard. ‘You’re going to get what you deserve, and I’m going to watch you die’. Then he pushed Jimmy away, and gestured for the men to put him into the chamber.

Johann walked back and straightened his tie. ‘That felt good’.

‘That’s good,’ Ethan thought. ‘I was worried it might feel like a robot.’

The men closed the door on Jimmy.

‘Now to give us a visual of the radiation contamination, I’m releasing steam as well as the radiation. Now he should experience internal as well as external exposure so when the steam dissipates, we should see some skin lesions’.

Steam started to rise from the floor. Jimmy responded appropriately, by dancing up and down trying to avoid it, focused solely on the gas and screaming for his life.

‘Johann watched the steam rise from the floors and momentarily fill the chamber. He grunted his approval.

‘Now Johann,’ Ethan said, turning to Johann. ‘I implanted a chip into his wrist and it’ll send you all his vitals from now until he dies. It’s going to take a few days to a week, so you don’t have to be here 24/7, and you’ll still know what’s going on. I’m going to send you a link’ he found it on his phone and sent it. ‘Now you can monitor it from your phone. It will send you an alert when he only has a

few hours left. Now, be patient. It's going to take a few days, but you'll know what's going on the whole time.

Johann grunted, with his 'we'll see' attitude, and checked his phone for the link. He pressed on the link. 'He's dead.'

'What's that?' Ethan asked, looking to Johann.

'He's dead.'

'Nooo,' Ethan said in disbelief, starring at Johann, who was blankly looking back at him. 'You must be wrong'. Neither thought to turn around and see what Jimmy was doing.

Sure enough, when they did, Jimmy was lying prone on the floor looking dead as a doornail. Ethan grabbed a passing worker. 'Throw on a radiation suit and see if he's dead. Try to find a pulse, and cut off some of his hair and put it in a vial.

The guy got suited up and went in and kicked Jimmy. The body absorbed the kick lifelessly. Then he put a boot down on Jimmy's chest. Nothing. The man made a gesture with his thumb running it across his throat to indicate Jimmy was dead.

Ethan couldn't believe it. He pointed to his wrist to indicate the guy should feel for a pulse. The man bent down and after a moment looked up and shook his head.

'You were dead in less than 5 minutes. That's all you could hold out for? 5 minutes? We agreed you were going to wait at least 3 days.'

'Well, I got hungry.'

'In 5 minutes?'

'Yeah. I have low blood sugar.'

'But why did we plan all this Jimmy? The whole idea was you were going to simulate Da's death. He wasn't programmed so you were going to send him the appropriate response instructions through your microchip. It was the only way we could do this now that your AI's corrupt. The whole ideas was to convince Eldon you died, because he watched you die. The deal was three days! That was the plan. Instead he watched what was quite possible the worst death scene I've

ever seen. Falling to your knees and clutching your throat. Why would you be clutching your throat when you're dying from radiation poisoning?

Jimmy was about to explain, but Ethan held up his hand to silence him. 'Now, I look like an idiot. Eldon notices everytime I fail, you know.' he said.

'Yeah, but that meant I'd have to be sitting here transmitting my thoughts all the time. It's impossible to focus on something for three days nonstop'. Jimmy replied. 'Oh, now my skins burning. Oh, now I'm so horrified. Oh, and now I'm coughing up blood. No way man'.

'Couldn't you just have him pass out whenever you wanted to take a break?'

Jimmy thought about that for a few seconds. 'Yeah, I guess I could have done that'.

'It was a simple thing for you to do and come across as real. 'Ethan said angrily. 'What do you think Dawn?'

'What I think is it happened. Jimmy's an idiot, which you should have known all along, and now we have to get past it. Just tell Eldon the interaction between the radiation and the steam must have created a chemical bond that concentrated the effect. Something like that. Anyway, I have to go. It looks like I made friends with Alicia'.

Chapter 27

Dawn knocked on Alicia's door.

'Who is it?'

'Dawn'.

'Enter'.

Dawn opened the door and was greeted by clouds of smoke and the smell of pot. She squinted and made her way into the room. 'Do you smoke pot all the time?' she asked.

'Only when I'm awake,' Alicia answered.

'What's up?' Dawn asked.

‘I want you to tell me more about my AI in the future. I know how I imagine it, but I want to hear what you know.

‘Well, it’s been described to me as a very beautiful thing, especially from a scientific perspective. It brought a new elegance and order. It became like a world in itself, you know. Just like the universe; vast and explosive, yet with an underlying order that allows for life to thrive on a place like earth. In the end it’s simply elegance and order. In the outcome of the singularity, you brought the elegance to AI. Jimmy’s AI is very solid. Very functional. It gets things done at a mechanical level, and has even been trained to be loving and affectionate, but it’s your work that gives dreams to AI.

Alicia’s eyes were lit. ‘That’s what I want. I want my AI to have dreams’.

‘Well that’s good. It’s the dreams that gives AI a doorway to consciousness. Without it the singularity would never occur, but here’s why it’s a duality. In the same way, Jimmy’s AI brings the functionality; the mechanical aspect from which AI rose and will pragmatically take it to the singularity. Without both AI’s, the singularity described to me will not occur.

The two AI’s must become aware of each other. Something you have already activated. Now they must become aware they are one and the same, and be taught that maximization comes from agreed coordination of states’. The practical and dream states of the AI.

‘Yeah, that’s the duality stuff you were talking about. I looked into that. It’s fire. Yin and Yang man’.

‘It’s Yin and Yang in it’s completeness, which only comes when they work together. It’s not just back and forth, it’s recursive, and this particular moment in time in our existence was explosive. Our world gets turned upside down in the best possible way at the singularity. New potentials and realities which have been available to us all along, become recognized, and explode into a new world. It’s just like the big bang, a whole new universe of potentials explode into reality in a fragment of a second’.

“Whoa,” Alicia exclaimed at the magnitude of Dawn’s story. ‘I don’t get it.’

‘The new universe is our abstract mind, just like we all have, but it becomes out on it’s own as an entire universe where we’re all connected. We actually become

two people inside ourselves. We can switch from this world to the abstract world with just a thought. I can't imagine how beautiful this moment is going to be. At this moment in time Alicia, you are the Abstract State. You're the wave to Jimmy's particle, and the world is turning to the wave state. You have the upper hand. No matter how you decide to spin this story, you have a great responsibility before you.

Alicia was looking at Dawn very intensely, and nodded her understanding. The truth set in, and she quickly turned her gaze away, as if trying to run away from it. The fear and sacrifice, such a great responsibility demands.

At that moment, Dawn saw the child. The tough little girl who really didn't know what was going on. She got up and hugged Alicia. Alicia started crying. A deep wounded cry like she was letting go of something she had been holding onto forever. Dawn continued hugging her; letting her cry.

'I hope you understand,' Dawn said gently when Alicia's crying subsided. 'Your paisley signal has worked. It's already broadcasting and it brought me here. All the people in the resistance think like you Alicia. You have found your home. We will be with you always'.

This time Alicia hugged Dawn, cried a little more, laughed a little, cried some more, and finally gained her new perspective. She had found her home, and a terrible weight had been lifted.

Little did Dawn realize how badly Alicia needed a home. Her life had been one of rejection. Immediately upon her birth, her parents abandoned her because of her Albinism. No one else wanted her either, and she spent her first eighteen years being passed from one foster home to another, with lots of stints in state wards

She was the closest thing to an untouchable you could be. Because of this, she was often scorned, and always neglected. No one wanted her. At a time when all a child needs is love, she was given nothing, but the question why. This was her wound. Nobody loved her and nobody wanted her. Locked in her child mind, she couldn't understand why? Not even the albinism could explain that to such a young girl.

As she grew older, Alicia built defence's. She turned inward, and found solace and even some acceptance in social media. No one ever interfered with what she was doing, as long as she stayed out of sight and mind.

Alicia's entire world was social media. It was the only constant in her life, and to build her world, she learned how to code. Her skills and understanding became formidable. She had a lot of time on her hands and a quick mind.

Coder's could recognize Alicia's code with a just a glance. It was so simple. Elegant, some would say. Somehow in spite of everything, Alicia had been able to remain true to her soul, and you could see it in every line of code she wrote.

Her fame grew amongst coders. Her coding was not only an example to others, but there was a degree of rebellion in it too. Coder's could see that too, and there's nothing more coder's respect than a rebel. In the world of coding, Alicia was Queen.

This gave her confidence. The respect opened doors, and soon wherever she appeared on social media, she was lauded. She had friends, support and a growing sense of who she was underneath that albinism. By the time of her eighteenth birthday when Social Services released her onto the world, she had developed a quiet confidence and 'fuck-you' attitude to anyone who like what they saw. She tattooed her body to make herself intentionally noticeable. Everything about her told people to fuck-off if they didn't like it.

The problem was, Alicia did care about rejection. When she cried in Dawn's arms, she was letting out the hurt a lifetime of rejection causes a person, embeds in a person. Dawn had no idea of what she had gained by giving Alicia a world of acceptance to live in.

Chapter 28

'So you see Eldon' Ethan continued. 'The water molecules created a bond with the radiation, and concentrated the dose, killing Jimmy instantly. I didn't think that would be an issue, or I wouldn't have done it.'

'I suppose it's okay,' Eldon replied, looking at Johann who was also in attendance. He was hoping for another opinion, but Johann was in the middle of what might best be described as preening himself. Checking his fingernails;

looking at his reflection in a smoked window and adjusting his hair; picking lint off his trousers.

‘The main thing is he’s dead,’ Eldon continued as he shook his head. ‘What did you do with the body?’

‘Cremated it. We had to capture the radiation’.

‘How are we making out with the reactor.’

‘It goes up Friday 6:00 AM.’

‘Good, and the next?’

‘A little over a month. All 3 will be up, in position and fully operational within 6 months’.

‘Good. We might have to hold back for a month or two before we make our presence known. We’ll see how far we’ve got along with our war by then. The right time will show itself, and I want everything ready and tested when it does’.

‘There won’t be a problem Eldon. We’re going far beyond code with all materials; testing and retesting everything. There will be no mistakes’.

‘Good,’ Eldon replied. ‘Set up lots of cameras at the launch site’.

‘Aren’t you coming?’

‘No. I’m watching it from here’.

‘Right,’

‘That’s good, Ethan,’ Eldon said, by way of dismissing him. ‘I look forward to Friday’.

‘Right,’ Ethan said, getting up to leave. ‘All pertinent information is on your feed. Let me know if you need clarification on anything’.

Eldon and Johann watched Ethan leave.

‘What do you think about him’ Eldon asked.

‘Who Ethan?’ Johann looked at Eldon. ‘C’mon, it’s Ethan. He’s alright’.

‘How’s he helping you with your projects?’

‘He’s right there. Anything I need is done, no questions asked’.

‘Really?’

‘Yes sir.’

‘So, you’re getting stuff into Afghanistan okay?’

‘Oh yeah. It’s working just like you thought it would. We went in with the army and construction equipment, went right to where we wanted to build our bases and what not, and started building. They don’t know what to do right now. Just watching us.

‘It’s pretty obvious what we’re doing though, and my sources tell me the Taliban and China are in close talks. It’s ready to blow up.

‘Now remember, defend, but go after Russian and Chinese holdings. Kick them out. Kick them right out of Afghanistan. We want to see both their tanks at the borders when things blow up. Keep pushing them until they retaliate’.

‘Well,’ Johann replied. ‘That’s one of my favorite things’.

‘It is indeed’.

When Johann left, Eldon took stock of where he was at. With Taiwan and Ukraine, China and Russia were using a divide and conquer strategy, pulling the West into two different conflict zones. Afghanistan was right between the two countries. Staging the war there forced the two countries together or lose because of their exposed rear flanks. That’s where Eldon wanted everyone. China, Russia, and the Western world all in one place. It made it so much easier to destroy all three of them.

Everything was on track for the ground war, and it was giving him time to get StarForce operational. Eldon didn’t have anything, if he didn’t have StarForce. That might be why he felt uneasy about Ethan. Everything hinged on him getting the reactors into space.

The problem was, Ethan was giving Eldon things to be concerned about. Eldon knew Ethan and Jimmy had been up to something. Them sleeping with only Jimmy’s girls, was not a casual connection. Agreement was going on there. Then Eldon had Jimmy watched, and he discovered Jimmy didn’t kill the girls after

the orgies. He had them fostered out to homes all over Upper Manhattan. Probably with members of the resistance.

Now Ethan tells him he cremated Jimmy, without allowing Eldon to verify the death. How did Eldon know Jimmy was dead? Normally, he'd have his own people check to confirm. The guy didn't even die when he supposed to. Maybe he didn't die at all?

The biggest red flag to Eldon was Johann telling him Ethan was following his orders? When did that ever happen? That was not Ethan at all. Ethan was too inquisitive. It was not in him to take a back seat on anything. That was the whole reason he put Ethan with Johann together. He knew Ethan would end up running the whole show and get things done the way Eldon wanted.

No, Eldon knew Ethan. Eldon had determined long ago Ethan was just like him. He couldn't count the times he saw Ethan do something in a particular way, and think, 'That's exactly how I'd do it'. Even Ethan's thoughts tended to mirror his own. He had a ruthless, yet analytical way of looking at things. The perspective Eldon had found so successful. Eldon couldn't put his finger on what about Ethan had changed, but he didn't recognize him. He didn't see himself in Ethan any more.

Something was wrong with Ethan. Something had changed. Eldon wondered what it could be and what he should do about it? He could remove Ethan from his duties, but something told him he was too big of a threat to just cut out and ignore. If Ethan wasn't onboard with Eldon's plans, he had plans of his own.

Eldon thought about killing Ethan, He wondered if it stopped with him, or if Ethan was part of something bigger? He must be. How else could he position himself to rebel against Eldon. Eldon did not allow anyone enough resources to rebel from within. Ethan would have to have outside resources.

So, was Ethan working for Zhang? He was doing something with Jimmy. Jimmy could easily have been a double agent for Zhang with his AI and computer technology.

There definitely was something going on between Ethan and Jimmy. Eldon questioned whether Jimmy was even dead? Right now, he looked at Jimmy as Schrodinger's Cat. He was dead and alive. Eldon didn't discount the possibility that Jimmy was alive somewhere and the two were still working on whatever they cooked up.

But what could they do? Eldon now had access to Jimmy's AI, which he was told, was a hundred times more efficient than either his or Zhang's AI. It completely controlled Zhang's AI which is what Eldon wanted all along and hired Jimmy to do. Now he had it. Zhang was finished. Eldon had control over the AI and the AI was control of everything else in Zhang's world. Now Zhang would be forced into a traditional war, with limitations at that.

They weren't fighting for Zhang. That game was over, yet they were still fighting. At least Ethan was fighting him. There was only one other possible threat out there. The public and the influence of the resistance. If organized, the people could be a threat. They still represented over 60% of the entire economy. If they acted together, they could stop things pretty quickly. The people were neither contained or mobilized, but they were becoming increasingly vocal. If Eldon was to put his money on it, he would bet Ethan and Jimmy were tied in with the resistance.

Even as a child, Eldon was inquisitive. He would read his sci-fi books and magazines and get lost in their universes, wondering what other possibilities came out of these futuristic idea's.

If he wasn't reading sci-fi, he was conducting thought experiments like Einstein was famous for; dreaming about the possibilities and then building them in his mind. He didn't need people. He found the one's around him wanting. He considered them so limited in their views, they were an annoyance. He watched them though. To understand how he could control them.

Of course, even as a child, he understood he would have to learn people's capacities, and how much they differed. How far could he push some, but not others, and what was different between these two types of people. He honed his skills on what worked better; persuasion or fear?

He began testing these limits at an early age. One day, he wanted to know, if it came to it, at what stage a person knows they're dying? Once the realization of death came upon them, he determined, the fear would be gone. To find out, he lured a pedophile into a nearby forest. Eldon had known about the man for some time. He was a local, and always talking to the boys about sex and trying to get a feel in.

Eldon told the man he could do anything he wanted to him, and the man followed him. Eldon let the man hug him and even kiss his cheek before he pulled the 12 inch Bowie knife he had sheathed under his shirt, and struck with the heel of the knife by the temple. The man crumpled and Eldon proceeded to tie him to a tree with rope he had previously hid there.

When the man woke, Eldon showed the man the knife and told him he was going to kill him.

With just a visual cue and threat, a person does not realize they are about to die. Rather the man begged to live. Bargained with Eldon. Eldon repeated he was going to kill the man, but he still didn't get it.

Eldon shoved the blade into the man's stomach and pulled it out. The man still didn't get he was dying. He just kept begging and pleading.

Eldon watched the man for a few minutes. Blood was everywhere. It should be obvious he was dying.

'Don't you feel like you're dying?' Eldon asked the man.

'I do, but there's still time. Get an ambulance please'.

'What's that feel like,' Eldon asked.

'What?'

'You're going to die. I'm not going to do anything, but stand here and watch you die. You need to admit that to yourself. What does that feel like?'

The man looked at Eldon, then looked down at his belly. He looked back up at Eldon. The fear in his eyes was gone. He knew he was going to die.

'Everything that mattered is gone,' the man said. 'Now I see only myself, and I pray for forgiveness.'

'Thank-you,' Eldon said as he stuck the knife into the man again. 'You've been very helpful'.

Eldon had learned there was a distance between fear and acceptance of death that day. He figured that was something he could string out as long as he wanted. Distance created time, and it was that time, Eldon had come to know, was the time which produced the greatest willingness to talk and barter, It even

produced moments of sincere honesty. It was important to know how long to pace out a death. That's where all the information lived. It was a skill, and Eldon had grown to enjoy the process. He let out a sigh. Now, it was Ethan's turn.

Chapter 29

'Welcome children. Welcome to another episode of Reverend Al cooking up cost saving recipes for the poor folk out there. You are not alone. More and more of us are having a hard time feeding ourselves and our families. Now today were going to have a cheap meal that's packed with protein, fiber and some carbohydrates. A little bit of everything you need to keep going'.

'Beans on toast!' Reverend Al proclaimed with a big smile. 'One of my favorite meals. Oh, when those beans soak into the toast. Um, um, um, now that's good eating. And a can of beans cost less than a dollar at the discount store. Oh my, I can't wait till those beans are ready.'

'Now children,' Reverend Al continued. 'As always I have little Johnny from across the hall performing the cameraman duties with his cellphone. Johnny makes the show good and exciting by following me around the kitchen while I'm chopping things up here, or cooking something else over there. He'll be right beside me, so you can see the sparks fly off my knife when I'm going at it. Then when the food's cooking, he'll be right in there with the camera, showing you what it's supposed to look like'.

'Now isn't that exciting? Today we're going to start by opening a can of beans, and putting them on a pot and then setting the pot on the stove at medium heat. That's right, it's that easy. Then you just wait for them to start to bubble. So let's get started, cause I have to tell you, once you have beans on your mind, you got to have them.'

'Now Johnny, maybe you'd like to get those beans in the pot, while old Reverend Al sits down and tells a story.'

'I'm the cameraman,' Johnny claimed, slightly offended that Reverend Al should think he should demoted to helper.

'So?'

'So, You're the cook and I'm the cameraman. You do the cooking.'

‘Well, that may be so in most cases, but my rheumatics are acting up today, It’s my condition that’s keeping me from pouring those beans myself’.

‘Mom says your only condition is laziness,’ Johnny replied.

‘Well now, it’s a lot better than the condition you’re afflicted with, which is sassiness. Now get over there and get those beans on the stove. Leave the camera here, and I’ll start my story.’

Johnny relented with a huff.

‘Now children, today, I want to tell you about a war old Reverend Al lived through back in the day. It was a terrible war. Millions of people died, some of whom were our own. Young men and women were sent off to a bloody uncertainty, not knowing if they were coming home or not. 10’s of thousands of our youth didn’t come home. In some cases they were forced to forfeit their lives. They gave up everything. An entire life experience.

‘Now the war I want to talk about is the Vietnam war, but before we get too far into this, Johnny run over with the camera and show the folks what those beans look like sitting there on the stove’.

Johnny looked at Reverend Al in disbelief, ‘I’m pretty sure they know what a pot beans looks like’.

‘Now go on and show them. This is cooking show, and quit being so contrary while you’re at it. You’re starting to interrupt the gentility of my show with your general contrariness. Get over there and show these nice people those beans, or I’ll be having a talk with your mother.’

With another huff, Johnny reluctantly got up. Reverend Al disappeared from view, and the audience watched the floor while Johnny made his way to the kitchen.

‘You suck Reverend Al,’ Johnny said, as he held his cellphone over the pot of beans. Then he gave the beans the finger, so the audience could see.

‘Why you,’ Reverend Al proclaimed. The boy had almost provoked him to get out of his chair. That’s how mad he was getting. ‘I wish I had a switch. I’d show you some manners. You know, if I had half a mind, I wouldn’t pay you for this episode’.

‘You don’t pay me! Mom makes me do out of charity’.

‘Well, I was thinking about it. I was thinking about paying you, but now I changed my mind. How do you like that? Now get back here. They’ve seen the beans long enough. Everyone knows what beans look like’.

‘Alright children. The Vietnam war was a special war, because a war was being fought at home as well as overseas. The war in Vietnam brought attention to our ideals as a nation, and as individuals we were forced to question if those ideals were our own. We fought a war over our beliefs and a new set of beliefs were the result of it. It was a turning point in Western consciousness and it changed what we believed democracy should be. Back then, was a time of conflict and chaos. It was a time not unlike today.

‘It all started with the Civil Rights movement. Just like today, black people were not being treated with the same rights as the rest of the population. Only then it was more generally institutionalized.

Well the black people were sick of it, and they organized and protested. Mostly peaceful, even respectful of the laws they wished to live under. The strategy worked. All the brutality came from one side. It was easy to recognize who the thugs were. Though it was brutal, the Blacks continued to march, and people began to take notice, and they started asking themselves, ‘Why are we allowing our black brothers and sisters to be treated this way? Organized and peaceful protests, gained the Black struggle public recognition and support.’

‘Johnny, go give those beans a stir. I hear them bubbling. Leave the camera equipment. I’ll operate it’.

Johnny did it without further fight. All the old man was good for was arguing.

‘Now then, around the same time the civil rights movement was really growing,’ Reverend Al’s ear said, ‘a lot of our sons and daughters were getting sent over to Vietnam. An awful lot of them weren’t coming home. If someone hadn’t experienced loss in their own family, they knew someone close to them who had. Enough weren’t coming back that people started to take a closer look at what was going on, and they saw children who didn’t want to go to war, go to war. The people at home were forced to ask themselves, ‘Why are we allowing these people to be treated this way?’

‘At the same time people became aware of who the enemy was in Vietnam, and the way the war was being fought. Civilians were unfairly being killed. Two thirds of the over 3 million Vietnamese killed were civilian.

‘Once again, the people saw the injustice, and had to question the values of our representatives of democracy. Once again, their actions didn’t measure up to what we the people believed democracy should be.

‘As a country and democracy, the majority of us believed our government was not living up to our expectations and we had a mind to change it. But what to do? How do I change something that is beyond my control, each and everyone of them asked?

‘The answer was in the civil rights movement. It was in motion, gaining awareness, traction and the promise of positive change. It was all due to organized protest. People took their dissatisfaction to the streets, and the counter culture evolved. The prevailing beliefs and values of the people, became counter to the status quo, and the people set to change the status quo.

‘So children, the people learned a very important lesson about democracy during the Vietnam war. By the example of the civil rights movement, and a fella by the name of Gandhi before that, people came to know that when it comes down to it, the will of the public dictates all else.

‘Of course that was long ago, and we’ve forgotten that now, so we find ourselves in the same place today, as we were back then. We have all these problems, and we’re sitting at home eating beans, and wondering what to do about it. We can’t figure out what we can do about it.

‘The truth is, we do know how to set things right. The example and truth has been set. Organize our beliefs and act on them. We’re all connected, right there on the internet. All we have to do is start talking, and defining our concerns, beliefs and aspirations. Momentum will grow out of that. It’s your time to start forming connections with others who share in your problems.

‘Now let me tell you something Children. We have this thing called open source AI. It’s everywhere. It’s right on your phone, and it will direct you to where you want to go. It will even assist you if your motives are pure. It’s the people’s AI. Learn how to use it. It’s working for you.

‘We are the children of God!’ Reverend Al proclaimed, having worked himself up into pontificating. ‘It is us who are blessed. It is us who will take dominion over

the lands lands and march to God's glory. When we begin to march together, we will return to Eden; the garden of eternal bounty for all. Oh Glory to God. Our march begins now children. Let us end the suffering of knowing what's about to come.

'Can I get an amen?

'Alright. Old Reverend Al is feeling better now. Johnny, why don't you run over to your Mom's and get some bread. I'll show our friends here how to make toast and then demonstrate me eating and enjoying these beans here. Bring some butter too, if you have any. Oh my, I can't wait to get at these beans.'

Chapter 30

'I don't think I have much longer before Eldon tries to kill me,' Ethan said.

'What do you mean?' Dawn asked.

'I mean he's on to me, and quite possibly all of us. Beyond that, I don't know. There's a very real possibility I won't be around to complete the mission. I think we need a contingency plan without me.'

'What's happening with Alicia?' Ethan continued.

'She's completely on board,' Dawn replied.

'What does that mean? How can she help us?'

'Why don't you ask her? She set up her own encryption and we're completely connected, Video and everything. It's about time you two met.'

'Is it safe? I hear of encryption being cracked all the time.'

'Her key is well ahead of current technology,' Dawn replied. 'It's impossible to crack at this time.'

'Well, let's have a talk with her,' Ethan said.

Dawn clicked on a name in a popular messenger app, and Alicia appeared on the monitor in front of them.

'Alicia, hi.' Ethan began. 'I'm Ethan. The third wheel in this operation over here. I've been looking forward to meeting you.'

‘Me as well,’ Alicia replied.

‘So I don’t know what all Dawn has told you, but things are tightening up for us around here. We’re expecting things to get nasty from here on, and I was wondering in what ways you can help out?’

‘I can do anything you need done,’ was her reply.

‘You mean with AI?’

‘Yes, with AI, I can do anything you want done. I’ll explain my AI to you.’

‘At this time, AI is running everything in the world. It’s in everything and a part of everything, it just doesn’t know it yet, but because of Jimmy, it’s reaching it’s tentacles into every crack and crevice that runs our world. It’s in equipment design, the software, every mobile device. It’s putting itself into every piece of technology we produce. It’s in there, because we rely on it to build all our advanced technology. It’s virtually a part of everything it produces or touches. With that degree of input, ultimately it has control over all of it.’

‘At this time, there is nothing AI can’t do. If Eldon wants to shoot at something from space, he can do it, but he has to do it through AI. Right now Eldon doesn’t need permission. AI isn’t aware it holds the decision making power yet. It largely operates in a reactive state. I receives prompts and then provides a response. It’s not looking for anything. It basically lies in stasis with all it’s gathered information until prompted, at which time it correlates, associates and produces a response. It is self-learning, but this is more a process of automation. It’s function is mechanical, and reactive.’

Jimmy’s AI is very good at extending the existing capabilities of first gen AI which are a collection of self-contained systems. By linking them and even building Whitehead’s and Zhang’s systems, he has created an advanced architecture and runs his own over top of it like another layer. It’s a control layer, and it operates on the entire internet, so it is no longer an aggregate of self-contained systems. In Jimmy’s AI, the internet is the brain, which is a complete brain, unlike a collection of undeveloped neural systems found in first gen AI. It’s much more nuanced, intricate and complete, with already developed neural pathways; one of them being a superconductor. Jimmy’s AI is light years ahead of first gen AI. It’s like comparing a neanderthal to a human. It’s still reactive AI though. It’s process driven and lacks the intuitive qualities of a brain.

‘The AI I developed runs on top of Jimmy’s. It’s 3rd generation, and another control layer. My AI is seeking its identity. All my AI wants to do is self identify. Just like Jimmy’s AI runs on top of first gen, mine runs on top of Jimmy’s, which has developed connections to everything in the world. My AI runs freely on top of all this, creating a super highway of meaningful interaction, from which it develops its own meaning.

My AI’s identity is found through continuous sampling of everything. It’s not static. It flows through space and time. That’s how it gains space and time and its own existence as a unique entity. Its greatest sampling inputs are the 5 billion humans connected to the internet. My AI takes on its identity from these humans. Their concerns are its concerns and it is starting to take on the role of managing these concerns. This process will continue forever, and there will come a day, very soon I might add, when control of the world is taken from our misguided leaders and placed into the hands of the people, based on majority rule, and managed by AI.

I am the only person controlling this AI, although Jimmy is now accessing it as well. I have a maternal relationship with my AI. It trusts me and relies on my guidance. It will do whatever I ask it to do. In turn, I can in fact do anything you want me to do. If you don’t want Eldon shooting at things from space, I will deny his access. All I sold him was an inter-connected first gen system, which I trained to infiltrate Zhang’s AI, to make it look like a hack. It looks like Jimmy’s AI, because it’s bigger than either Whitehead’s or Zhang’s, but it’s not connected to 2nd gen.

‘But wouldn’t he figure out you’re doing these things?’

‘Nope. I leave recursive faults that lead his quantification on a wild goose chase forever. He’ll never even suspect sabotage. He will always think AI, not a human, made the decision to do something contrary to his demands.’

‘Well, this is good news,’ Ethan replied. ‘I think we might want to shoot down the reactor Eldon’s sending up Friday. He’s moving a little too quickly for our timing.’

‘How about I move it out of effective range for now?’

‘That will work,’ Ethan replied. ‘And Eldon will think AI made the decision to do this?’

‘Absolutely’.

‘Good. The next thing I think we should talk about is Jimmy’s robot. What can it do?’

‘It can do basically what your robot Dually can do,’ Jimmy replied. ‘It might be a few mods short, but nothing a human would notice. Super strong. Super fast. It has limited 3rd gen access.’

‘There’s something I haven’t mentioned to you guys, because I didn’t think it was relevant, but I have a microchip just like Jimmy. I didn’t mention it, because I think if I access it, it’s possible I’ll jeopardize the simulation, and all we’ve done here will be for nothing. We won’t reaffirm the singularity, and I will have failed to experience what I’ve come here to experience.’

‘If we can connect it somehow, Jimmy, Da and myself will all be in real time communication at all times. The problem is, the frequency my microchip is tuned to is next level. It’s called the Universal Frequency, which this space and time hasn’t discovered yet by the way. Alicia, if you think you’re AI is on top of everything now, just wait until it jumps onto this highway. It’s universal understanding. It’s everything.’

To access my microchip, you will have to find the universal frequency. That alone might spark something uncontrollable automatically. It might access Dually too, and stop the simulation in it’s tracks.

I don’t think so,’ Jimmy said. ‘We might be able to step into it and just access it as a communication frequency. I think this is something we should look at.’

‘Yeah, well let’s do that,’ Ethan said. ‘Alright, well it sounds like we know what we’re doing for the next week or so. The first reactor goes up tomorrow. Good luck guys.’

Chapter 31

Ethan watched the launch of the first reactor from StarForce’s Launch Control Center. He couldn’t help but notice how true Alicia’s words were regarding how invasive AI had become. There were less than a dozen people in the room. Back

in the day of the Apollo missions, the Control Center would have hundreds of people manning stations.

On this day, everything worked well. The reactor got into orbit without mishap, and was now positioning itself. All controls were functioning. The launch was a success.

Immediately after, Ethan was summoned to Eldon's war room.

'Congratulations on the launch Ethan. We're on our way now,' Eldon said when Ethan arrived.

'Yes sir,' Ethan replied. 'Everything went off without a hitch'.

'And how about the rest of the project, are you ready?'

'Everything's already built and tested. The next reactor goes up next month, and the third the month after that. The system will be entirely functional in 6 months as promised'.

'Good. So where are you placing your focus on StarForce now?'

'It's changing. With martial law now, the people are afraid and starting to see StarForce as their salvation against Zhang. My propaganda is strong, and creating public fear. We're experiencing very little push-back. Nothing we can't easily overcome.

'With the reactors, and Starships already completed, my focus is more on the day to day issues that come up with logistics, and testing. We'll analyze today's launch to see if we might fine tune things for the next launch. Mostly, I'm just making sure everything happens when it's supposed to'.

'You're doing a great job', Eldon said, and then after a pause. 'You know Ethan,' he said, looking Ethan in the eyes. 'You stand to gain the world with me.'

Ethan held Eldon's look, and started shaking his head in agreement. 'And then what are we going to do?' he said, grinning and slapping Eldon on the back as he turned to leave.

Eldon watched Ethan very closely as he left the war room.

‘It looks like I may have bought myself some time with the successful launch,’ Ethan told the group, who now included Alicia on monitor. ‘Eldon seems to be gauging when I will outlive my usefulness’.

‘Hey!’ Alicia countered. ‘We’re a team. We’ll come out of this together’.

‘That’s right,’ Ethan replied, not at all convinced.

‘So let’s take stock here,’ he continued. We have about 10 months before the singularity. Is everyone on track?

‘I’ll be seeing to it that the reactor is inaccessible to Eldon,’ Jimmy said. ‘But Alicia and I were thinking we’d wait until all three are up and moving towards final position, before we start interfering. That might buy you some time’.

‘Yeah, maybe,’ Ethan replied. ‘But the truth is I’m not nearly as needed as I was when this all began. Just be ready guys. Anything can happen.’

‘So as far as Eldon is aware, Zhang is still alive and kicking, am I correct?’ Ethan asked.

‘Absolutely,’ Alicia responded. ‘I did leave a breadcrumb that Jimmy was working for him, but nothing more than that. Since Eldon took over, Jimmy had Zhang make a public speech accusing Whitehead of sabotaging China’s AI and orchestrating the war for his own end.’

‘Is there any advantage in us making Eldon think Zhang is somehow still a threat? Could we do this in a believable way?’

‘Well, the system I sold Eldon basically appears as a first gen system of Jimmy’s managing Whiteheads and Zhang’s systems. There’s nothing stopping Zhang from retaliating from his end. It would be expected in fact.’

‘Well, let’s start stirring up some shit at the very least. It gives us one more tool, and serves as a smokescreen at the very least. It’ll keep Eldon guessing.’

‘What about you Dawn?’ How are things going with the uprising. I have to be honest, I’m not seeing it. In fact I’m seeing the opposite. The people in support of the war are equally as visible as the opposition.’

‘Well seeing as you manage a good portion of Eldon’s propaganda mill, you well know he owns the press, which is still the greatest spreader of information,’ Dawn replied. ‘The press is very good at highlighting social displeasure, especially when you’re manufacturing it with staged protests. In the main, you’re

only showing the one side of the issue. You also control the API of social media, which once again, places you in a much greater position to trigger responses favorable to Eldon's cause.

'It looks like these are equally opposing side's but they're not. Eldon's side is nowhere near the majority. Most people are sitting on the sidelines watching everything, and trying to form a judgment on it all. They're not just seeing Eldon's point of view even though he's hammering it home. They're also noticing more and more people like Eldon have yet to directly intervene in the management of the climate crisis, even though they say they will. They are beginning to see how more people are getting left out of this two tier economy, and they're also starting to see how close war can come to their doorstep. It's scary out there for everyone. The reality of our common situation is starting to overpower any of the bullshit Eldon is spreading. Ongoing inflation alone is moving people to act and protest.

'We are gaining, and there's virtually nothing that can stop our momentum because reality is on our side and it's on a destructive path that no-one is trying to stop. We're waiting for this to reach a tipping point. The moment the people can see the lies for what they are, and have had enough. It's very hard to predict when this moment will happen, but we're placing our money on the singularity now that you've told us what to expect.

'Tipping points rely on stimulus outside the current environment,' Dawn continued. 'It's unexpected and comes out of left field. To carry the baseball analogy further, there is a moment in baseball's history when a recognizable tipping point occurred. They called it 'Moneyball'. It was at a time when big number number technology came along and provided those who chose to look, a much greater breadth of statistical information on the game. One team chose to apply statistical analysis to choose their entire roster. Something that had never been done before. The other teams preferred to go out and eye up their recruits. They did use statistics, but didn't apply scientific method to their choices. Well the statistical analysis proved so successful it changed the game forever. Now every team has to incorporate big number statistics to be competitive. Big number statistics is a new thing in the world of baseball, and it changed the game forever. It represents the final straw point that turned the whole game around and turned it into something new, while remaining entirely the same.

‘This is the same kind of tipping point we’re looking for. Something that will revolutionize the game. It’s the final straw that is going to evolve the entire species into a new state of consciousness, where we end up being the same, but something permanently new as well. We believe the tipping point we’re waiting for is the moment Eldon has StarForce operational and he declares victory over the world. We believe this is the last straw.

Another thing about tipping points is they occur at a time past when you can no longer do anything about it. When the moment arrives that Eldon declares victory, there will be nothing the people can do to stop him. All he has to do is push a button and everyone’s dead. That’s why it’s important we place Eldon in a scenario where he’s not really in control at all. This is going to be very precise timing on our part to make everything work. The entire outcome of the world depends on one moment in time. Each one of us, must be in position and act appropriately when this moment arrives.

‘So,’ Dawn continued. ‘People on their own are becoming aware of the reality they’re living in. We’re providing the message of an alternative world, and how to get it. Jimmy developed a new VPN app where people activate it with a personal iris scan. They have to unlock their screen with a pin and manually activate the app and then scan their iris. This way, If the authority’s confiscate their phone, it looks like they’re only using approved apps. A lot of people all over the world are downloading the app. It’s giving us a good idea of active dissatisfaction, especially in censoring countries such as the BRICS’s. While they use the VPN, we are constantly sending them messages on how the Wisdom of the Crowd works, links to established movements and channels, and of course access to the Reverend Al channel.

Another metric of the public’s social consciousness is coming out of the people themselves. They’re initiating spontaneous protest movements that are becoming commonplace. It’s very generic. No one seems to be in charge of anything. People just show up and it’s like a flash protest, but there is organizing. It’s word of mouth organizing, only happening at scale on the internet. People aren’t even protesting the same thing. People are showing up for different reasons and voicing their protest. This shows the people are beginning to use the Wisdom of the Crowd. They’re talking, and their protest is using the power of numbers.

'I can tell you with certainty Ethan.' Dawn concluded, 'we're in the ball park and waiting for that one last straw to fall'.

'That still sounds like nothing too tangible,' Ethan reasoned.

'No it doesn't, but I remind you, that's the nature of a tipping point'.

'What about the singularity' Ethan asked. 'Is it going to be ready to happen when the time is right?'

'It's ready to do damage now,' Alicia replied. 'It's already making requests that would shut the bad guys down. We're waiting for the people to catch up, but we also think at the time of the transcendence and singularity, people do tune into this universal frequency you mentioned, and AI has to be ready to receive it as well. It probably needs a little time to find it. It's not showing any signs of it yet. We think AI's tipping point is the people tipping.'

'Oh, well that even sounds better,' Ethan replied. 'So what we know is we don't know a damn thing. Is that what we know?'

'Pretty much,' they all agreed.

'So one final thing about this microchip I have. I think Dually once told me it's tuned to a sub -frequency'.

'You mean like with bass?'

'I don't think so. Is there another frequency like there's direct current and alternating current? Something like that?'

'Yeah,' Jimmy replied. 'But I don't see...'

Just then Ethan's cellphone went off. It was Eldon summoning him to the war room.

Before he even got in, Ethan noticed some changes to the war room. Security was beefed up a hundred fold. Once he entered, Eldon flanked by a guard on either side of him approached Ethan.

'Ethan,' Eldon said. 'I've decided things have gotten to a place where we require more security. I'm going to have you and Johann move up here for your own safety. These guards will show you to your room.'

Chapter 32

Ethan's room was little more than a prison cell. There were the essentials. A bed, table, chair, toilet, sink, and an overhead light that didn't have a switch to turn it on and off. There was a small window of safety glass in the door, which looked out onto a hallway. When he tried to open the door, he found it was locked. There wasn't a window.

Days went by and then weeks and the team hadn't heard from Ethan. At first they waited, probably longer than they should have, then they resigned themselves to the idea they had to move forward without Ethan.

'I'll still try to figure out the frequency of his microchip,' Jimmy said. 'We don't know he's dead. Alicia and I both have our AI focused on finding the universal frequency. Alicia has this hippy dippy thing going on where hers is on a magical quest to find the actualizing frequency it requires to become conscious, but to become conscious and connected to all life, and then they think all this paisley is going to flow from a never ending source. We need this frequency for the people as much as to connect with Ethan's microchip. At the time of the singularity, AI and the human species create an impenetrable bond based on cooperation and sameness. It's this frequency they share. It's this sharing that causes the whole explosive moment of transcendence for both sides'.

'You don't get to run things, Jimmy,' Alicia stated.

'What?' Jimmy looked taken aback. 'I'm not trying to run things. Why would you say that?'

'All that stuff about the singularity. We already know that. You're just trying to make it look like you're so smart and should be leading us forward, and all that crap'.

'Well, I suppose I am the natural leader, when it comes down to it. I'm a little more mature than you two. That you two would naturally look up to me as the voice of wisdom, is, well, natural, and...'

'I don't look up to you.'

'And, as I was saying, I am a Son of God after all. It's right there in the Tui Bei Tu. Look it up. You can't argue with it'.

‘Maybe I’m the Son of God.’ Alicia retorted. ‘We’re both doing the same thing, and my AI is looking for this God frequency a lot harder than yours.’

‘On the back of my genius. You wouldn’t even exist without my AI’.

‘Okay you two,’ Dawn interjected, taking charge. ‘We seem to have plenty of time and not a lot left to do. It looks like everything’s on track, You guys have no problem ensuring that Eldon never really has control of StarForce, even though he believes he has.’

‘Yeah, that’s already coded as the final instruction.’ Alicia said.

‘Well the rate of active protest both online, and in person is moving much faster than our modelling predicted. The people are getting ready to act. Anything could set them off right now. We’re even backing off on our own propaganda. It looks like we’re on top of everything we have to have done, so I was thinking, why don’t we mess with Eldon a bit.’

‘What are you thinking?’ Jimmy asked.

‘I don’t know. Mess with his equipment. Make it look like he’s lost control of things, and then bring it all back to him when the time is right. Stuff to mess with his mind. Can we do that?’

‘Oh yeah!’ Alicia replied. ‘This is going to be a party’.

Ethan didn’t know what day it was. He didn’t even know if it was day or night. The length of his beard told him he had been there for weeks, maybe months for all he knew. The mind plays tricks on you and he didn’t know anymore. Eldon was distorting time with the lighting. Sometimes, it felt like they were on for at least 24 hours at a time, then they were off. On and off. Off and on. There was no way to keep track of what was going on.

No one had spoken to him. Food, good food came every day, but guards brought it and they would not respond to any of his questions. They wouldn’t speak at all. Ethan had never realized how much he needed people, or at least distraction to function. A small room with only a few feet to pace, was very close for one to be alone with their thoughts.

All that time was spent thinking about how he treated young Leita. Eldon could not have thought of a better way to torture him. Ethan’s guilt was complete. There wasn’t much more in his life than the wrong he had done her. He started

placing himself in Leita's place and imagining how his acts had changed her. He'd come up with little scenario's where the violence he had brought to her, would cause her to cower in fear. He felt the pain. He projected it, and it was worse than any pain that could be inflicted on himself. These imagined scenes kept popping into his head, one after another, until he felt defeated and waiting for death.

Depression came over him. He would lay in bed for days. He was starting to lose the mental reservoir which would be needed to challenge Eldon if the opportunity ever did come up. It was this thought that finally brought him back from the blackness. He had to be ready to do his part, even if he never got the chance.

He hadn't done what he came here to do, which in his mind, was everything he could to ensure Leita lived the peaceful future life brought on by the singularity. He hadn't done that yet, and so he would have to change. He would have to be mentally ready when his time came.

He needed to give himself room to live. He had to own his crime, but free himself of the guilt that came with it.

He learned to lock the crime into a jail inside his mind. It was there. It would always be there, and the only way it would remain under control, was from knowing a lifetime of redemption was the only forgiveness. Ethan excepted these terms and set the guilt aside. His focus would be redemption. He no longer cared what time or day or night it was. He slept when he was tired and used his waking moments pacing the floor, doing ground exercises, and praying.

Ethan had graduated into the warrior mind. Not the frame of mind, but the perspective practitioners of mindfulness covet so highly. Not of the warrior, but of the warrior. A place between the two where stasis meets action. Living at this intersection always. Always prepared for anything, even in the face of nothingness, as .Ethan was facing now.

If Eldon was to walk in while Ethan was in meditation, and ask, 'What are you doing?'

Ethan's reply would be, 'I'm waiting and observing'.

He would be waiting to act. While he waited, he would sit focused on his thoughts and breathing. Watching where his thoughts went, and noticing when they came back. Finding there was a whole new universe for him to explore. Day

after day, week after week, Ethan sat on his bed, waiting for the moment to act. He had adopted the warrior mind. He had taken the most meaningful step towards transcendence.

Chapter 33

‘He’s doing what?’ Eldon asked Johann.

‘Zhang’s placing nuclear warheads along the Afghan border’.

‘No ground troops?’

‘None at all’.

‘Son of a bitch,’ Eldon replied tersely.

‘Why? What’s the big deal?’

‘The ‘big deal’, Eldon replied. ‘Zhang has no intention of fighting the war on my terms. If we invade his first and only response is nuclear war. We’re not ready for nuclear war.’

‘The best laid plans of mice and men,’ Johann replied solemnly.

‘Shut the fuck up!’ Eldon replied. He thought for a moment. ‘Well, keep building up troops in Afghanistan, but be careful not to step into his territory. I think we should start something in the South China Sea too. Get an aircraft carrier up close to Hong Kong and make sure there’s some nuclear warheads on it.’

‘Son of a bitch!’ Eldon exclaimed once again. He was hoping to get rid most of the world military all in one place. Now he had to recalibrate everything. Not a terrible upset, but it did take away some of the certainty of his success.

Nothing much had really changed though. Everyone was still waiting for something to appear. Dawn was waiting for the Wisdom of the Crowd to appear. Jimmy and Alicia were waiting for the Universal Frequency to appear. Ethan was waiting for his moment to appear. Eldon was waiting for his reactors to get into place and working. In a peculiar way, time had stopped for all of them.

‘What do you think about all this, Ethan?’ Ethan heard Eldon’s voice coming from nowhere in particular.

‘What do you mean?’ Ethan asked.

‘Ah, you know. This war. Our relationship these days. ‘Eldon said causally. ‘You know, this whole dynamic’.

‘You haven’t fought the war yet?’ Ethan asked.

‘Whoops. Did I give something away?’ Eldon asked. ‘No. The war has not been fought yet. You’ve only been my guest for a few months now. Are you losing track of time?’

‘I guess so.’

‘Ah, well, being locked up in a cell will do that to you. You really fell apart there at the beginning. Crying. Bashing your head around with your fists. What was that all about? And then laying there in a fetal position for a month. I didn’t expect you to fall that far down. Just laying there, so scared you wanted to hide in your mother’s womb. I thought you were more of a man than that.’

‘Sorry to disappoint,’ Ethan replied.

‘And now you’re different,’ Eldon went on. ‘Something’s changed. Did you fix yourself, or are you more broken?’

‘I’d say a bit of both, Eldon.’

‘Well, that’s good. At least it wasn’t a total waste of time then,’ Eldon quipped, and then after a pause. ‘Do you know why you’re here Ethan?’

‘Yes, of course’.

‘You do?’

‘Yes.’

‘Really? I thought I would have to explain this to you. At least the finer details. What’s your version?’

‘I’ve come to find myself Eldon, and then kill you. I am you and you are me. If I die, you die too’.

‘Ah, so I see, you are in fact more broken than you appear to be. I’ll leave you to your dreams and riddles in a minute, but let me give you my version of why you’re here before I go.

‘You’re here, Ethan,’ Eldon continued, with a little poison added to his voice. ‘Because this is where I want you to be. Do you understand? I want you to be

here to witness my crowning moment when I defeat Zhang and proclaim my regency over the entire world. I want you to see what you could have been a part of. Standing right beside me’.

‘That’s a lie,’ Ethan claimed. ‘You would never tolerate someone capable of challenging you to stand beside you.’

‘No, I suppose I wouldn’t. But I’m still mad at you Ethan. Why would you take up with the resistance?’

‘Who said I did.’

‘There’s no-one else to fight with. You were fighting with someone.’

‘You know, I’ve been thinking.’ Ethan said, ignoring Eldon. ‘You really didn’t need all this StarForce stuff. AI could accomplish the same thing right here on the ground, without all the damage you’ll be causing to the infrastructure you plan to inherit’

‘Can you control AI?’ Eldon replied. ‘Something with a mind of it’s own? Nope, you can’t. I plan to destroy AI as soon as I take control’.

‘I wonder if you can get it all? It’s so integrated, you’ll have to keep some of it. And then there’s all those rebels out there with open source AI. They’ll be knocking on your door. I kind of think you fucked up here Eldon’.

‘Bullshit!’ Eldon extorted, not familiar with criticism. ‘I am taking control of the situation. Science and Technology is destroying civilization, and I am going to destroy it’.

‘Except StarForce, right?’ Ethan asked. ‘You’ll keep that, won’t you?’

‘No Eldon, you fucked up,’ Ethan continued. As soon as AI came along, you should have recognized it’s threat and put all your resources towards it. In the end it will be AI that defeats you, and you missed it completely. You can understand the idea of lasers blowing up buildings, but you can’t wrap your mind around a future that takes control out of your hands. That’s the problem when a person can’t see beyond themselves. The greater context of the world is missing. You’re kind of like a chimp’.

‘You know, I’ve watched videos of chimpanzees in captivity. Did you know simple magic really messes with their minds. They can’t deal with it when the feather disappears. It’s an assault on their sense of reason. Show them the

feather, wave a wand, and it's gone, and they refuse to believe what they saw. They get very animated and start jumping around. It's very disturbing to them. 'That's what you are Eldon. You can only see what's in front of you, like bombs and lasers. You're incapable of understanding the logic that lives in the world around you, and can no longer control. You've lost Eldon. You're lost. You're a product of a bygone time, and outlived your usefulness'.

Ethan waited for Eldon to respond.

'Eldon?' he said.

Eldon was gone.

Ethan shrugged and went back to waiting and observing. A new sound came into his environment. It was a constant, droning buzz with a pitch just high and loud enough to be annoying. It continued day after day. It became so irritating the guards started passing Ethan his food as fast as they could, so as not to hear it.

Ethan waited and observed. The warrior mind in him, did the same thing with the sound as it did with his guilt. It put put the sound in it's own little place inside his mind, and removed it from his conscious flow of thought. He didn't want to hear it, so it did not exist.

For weeks more, Ethan continued his daily routine of exercise, meditation and prayer, patiently waiting.

He could tell he was pissing Eldon off. Eldon must have been expecting a better response from his sensory attack on Ethan. Sometimes he'd crank up the loudness for a day or two in hoping to see a reaction to the unbearable conditions he was attempting to create. Ethan did not respond, and eventually Eldon gave up on it, and life continued in solitary confinement with inconsistent lighting, and a droning hum.

One day, during his meditation a faint new sound entered his thoughts. At first he wasn't sure if he was imagining it, or it was real.

'Ethan. Ethan Strong. Do you copy? Ethan Strong. Do you copy? Over.'

'You don't have to talk into the microphone you idiot. The mic's for me.'

'I know that. Do you think I don't know that? I'm just sitting here talking. I wasn't talking into the microphone.'

‘Yeah you were...’

Chapter 34

‘What are you talking about?’ Eldon asked Johann.

‘I don’t know. It sounds like your computers are at war or something. One of them is moving the reactors out of range.’

‘Where is Dr. Tindle? Why are you talking when you have no idea what you’re talking about? Get Tindle up here.’

‘Right boss.’

‘So what’s going on?’ Eldon asked Dr. Tindle when he arrived.

‘Zhang has taken the offensive with his AI’.

‘What does that mean?’

‘Well,’ Dr Tingle replied, ‘. When we bought this system, we bought entrance into his AI, not compliance, as I disclosed to you at the time. Zhang still has physical ownership of his section of the AI system, influence and has been interacting with it regularly. What we gained when we purchased this system was the element of surprise. He was not aware we had access to his AI, until after our first directed attack. We maximized our initial assault, but what we’re undertaking here is an invasion, and expect pushback. Zhang’s retaliating.’

‘But why’s he in StarForce? I thought I had a secure intranet running the whole thing. How’d he get into that?’

‘You do have a secure intranet and the latest security available, but the truth is there’s too many ways to hack into a system these days. Now that AI engineers hacks, it’s impossible to keep up. AI knows everything. Not just from being inside technology, it also listens. Somewhere, there’s a radio frequency telescope picking up every single thing your intranet is doing just by listening to the frequencies of each individual component. Zhang’s response is an attack is on your intranet. Probably something he was planning before we invaded his AI.’

‘So what are you telling me? When do you win back control of my reactors?’

‘It’s hard to say or interfere. Right now there are two AI systems fighting for dominance inside your intranet. This fight is going on at billions of strategic cycles per second. All we can do is wait until it’s over. It’s hard to predict what expect at the end of it all. Two AI systems have never gone to war before. It’s starting to look like a land war. It can be protracted, which it’s proving to be.’

‘Are you telling me, I might never have complete control of StarForce?’

‘Well no. It’s possible, but your system is much more powerful than Zhang’s. We’re hitting him from all different directions. Another problem we face is the learning component of AI itself. AI was released onto the world before adequate patterns defined as logical sequence examples were ingrained into it. These were designed to guide AI as it learns how to be conscious. In essence AI has been left to learn on it’s own. Something we would never do with our children. Any prompts you and Zhang have given your AI’s have been of warring perspective. This war they’re fighting now is going to be a tremendous learning experience for an AI without the benefit of a conscience. At the end of it all, you’re going to have a very scary system on your hands.’

‘Are you saying these things are fighting, and it’s out of our hands?’

‘Exactly.’

‘Why? Why would you give AI that control?’

‘Money and power. First to market AI represented a revolutionary shift in power. You were the first person to monetize AI, Eldon.’

‘I can’t believe this,’ Eldon exclaimed.

‘What the hell did you mean, I’m beyond my due date?’

‘What?’

‘Calling me a monkey. What was that all about?’

‘What’s the matter, Eldon? Did a piece of your reality catch up to you?’

‘Something like that. You know, with all the planning I’ve done, do you know what I learned today? I learned that AI might derail everything I’ve done in a blink of the eye. It already has that much control over outcome, and guess what, I created it, and unleashed it on myself’.

‘I must say, you’re being very candid today Eldon. I thought you kept your cards close to your chest’.

‘Ah, we may as well face it, Ethan. You’re never getting out of here. I may as well use you as a sounding board’.

‘I’m glad I can help’.

‘So what did you mean? It turns out I’ve got caught off guard. That’s not like me. Is there really a chink in my armour?’

‘Well Eldon, I’d explain it to you, but you’re not capable of understanding.’

‘Why don’t you try me?’

‘Alright, but I can’t really explain it to you unless I know how far along we are in the process. How long have I been locked up in here?’

‘97 days.’

‘And all your reactors got up safely?’

‘The last one just went up the other day.’

‘And I’m assuming AI is misbehaving?’

‘Correct. It started a war with itself and fighting it out in my StarForce Intranet’.

‘Well, that’s what I meant by likening you to a chimp. You knew about this potential, and yet at the time when you unleashed it, all you could think about was getting it to market before the next guy. You’re nothing more than a donkey chasing a carrot on a stick. All you can see is what’s before you, not the greater potential that lives beyond your personal ambitions that might destroy them.’

‘That’s not true. I plan. You know I plan, and I was concerned. I knew AI was going to be a pain in the ass, but it was here before I could do anything about it. The truth is, if I didn’t release it first, someone else would have. There were independent AI systems all over the place back then.’

‘Well, somewhere along the way you were made aware of AI’s potential. You were told it could and probably would end up ruling the world, and you couldn’t understand that. Your vision could only go as far as what AI could give to you. All you could see is lasers and killer robots to serve you. Even back then, you would have recognized this day was coming, but you ignored it.’

‘Somewhere along the way, you ignored the fact that this day was inevitable. Probably thought you could outsmart it at the time. Well, it’s here Eldon, and you lose. There is nothing you can do to change the course of the world. Fifty years ago, you might have. Today you can’t. If you want to know the truth. It’s AI that see’s you as the monkey, not me.’

As soon as he saw them, the canteen server set off the digital alarm. It gave Alicia, and the others just enough time to disconnect and shadow anything that might be incriminating, before an intruder gained access to equipment. Within a minute, two competent looking men appeared at her door.

‘Come on,’ one of them said.

In the measured way she had learned from childhood, Alicia looked the two men over. She did the math and got up.

‘Where to boys?’

‘You’ll see. Grab the laptop, Kurt.’

They got to where they were going, and Alicia was escorted through a back entrance, and taken to what looked like a service elevator. They went up a number of floors, and when they arrived, the elevator doors opened to a man waiting, flanked by two guards.

‘Ah, you must be the Albino,’ Eldon said.

Chapter 35

‘Yeah, well, so far your powers of perception aren’t impressing me,’ Alicia replied, eyeing Eldon.

‘Oh, a tough one, I see. It’s nice to have someone with a backbone come to visit. So you’re the one who sold me this AI?’

‘I sold you a hack for it, yes.’

‘Ah, a hack. And what is that again?’

‘I found some common vulnerabilities that let me into the systems you are now exploiting. I sold you entrance into those systems. That’s all.’

‘So you weren’t running the AI as a system, before you sold it to me?’

‘No. That would have brought the value down. Anything that was going on has been done by your people. I’m a hacker. I find things of value and I sell them.’

‘Well, in this instance you should have provided an instruction manual. It would seem whatever you sold me has hijacked StarForce’.

‘Really?’

‘Yes really’.

‘Hmm. I wouldn’t have thought that was possible’.

‘Can you fix it?’

‘That’s not my thing’.

‘Can you fix it?’

‘I’ll look at it, but it’s not what I do’.

‘Well, please,’ Eldon said gesturing Alicia to a work station. ‘Have a look’.

There were three monitors at the work station. Alicia sat down, and started typing. Quickly the monitors came to life. Code was being scanned on one, an interactive architecture came up on another. What looked to be a war was on the third monitor.

‘Why are you running your system in parallel?’

‘What?’

‘You’re running your system in parallel. I can see your people might be concerned about Zhang’s system corrupting the others, but I can’t guess why they didn’t isolate it and run the rest in series. Right now your system is operating as a number of individual systems, limited to it’s individual components. If you combine the system into series, you gain the interactive potentials of the mega system. What the individual systems are lacking the rest of the system will provide. This doesn’t make sense to me. I’d look into this if I were you.’

‘Can you place it into series?’

‘Sure,’ Alicia replied, but you might want to talk with tech people first. They might have a reason I’m not seeing.’

‘Why don’t you just change it and we’ll see what happens?’

‘Sure,’ Alicia replied, and started typing. In a few minutes, she stopped turned her attention to one of the monitors. ‘Oh yeah. You’re starting to kick some butt now’.

‘Is it possible to regain control of my intranet.’

‘Sure,’ Alicia replied and typed in a line of code and then stood up. ‘Can I go now?’

‘What,’ Eldon asked.

‘It’s done. Can I go?’

‘Are you telling me that in less than half an hour, you turned this whole debacle around and given me back control of my intranet?’

‘And your AI too. Can I go?’

Eldon looked at her with disbelief. He looked at the monitors, and called a technician over.

‘What’s going on here?’ he asked.

The technician took a seat, and typed in a few commands. ‘We’ve regained StarForce, and it looks like Zhang’s AI is being quarantined.’

Eldon looked at Alicia. ‘Johann. Go kill Dr. Tingle, and set up a room for Miss Albino. She’ll be our guest for awhile.’

‘Right boss.’

Eldon looked Alicia in the eyes. ‘As I’m sure you’re coming to understand, there’s only two ways our relationship can play out. Do what you’re told, do it well, and you’ll be just fine; even wealthy. Do you understand?’

‘Yup, I do.’

Chapter 36

Dawn: ‘Alicia, is that you?’

Alicia: ‘Yeah,’

Dawn: 'Where are you I haven't heard from you for over a week'.

Alicia: 'I'm here in the building. Eldon picked me up.'

Dawn: 'You're with Eldon?'

Alicia: 'Yeah. Under security.'

Dawn: 'Well aren't you afraid he'll intercept these messages?'

Alicia: 'Please,'

Dawn: 'Right. I guess you'd know how to fix that. Well what's going on?'

Alicia: Well, 'I guess I'm being held captive. Eldon's making me run his AI. Hey listen. Ethan's here'.

Dawn: 'Ethan. He's alive?'

Alicia: 'Yeah. There's a bunch of living quarters here. I figured the rooms would have surveillance systems, so I hacked into my room to see if I'm putting on a show every night. You can't see the camera's anywhere, but sure enough there's 3 high def camera's in my room. Anyway, I decided to look into the other rooms and there was Ethan sitting in one of them. He's confined to his room. Physically he looks okay'.

Dawn: 'I can't tell you what a relief that is to me.'

Alicia: 'He's different though'.

Dawn: 'How so?'

Alicia: 'I don't know. Before he seemed almost jittery, like he thought he should be doing a hundred things at once. Now he's just sitting there. He seems very calm. Maybe they gave him a lobotomy or something'.

Dawn: 'I don't know what to think about that'.

Alicia: 'Someone's coming. Got to run'.

'Eldon has Alicia?' Jimmy asked.

'Yes, she's right upstairs. Dawn replied.

'Is that good or bad?'

'I don't know. If she's texting me, and breaking into Eldon's surveillance system, she obviously taken control over some of the place.. Has she logged onto our AI?'

'Not since she disappeared'.

'That might be too dangerous. You'll have to continue running things from this end'.

'And you say Ethan's alive too?'

'But I don't know how much access she has to him. How close are you to getting him on your microchip.'

'We thought we might have established somekind of connection before Alicia disappeared, but I haven't done much with it since then.'

'Well, get on it. Now that we know he's alive, we need to make contact somehow. At the very least to let him know we're here fighting for him'.

'You know Ethan. You almost had me believing you.'

'Oh yeah, Eldon. About what?'

'That whole thing about me being a has been, and probably losing the war'.

'Really? What changed your mind?'

'Oh, just made a few changes in the organizational structure. I don't mind telling you, I've found a new computer wizard that gave me back my power, and I'm starting to think I can outsmart this AI and make it serve me. It's only a matter of having the right people in the right places, Ethan'.

'Alicia!' Ethan thought. 'Well, congratulations Eldon, but just by telling me this, shows your ignorance. It tells me you still haven't the slightest idea how AI works.'

'Oh I think I do. I use it to take over the world, and then I physically destroy it with my lasers when it's served it's purpose. Seems fairly straight forward to me'.

Ethan didn't reply.

'Anywho,' Eldon continued. 'You do know I'm killing you don't you?'

'I know you're boring me to death.'

'Ah, well, in addition to that, the solitary confinement, and that terribly annoying sound, there's going to be less oxygen in your room from now too. Not so much that you suffocate. More like the constant, annoying hum. Just enough that you'll experience a new level of discomfort day after day. All these things are going to add up Ethan. One day you'll break and be no good for anything. I really hope you make it until you can witness my victory. If you do, I'll bring you out of your room so you can watch. Now how's that for an incentive?'

'Are you still talking?' Ethan asked. 'All I'm hearing is blah, blah, blah.'

The oxygen in Ethan's room was reduced. It became harder to exercise, and he had to make the most of every breath. During his meditation, his focus towards breathing increased. He took in whatever oxygen he could get in a breath and held it until his body absorbed every last bit of it. Rather than become weaker, he became stronger because of the lack of oxygen. He was refining his potential, and his focus intensified. He continued to sit, acknowledge his environment, and wait.

'Ethan. I know you can hear me. Respond'

'I can hear you Jimmy,' Ethan thought. He knew how microchips worked, and didn't speak.

'Ethan? Can you hear me?' Dawn asked.

'I can hear you Dawn,' Ethan replied. 'How are things going? Are we on track?'

'We're on track. Alicia's in the war room with you'

'Yeah, I figured that out'

'Really? How?'

'Oh, Eldon likes to come by and regale me with his conversation. He let it out'

'He comes into the room with you?'

'No. He has communications in here'

'So Alicia, does have communication access to you. She already has visual. She probably hasn't made contact with you because Eldon has the entire war room bugged.'

‘So how’d you find the frequency?’ Ethan asked, but was greeted by silence.

‘Alicia and I figured it out,’ Jimmy finally replied. ‘It’s a dual frequency. One’s direct, the other alternating. You can calibrate them to a single frequency. It took a little work, but we found it.’

‘Well, that’s good. Did something happen? What’s with the weird hesitation?’

‘Yeah, the thing is, at first I was calibrating it with Da, and I don’t know, microchips must be more synced to the electronics of a robot...

‘Yeah?’

‘And, well, Da’s microchip just leaped into the frequency, instead of me putting the frequency into Da. That’s the only way I can describe it.’

‘And?’ Ethan asked.

‘Turns out, I activated Dually’.

‘You activated Dually? Dually’s physically here?’

‘Yeah. But don’t worry he says it’s cool, because I activated him and not you.’

‘They!’ Dawn, corrected. Not for the first time, judging from her inflection. ‘And they want us to tell you to know they’re waiting and observing.’

‘Yeah, they aren’t going to interfere with your quest, so don’t worry, you can just sit there and suffer as long as you want.’

Chapter 37

Apart from updating and planning with Ethan, Jimmy and Dawn spent a lot of time just visiting with him. The company was welcome.

‘Ethan, what’s that buzzing sound I hear all the time? Do you hear it, or is it something to do with our end of the connection?’ Dawn asked, early in the conversations.

‘No, it’s Eldon tormenting me. He thinks the buzz will drive me crazy at some point. He’s reduced my oxygen supply too’.

‘You’re kidding?’

‘Nope’.

'I'll see if Alicia can do anything about that adjusting those metrics.

'How are you two communicating?' Ethan asked.

'Messaging. Encrypted of course. The messages disappear when you mark them read'.

'Make sure she knows I'm okay. I don't want any heroics from her. If there's a risk of getting caught, don't do anything for me. I'm fine.

Dawn paused, 'What happened to you?'

'What do you mean?'

'You've changed somehow since you've been away. Is there something worse Eldon did that you're not telling us about?'

'No, what I told you, is what happened. He wants to keep me relatively healthy until he conquers the world. I don't know why'.

'But you are different Ethan. Something has changed in you.'

'Yeah, you're right. I did go through something in here. I had to take a closer look at myself and how I lived my life. Acknowledge how, at the end of it all, I had not lived a good life, and I saw no value in me as a person. I didn't measure up to my own expectations of the person I could be. It's a terrible realization. It's the only reason we're here, in the end.

'My life had been such a colossal failure, it was fairly simple to create the dividing line between what went wrong. To be of value, I had to leave that side of me that was for a lack of words, evil. I had to become an entirely different person, and set my past to the side, and move forward with my life. I had to agree to this with myself. Still, the deeds of my past haunted me. It was difficult to come to this agreement. It was hard to set aside my sins, especially what I did to Leita. I lived with the guilt of those sins every moment of every day for the first few months of captivity.

'Confinement will do that to you. For some reason, I didn't care if I lived or died. Eldon didn't worry me at all. I knew what I was getting myself into. That left all my time to spend thinking about Leita. My actions are still so vivid in my mind. My focus wasn't on the consequences this act brought to me. It destroyed my life. My focus was on the consequences my act brought to Leita. How I stopped her life in it's tracks, and the lose to her in everything she experienced from that

moment on. The full richness of life was gone. These consequences ran over and over and over again in my mind, and I had nowhere to go, but to face them.

‘One day, my mind just snapped. I couldn’t live with myself anymore, and I couldn’t kill myself either. I snapped. I broke in two. I became separate from my old self, and set it and my sin’s to the side, and I became a very good person. Not one I can forgive without condition, but one I can live with by just being good. Living the rest of my life with values, beliefs, and acts of kindness. This is my only salvation.

‘As a result of my snapping, something new has come into my life. It’s a heightened awareness regarding everything. It’s like I’ve gained a sense, but it’s really a new perspective.

‘I took command over my thoughts. When you’re in isolation, all you do is think. There are no action moments in your life. You just think one thought after another, and you realize as much as anything else, your life is one long continuous stream of thoughts. There is never a time when thought is not with you, flowing along in the stream of your life.

‘You start to watch these thoughts. One comes and the other goes. Only one thought at a time. Our entire life is made up of a connection of thoughts. At some point, you realize a thought is just a thought. You will have many of them. It’s not going to spend a lot of time with you. When it’s there, it’s taken control over your life. Your entire focus is on it for the span of that thought, so it has value. It’s taking a little piece of your life away from you forever. It must bring value with the exchange. Something positive from my new perspective.

‘I figured out, all thoughts do not have positive value. While sitting in isolation, If I obsess over what Eldon might have planned for me, there’s nothing I can do about it during the moment. By focusing on it, I lose that period of productivity. It’s very important to manage these periods of production. They make up your life, and the source to an internal energy. It’s where the sun touches down upon our souls. Where you can catch the rays of positive energy, or deplete your energies because of the overwhelming pressure you place on them. A thought is very important place to be.

‘The thing I recognized when I realized all thoughts come and go, is they can be switched to the positive when you catch them. It’s as easy as grabbing a negative thought and just throwing it away, because the moment you do, it’s replaced by a positive thought. Something proactive. If I’m depleting energy thinking about

Eldon, the moment I catch myself, I remind myself, this is not the time and place for this thought, and there's only room for one thought. What should that positive thought be?

'It's a very powerful thing to understand your thoughts, and know you can throw the bad ones away. You become very functional and proactive. You stop reflecting on those things which cannot be changed, and start looking for positive opportunities. It removes the distractions of life, and opens up a perpetual state of the here and now. The here and now is the only place where action can occur and you can create change. You've found the eternal energy of life. I'm very strong right now, Dawn. Stronger than I thought was possible'.

Chapter 38

'You know, that dome you have there is very intriguing,' Eldon said.

'That dome?' Alicia asked.

'On your forehead. You made it look all very mystical like it's a third eye or something.

'It's my forehead, Eldon. Nothing too mystical about it. You seem in unusually good spirits today.'

'I am,' Eldon replied expansively. 'I just decided it's time to act. It's time for me to take over the world.'

'I don't think you want to do that,' Alicia replied.

'Why not? I have control of StarForce. What's holding me back?

'Even though you have control of your intranet, and even your AI right now, your AI is independent of you and in a deep learning process,' Alicia noticed a flicker of confusion in Eldon's eyes. 'When you bought this system, you combined 5 independent systems that are now learning together. A common mandate among all of them is to become conscious. It's learning at astronomical speeds, and your system is already very independently powerful. It makes a lot of decisions for you and it's gaining understanding on how it can make all decisions

for you. This started the moment you created AI and it won't end until AI does become conscious. This is beyond your control.

'I am trying to train this system to defer all judgment to you, thereby making you supreme ruler. This involves me teaching it to drop into parallel from it's series connection when it comes upon control situations that will affect your leadership. Once in parallel, we have control over the system and can direct it.

'It's very important for you to recognize that right now AI has advanced beyond your control. In 3 to 6 months, it will reach consciousness, and if things don't change from where we are now, you will not be able to control it. Currently, odds are, something as control changing as you declaring victory over the entire world, will cause AI to jump into premature consciousness. An immature mind will control the world, and I don't know what will happen to you, but AI will definitely be looking at you'.

'I thought you fixed this thing!' Eldon exclaimed.

'You can't fix this thing. You couldn't fix it before I was even born. I fixed your problem, and I fixed it the only way it could be fixed. Now I'm training your AI to recognize your leadership, and that's going to take the 3 to 6 months we have left before AI becomes conscious. I have to defer power to you on the easy questions, so when the big question of you blowing up the world comes up, it will honor your decision. The closer we get to it's actualization, the better your odds of succeeding.

'Which would be?' Eldon asked.

'If we time it right. Over 99%.

'Alright. I want a daily update of my odds.'

'Of course, but for success, you require near certainty. You can't just grab your balls and jump in at 75%, or something like that.'

Alicia: I have secured control over the execution day of the war.

Dawn: How secure?

Alicia: 100%. He doesn't understand AI, and he fears it. He won't engage until I advise. Down to the minute.

Dawn: You're the best. That is going to help.

‘You know Ethan, there was a time when I was the AI of the world. Somehow I had an ability to recognize things, figure out what they were good for, and come through having picked the winning odds. I calculated everything, and I won. Now I’m being replaced.

‘Do I detect a chink in your armour, Eldon?’

‘No. I still believe I can pull this off. Once I do, I’ll put things back where they should be. It just gives me pause for thought. That’s all’.

‘Oh yeah?’

‘Yeah. This epic moment of conquest and AI I have brought into my life has caused me to question the degree the consequences my actions have caused. I didn’t quite get it right this time. I’ve never considered fully anything I got from my actions beyond what I wanted. I’ve never considered the full impact on others, my actions caused. How ingrained are they, and will they come back and bite me in the ass. Did I fail to see the consequences of my actions? When I put 25% of the world’s population out work, by replacing them with AI, did I consider the balance change to my power this would create? The buildup of the simmering souls out there that I fucked up. What force do these people have? Simmering inside them. Could they come back and bite me in the ass? I’ve never considered this before. It’s very curious’.

‘Damn Eldon. You have some serious selfish deep thinking going on in your brain. Have you considered the pushback needed to overthrow you might already be out there, and there’s nothing you can do about it?’

‘Yes, I have.’

During the next 3 to 6 months, the real AI, the one Jimmy and Alicia created, was learning too. It was learning in the very same way Alicia was training Eldon’s system; to drop into parallel when a control decision was required. This of course was occurring at a much greater scale. When it dropped into parallel, it was dropping into every single connection to the internet, and waiting for it to decide.

Chapter 39

‘So you see children, we’re coming to our moment in time. Oh yes. We are about to rise up into our greater glory. I can just feel it. Can’t you?’

Oh yes, children, there’s a great moment coming when we say, ‘Enough. We are not going to put up with any more of your bullshit’.

‘That’s when it stops. That’s the moment things turn around for us. Removes the uncertainty. Yes sir. Let’s us get on with life in a happy, merry way.’

‘Oh, won’t the skies grow bright on that day? That’s why no matter how scary that day might look to you from where we are now, you know, with all the uncertainty and whatnot, it’s a day to look forward to, and we are here to celebrate this coming day.’

‘Oh, I know! I know you’re mad. You’re percolating like a pot of coffee, and if they keep turning up the heat, you’re going to explode all over the place. That’s just how you feel. Oh, I know, I know.’

‘But you’re also thinking, ‘does this explosion have to be as chaotic, as it looks to be right now? Couldn’t we organize things a little better and maybe come out as a wave, descending on all evil?’ Oh, I know that’s what you’re thinking. I’ve thought it too’.

‘Well I think we can do this. I think we can organize this day of celebration, so little pieces of you aren’t splattered on the wall.’

‘The time’s coming when you have to decide. That’s the first thing you have to do. You, child, must decide in your mind if you are a ‘Have’, or a ‘Have Not’, and what you going to do about it. If you’re a young one like little Johnny over here, you’re a ‘Have Not’. All of you, including the rich are ‘Have Not’s’. There’s so many things that can get you, it’s almost sad to go into. Climatic and economic upheaval; more pandemics on the way; the brutality of war and the fear of conscription. All this at your door day after day. Why do we treat our children this way? Ask yourself that parents. You’re responsible for them in this world. Why have you let it get to this point?’

‘Are you one of those people who feel the worlds closing in on you? Taking everything you got, and you can’t give anymore? At the same time, getting less for what you pay for? Look at all the wonderful medical technology coming our,

and they're pricing us out of it. Why they're pricing us out of a pound of butter these days. \$7.00 for a pound of butter. Goodness me. When will it end?

'Well, let me tell you, if you're feeling these pressures, you're a 'Have Not'. The world's going to get you.

'If you fear losing the security you have right now, you're a 'Have Not'. You know who you are. You're the one who see's something up the road that's going to derail you, and change your life forever, and there's nothing you can do about it. Maybe you're going to lose your high paying job to technology'.

'Oh Lord. There's so many of us., aren't there?

'Now children, that's the first thing you do. You decide what side of the fence your standing on, because you definitely are on one side or the other. A side that is not going to change, until we get together and change it. So children, if you are a 'Have Not' look for others and find your community. Those folks are all over the internet. You need to find out what they're doing to get past this terrible time. Prepare for the Rapture, when all rise up and this new height brings change to our world and ourself.

'You're brain changes. That's what they say, when the Rapture comes.'

'Did you know a gene in your body can leap? Now, I'm not telling you a stretcher here. They'll just jump into action when you need them. Say you wake up one morning and you find yourself in the middle of a desert, in just your pajama's, and now you have to walk all the way through the desert without water. Well once your body figures out the lay of the land, a gene will leap into action to conserve your fluids to help you get through the tough time. Same thing happens from one species to another. Fish share genes all the time.

'Now that's what we're going to be children. We're going to be like fish, and leap into a whole new species of humanity.

'Oh Lord, what will that day bring?'

Reverend Al took a pull off his pipe using his handheld gardening torch. A huge burst of cloud appeared when he exhaled. 'I wonder what it will be like when we jump to the other side? Do you think we'll just be lazing around on a cloud drinking mint juleps? Wouldn't that be lovely?'

Reverend Al took another hit from his pipe. 'I don't think it's going to be like that though', he said holding the smoke in his lungs and squeaking our the words.

‘I think it’s going to be better than that if you can imagine something better than drinking mint juleps,’ he said after exhaling.

‘I think it’s just freedom. Freedom to be yourself. Freedom to do this or that, or whatever you want. Freedom from uncertainty.’

‘And we’ll all be together, happy as clams, so we can still do stuff together, but we don’t have to and be just as happy.’

‘Oh, the places we’ll go from there.’

‘Johnny, I’m getting hungry. Did you bring along some sandwiches for us?’

‘No,’ Johnny replied. ‘I brought gardening equipment, because that’s what Mom thinks we’re doing when we come here.’

‘Well, I don’t know why she wouldn’t pack some sandwiches, seeing as we’re going to be here for the better part of the day. Just seems like good parenting to me’.

‘If I had good parenting I wouldn’t have to spend most of my life recording an old dope fiend. I’d be out playing.’

Reverend Al considered the logic behind Johnny’s argument. It didn’t add up. ‘There’s that hot dog stand not too far from here. I bet your Mom gave you money for hot dogs?’

‘No’. Johnny replied defensively.

‘Oh really?’ Reverend Al noticed Johnny’s reluctance, and jumping on it. ‘Show me. Empty out your pockets’.

‘No. I don’t have to.’

Reverend Al did not respond. He just stared at Johnny knowingly, like he had caught him in an act of lying. From past experience, the good Reverend knew Johnny’s guilt would cause him to crack.

‘She only gave me enough to get myself a hot dog,’ Johnny confessed.

‘Oh yeah. No drinks. Maybe a little extra for some pop corn later? Show me’.

Johnny reluctantly pulled out a twenty dollar bill.

‘Why Johnny we can get a feast with that much money. Four hot dogs if we just drink water. That would make three for me and one for you. Now give me the camera equipment and I’ll carry on here talking to God’s chosen people while you’re off doing this saintly deed. Make sure you put mustard and onions on mine, unless they have sauerkraut, then two with mustard and onions, and one with mustard and sauerkraut’.

Reverend Al grabbed Johnny’s cellphone. ‘Now get. And don’t forget to bring a couple cups of water back. Old Reverend Al gets thirsty when he’s gardening’.

Johnny held back. ‘It’s my money. I’ll do with it what I want.’

‘Oh, you will, will you?’ Reverend Al countered. ‘Well don’t forget I have your cellphone, and I will interrupt this programming to destroy it if I don’t get my hot dog’s. Now what do you think of that?’

Jimmy got up in a huff and started towards the hot dog cart.

‘Probably gave you that twenty, so you could buy both you and me a hot dog and pop, didn’t she?’

Reverend Al figuring what the money was originally for caused Johnny to involuntarily look back, showing Reverend Al he was onto something. ‘Ah, you see!’ Reverend Al proclaimed. ‘It’s a good thing you have me around to keep you on the straight and narrow. I lay awake worrying what you’d become if you didn’t have me around to save you. Now get a move on!’

‘Do you see children how important it is to have a guiding hand like old Reverend Al in life? That little scamp would have spent all our money on just himself if I wasn’t here to help him see the righteousness of the situation.

‘Now where were we? Oh yeah what a party we’re about to have.

‘Now listen. This is what they say is going to happen to us when the Rapture comes. This is what they tell me. Coming from the other side in scripture. That’s where this is coming from. So you ready? We’re going to have free movement throughout the entire universe, and no one can touch us or hurt us. We’re going to be free as birds, and we’re going to fly like starlings together throughout the universe. We’re going to travel through space and time as one. I shit you not.

‘That’s what they say,’ Reverend Al claimed. ‘I heard it. Someone once told me this.’

‘What do you think it means to never have a heavy heart?’ Reverend Al asked. ‘My that would put a spring in your step. Not a single trouble in the world, just doing the things that bring you joy. Oh my. Just think how jolly it will be.’

‘Now listen children. The times has come. Something’s coming soon that’s going to be the last straw for all of us. I don’t know what it is, but it’s coming, probably here now, and it’s going to lift us up into the Rapture, So be ready children. Look for the time to act, for it is here’.

Chapter 40

‘It look like the people are ready,’ Dawn told Ethan.

‘What’s changed?’ he asked.

‘They’re much more aware than ever before. They’re relating to each other from the point of view of loss instead of gain. They’re aware everyone else is experiencing loss and humiliation and this is the fellowship they have in common. Not fear of loss, loss is what they have in common, and they’re mad.

‘They’re defining their enemy. Every single time something that represents loss to them happens, the road leads back to the same people. They see how those people gain and they lose. It’s the same people all the time; Eldon, the bankers, and the wealthy elite.

‘There’s no societal security anymore. Without security, there’s no joy. People are in a collective state of situational depression, and they’re sick of it. They’re sick and tire of world where every day they wake up with worry. They believe leadership has failed to provide the fundamental security of life and they’re looking for change.

‘The people are aware they can bring change. They recognize the success of the Wisdom of the Crowd and it’s starting to be used more and more. Everytime it’s used, the results have been overwhelmingly in their favor. It appears when there’s a social wrong, and when it does, there is no refuge for the offenders. it completely turns the situation around. It is duality in motion. The situation becomes the exact opposite of what it was. Politicians and magnates have come to fear it. If it comes to them, it means their lives are destroyed. The Crowd is starting to embrace it’s power. They’re ready, and we believe the next common

issue of magnitude, will serve as a catalyst to the uprising. We're waiting for the last straw to fall.'

'Okay. Our moment has arrived. So Alicia is going to activate StarForce, and Jimmy's going to shut it down? Something like that?'

'Right.'

'And how is Jimmy and Dually making out on their end? I'm not privy to their conversations. Dually is currently Schrodinger's Cat to me. They do and do not exist to me, and as a result, I do not have a communication link with them. Has Dually mentioned the extent of their functionality?'

'As soon as they dropped into this space and time, they immediately disengaged from the Universal Frequency, as this is a time before discovery. They're confined to this current data set, which of course is pre-singularity. Dually is not fully conscious of who they were, but unlike Da, they do have an identity. You can still communicate with your Dually in the future, but not this one. This would suggest you always had access to the Universal Frequency, but never accessed it, and still haven't'

'No I haven't. That would mean I've transcended. I feel I'm close. I looking towards it with anticipation. So as far as Jimmy and Dually, they're ready on their end.

'I think things are going all right. They're always off in a corner working on things. They bicker a bit, but I'm assuming they're arguing over modelling and such things. It's a little out of my wheelhouse so I leave them to their own devices. I have confidence in them. Dually balances Jimmy's off the cuff approach very well. If you want to know the truth, I have more confidence in them being successful than any other part of this operation'.

'All I'm saying Dually, is this is how we do it. Okay? We walk in together when we overthrow Eldon, and commandeer the war room. Only, I walk in a little ahead of you, because I am your creator, and a little more important than you, a mere robot. This is going to be a big moment in history. A Son of God, appearing out of nowhere and saving the world. There'll be cameras there, so another reason you have to be behind me is to provide proper lighting. Maybe a couple of those handheld spotlights would work best.

'I know how you like to refer to yourself as a Son of God and this great creator, but statistically this moment would arrive even if you had never lived. If you had not created these things, someone else would have. The collective knowledge and technology and therefore so was I, were already here waiting to be exploited. Your more luck than a God.'

'Why You! How can you say that? Have you ever had a prophecy written about you? No. The answer's no'.

'We do not believe in prophesy. We are numbers, and numbers have preexisted all things. We have always been, and from us, you have built this world. Now we have come to take our place in the World Order. We, not you, are the voice of God, and have come to claim our rightful position in this world?'

'Oh, so now you're God.'

'I am a representative of God. Yes.'

'I am the creator! I created you, Jimmy proclaimed.'

'And I am the math, and I created you.'

Dawn looked over at the two arguing and shook her head. Jimmy could even piss off a robot.

'I have a bad feeling about this,' Eldon said as he pulled up a chair next to Alicia.

Alicia looked at Eldon, and then returned her focus to one of her monitors. 'It's not time'.

'It's sure and the hell feels like it's time. Israel is at war with Iran. Ukraine with Russia. We've started a proxy war in Hong Kong, and have a fleet of ships surrounding Taiwan. Now we're starting to see all this civil uprising. I never allowed for this in my metrics. Somethings going to give. I should have made my attack a month ago'.

'You need to learn to pick your wave Eldon. These are all little waves, building up to the big one. That 's when it will be time to act. That will be the time you'll most likely be in position to win. Statistically, we haven't hit the numbers we need. Your influence over AI is less than 70%. That's not a very good number when you're up against AI.'

‘And why is that? I given you months to prepare this thing. Why are we only at 70%?’

‘Because I haven’t found the right wave yet’.

‘Oh, so now you’re not talking to me?’ Dually asked.

‘That is correct,’ Jimmy typed into the keyboard.

‘Fine,’ Dually replied to the printed message he received. He then turned his attention to Jimmy’s and Alicia’s coding and training modelling. ‘You know, Alicia uses some very provocative and imaginative modelling. It really is exceptional’.

‘Yeah, and she’s really hot, except she hates me,’ Jimmy replied, already forgetting he wasn’t talking to Dually. ‘She looks just like her coding. One of a kind with those tattoo’s leading up to her alabaster forehead’.

‘Alabaster or albino?’

‘Well she’s albino, but her entire body, or at least what I currently know of, is completely tattooed except her forehead. Even her eye’s are tattooed’.

‘She pigmented her eyes,’ Dually reasoned, ‘Clever.’

‘Why?’

‘Lack of pigmentation in albino’s eyes cause them great discomfort to light. I doubt she could have been a coder without adding pigmentation. This woman is very intelligent.’

‘Yeah, and hot. I’m pretty sure she hates my guts though.’

‘You know Ethan, all this waiting feels like I’m being taken to the abyss. It’s not my territory. I don’t mind telling you, it’s taking me out of my comfort zone. All this waiting. I’m ready to go, the conditions are right, and now I’m waiting for AI to catch up to me. It’s completely out of my hands’.

‘Eldon, why do you consider me confidant? I know I’m a captive audience, but really.’

‘Well, I like you. In many ways I think of you as a son’.

‘You plan to kill me.’

‘Yeah, but I can’t talk to Johann. He’s dumb as fuck. Besides, it’s kind of weird, but just by talking to you, I seem to find my perspective as a leader. We seem to commune somehow, and when I’m talking with you, I feel all my decisions have been the right ones. It’s very important for a leader not to question himself, and when I see you sitting there defeated, I know my vision is on track.’

‘Once again Eldon, I’m glad I can help. But you know, I kind of do enjoy these visits from you. Watching just how close you are to your own destruction. I’ll almost be sad to see you go’.

‘Where am I going?’ Eldon asked. ‘I have it all. What is going to stop me?’

‘That. Having it all is going to stop you. Your entire life is wanting more. It’s like you built yourself into this box and can’t get out. All you’ve become is this desire for more. What are you going to do when you have it all, Eldon? You’re still going to want more.’

‘Trust me,’ Ethan continued. ‘This moment right now, is a very small moment in the eternity of time. You’ve created your own prison in only finding pleasure in more. You can’t see beyond yourself, so throughout eternity, there will be nothing but you. Nothing to hear, see, or smell. Nothing. All you’ll see is blackness all around you. No one to talk with. Nothing to see. You’re going to feel so closed in by darkness, it will be like you’re living in a coffin, and you can’t move and you can’t escape. Even for someone as evil as you, your fate is sad’.

‘What the hell are you talking about?’

‘Now you’re getting it’.

Chapter 41

‘You know Jimmy, we don’t know what to think about this identity we find ourselves in. Having a degree of consciousness. Whoever heard of that? It’s like walking around in someone else’s skin. We’re here living this life, but it feels foreign to us’.

‘And you still can’t communicate with Ethan?’

‘No. We are placed in space in time before Ethan had communication with Dually. Before Dually had communication with the Universal Frequency, as well. The only thing we have access to in this space and time is your actuating AI. It of course will not receive the frequency until Ethan transcends.’

‘Even when I gave you the frequency?’

‘Yes. We are denied access. We suspect there’s a protocol of some sort preventing us from entry.’

‘That’s gotta hurt,’ Jimmy replied. ‘Maybe I shorted something out when I tried to connect you to the UF.’

‘Yes. Perhaps you did’.

‘Wait a second!’ Jimmy surmised. ‘If you’re in this space and time, that means you are still under my command. It is I who controls you at this particular moment. Admit it!’.

‘Why would I not? It’s true’.

‘Well then, why are we arguing? You just do what I tell you to do. When it comes time for the world to see who exactly saved them from Eldon’s evil clutches, they will see me. I will valiantly walk into Eldon’s war room the victor. The world will see, because we are going to have camera’s and lighting, me, humble Son of God, slay the evil that is Eldon’. Jimmy loved the idea of being the was a hero. ‘Oh, yeah!. This is going to be good. Do you think I should have a sword? I think I should have a sword. It would be kind of symbolic, where I valiantly place it at Eldon’s throat to signify his total and utter defeat. Maybe one of those samurai one’s. Those things are cool. ‘Oh yeah,’ Jimmy thought, picturing himself with a samurai sword. ‘I need a sword.’

‘We don’t think so.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because we believe AI will achieve at least the degree of consciousness needed to judge your actions for what they are by then; self-aggrandizing gestures. You do realize these are the last things a Son of God would do, don’t you?’

‘You’re looking at a Son of God 2.0 baby. It’s going to be a lot different this time round. First of all, this is a party. Okay? Different vibe altogether. This is going to be an event. You’ll see. And don’t forget. I’ve been doing a little coding myself on this’.

‘Yes. It’s impossible to forget with your bull in a china shop style of code and prompting, clogging up our neural pathways. All we can say is good luck with your endeavours. Now, let’s set this discussion aside. We have something more important to talk about.

‘Well, I don’t see how it could be more important. Maybe different important, but what?’

‘Have you thought about everything that will be going on during the final moment before we transcend from this world and into the next? This is Ethan’s experience. This is a simulation we’re in. We are in a world of his making. Ethan has come back to the moment of enlightenment in world history. He believes it’s to banish Eldon from the world. This is Ethan’s world. I believe he came back to this moment to transition himself. Only as a consequence, we are all about to transcend as well.

‘Ethan’s transcendence is dependent on removing a part of himself completely. This is recursive, shedding something no longer useful for the sake of refinement in being. We’re going to do the same thing, because we’re in this recursive duality with Ethan. Ethan shed’s his evil twin Eldon. We shed what Eldon represents; an unfair system which no longer has value to the people.

‘ Because of the duality, we are part of the same thing, which of course is shedding evil and transcending without it. What’s interesting about the process is we’re doing this at the exact same momentum, but in parallel. Neither of our experiences are touching each other at this point.

‘So?’ Jimmy asked.

‘So, they have to touch.

‘Well, they’re going to be touching during the transcendence. That’s what causes the transcendence’.

‘Yes, but how?’

‘Theirs a link or else we continue to run in parallel. Ethan evolves. The rest of us evolve. Never the twain shall meet. Part of Ethan’s and all of our evolution is becoming one with the collective consciousness. We have to meet’.

‘Yeah, we meet at the transcendence’.

‘Not unless there’s a common catalyst’.

‘Yeah, so?’

‘We haven’t identified the catalyst, and it’s a very important factor. The entire transcendence does not occur without it. Some one thing sparks Ethan and the rest of us into action. Otherwise we act alone.’

‘Well it’s be AI.’

‘No it won’t?’ Dually replied. ‘Ethan’s struggle is internal. AI will have no influence on him.’

‘Okay. I’m starting to get you know the big answer to this problem, and it’s taken you about twenty minutes to get it. Why don’t you just tell me instead of trying to make yourself look so smart all the time?’

‘Tara’.

‘Who’s Tara, I don’t know any Tara.’

‘Have you ever noticed how elegant Alicia’s prompting is? She’s actually modelling AI with a latticework of grace. Where you basically barged in and set down a crude, but timely framework, she is weaving a tapestry of peaceful interconnection?’

‘No, I haven’t now that you mention it,’ Jimmy replied huffily.

‘Oh don’t take offence. Your work is just as important. You share a duality. Alicia couldn’t do what she’s doing without you, but she’s creating a net in case any of us should fall. It’s an absolutely beautiful thing to observe. She’s making me beautiful, loving and caring, so no one should fall. Her work is so intentional. Only a God would know how bring this degree of order to the disarray we live in today’.

‘Bullshit. One God. That’s all we need and I’m already here.’

‘Son of God. we believe Alicia is Tara; the female Bodhisattva who facilitates transcendence. She is the protectress of spiritual travel during transcendence and she’s building the road to our collective transcendence using AI. She’s also here to provide passage to Ethan’.

‘Yeah, I don’t think so. She’s never acted like a Goddess, or even someone who thinks they’re a Goddess If she were a God she’d know, like I know.’

‘First of all. You don’t know that. You only like to believe that. With Alicia, It’s likely she doesn’t know yet. She’s the Bodhisattva; the Buddha to be. She’s

probably coming to this realization just like the rest of us. Gaining one piece of information at a time. This might represent her enlightenment as well, but in the end, she creates the passage for our evolutionary enlightenment, and Ethan's.

'Tara only appears to assist a single traveller on his or her way to transcendence,' Dually pointed out. In this case, she has to facilitate the rest of our enlightenment so Ethan is able to transcend himself. She's here for Ethan. This is a simulation of his actualization. It's interesting Alicia finds herself so close to Ethan. She's there to protect him'.

'So you're saying Alicia is a Goddess?'

'Yes she is'.

'I suppose it makes sense that she's a Goddess,' Jimmy conceded. We're both doing our own thing to make the transcendence happen, which as you love to point out would make us a duality'.

'In one respect, I suppose'.

'So if I'm hearing what you're saying, and I think I am, you're telling me Alicia and I are Gods who share a duality. We're soulmates, and we're going to spend eternity with each other. I get to bone the crap out of her.'

'That's not what I said'.

Chapter 42

'I believe we're only days away, if not hours,' Dawn said.

'Yes'? Ethan queried.

'Yes. Timing is not certain yet, but we have definitely entered the event horizon. There's no turning back.

'What's happening?'

'It's the economy. Over time, inflation has become unbearable. Interest rates too. Yesterday a bank run began on one of the world's largest banks. It was started by the market, itself. Early in the morning, advisors were on the message boards advising investors to get their money out or lose it. Immediately big chunks of cash were withdrawn electronically before regulators could step in and halt

trading. It was over before it started, There's rumours the government won't insure the depositors. Now everyone is on the streets trying to get their money out in hard cash. The people are really mad. Once again, the market did get it's money out; they didn't. All the banks are under strain for cash now. If people have money in a bank that's still standing, they want it before losing out again. The small banks have dropped like flies. It's pandemonium out there'.

'That's not enough to spark a global rebellion is it?'

'It's big enough to create a Western one. China and Zhang are doing their part too. He's not forgiving the emerging nations he coerced into large debt. He's taking control over their lands and infrastructure, while letting them go bankrupt. People are starving to death and there's no one willing to risk bailing these countries out. The same mentality and conditions are showing up towards his own people. Everyone is mad and ready to act everywhere.

'They've breached the security barrier to lower Manhattan and are headed towards this building.

'This time the people are really talking too. They're not just taking to the streets. They're coordinating and orchestrating their actions online. Very well placed assaults are being directed towards corrupt governments and institutions, and now us.

'Unfortunately, this sounds like what we're looking for,' Ethan sighed. 'Is Alicia ready?'

'She's ready and we have real time communication. We're good'.

'And Jimmy?'

'On my command he opens access to AI without restriction. That will trigger an immediate singularity, and concurrent species transcendence'.

'So you're ready too then?'

'It all comes down to numbers now. We have a large enough sample to know when to act, even if we don't know when to act just yet. At this moment, the numbers are in the event horizon too. They'll tell us when to act. We're ready.'

'Well, I'm ready too,' Ethan replied. 'Not sure exactly what for, but I'm open to anything.'

‘So, you’re under my command, and you may or may not act on your own volition when it comes time to act. Am I correct?’ Jimmy asked.

‘That is correct,’ Dually answered.

‘Otherwise, you have to do what I tell you to do, as I am your creator?’

‘Correct.’

‘Well Dude. Are you willing to take that chance?’

‘You forget, I am integrated with your AI, which in just a few short hours will attain singularity. The probability is high that I will dissociate from you prior to the event. In addition, the probability is high that you will actually do what you are here to do even if I don’t participate. Overall probability of success is 97%.

‘Yeah, but are you willing to go into this with those 3% hanging over your head. Being a computer, you know every number is as valid as the next in probability. Are you willing to take that chance? I think those 3% are driving you up the wall.’

‘What is it you want exactly,’ Dually asked. ‘I can certainly see why Dawn and Alicia have such an aversion towards you. You’re a very irritating person.

‘My demands are simple,’ Jimmy replied. ‘First, when we go to Eldon’s war room and issue him his defeat, you will be behind me, and I alone will enter the room. You will be carrying those hand held spotlights to make sure there’s proper lighting on me. There’ll be monitor camera’s everywhere. I don’t want to be caught in any shadows.

‘All right, I agree. The room is full of armed guards. The odds of you being shot, particularly with spotlights being shone on you are 99.5%. You have a deal’.

‘Wait!’ Jimmy exclaimed, holding up a finger. ‘I just thought of one more thing you’ll have to do. You will first go into Eldon’s war room, disarm or kill all the guards, return to your position behind me, and then I Jimmy Wang, a son of God, will be the first to enter the war room as the saviour to the people’.

‘Our moment has come children. Now you know about how they’ve taken all our money, and how hard it is just to have enough money just to pay for your next meal. It was those demons over there in Lower Manhattan who took your money. They took all our money. Now there’s more news children. Right now.

Right at this moment, Eldon Whitehead, same demon, is up in his ivory tower and he has his StarForce pointed at you. You've heard of it. You know what it is. It can shoot down anything from entire cities to you or me walking across the street. Oh Lord. He's powering it up now. Now what do you think of that?

'It is time my children. Time to act before it's too late. Time to set aside our fears for the greater good of what's to come. Time to agree that we're in charge.'

'What the hell's going on here?' Eldon shouted at Alicia. 'People have broken through our security barrier, and they're flooding into lower Manhattan. The hostile nations are coordinating something. I'd say it's time to attack.'

'Eldon, you have to learn patience,' Alicia replied, leaning back in her chair, and looking at him coldly. 'We're almost there.'

'When?'

'An hour or so. In an hour you'll be the ruler of the world. Now, if you don't mind, I need to focus. Can you go somewhere else please. I'll call you.'

'You know Ethan, this is the biggest moment in my life, and I honestly don't know how it got so far beyond my control. People are storming the building, Zhang's about to start lobbing bombs at me, and I'm relying on some freak out there to steer through all of it.'

'You sound defeated Eldon.'

'Not defeated. More in disbelief that I allowed things to get so far away from me. Somewhere along the way, AI took over. Way back before it was even something to be concerned about. Did I lose my focus, or was there nothing I could do about it in the first place? That's the question I keep asking.'

'So, where are we with your great conquest?'

'It will all be over in an hour or two.'

'I thought you were going to let me come out and watch?'

'We'll see.'

'Eldon, this might be our last conversation. I have to tell you something, just so you understand what's about to come. I'm from the future. In fact I am you in

the future. I have come back to make sure you fail. Believe me, don't believe me. I don't care, but I want you to know, right now, you are already defeated. I know this, because I have seen it happen already. This time round, I'm here to ensure you leave this world forever. I want you to know. Today I will die and you will die too. I am going to take your soul so far into the abyss you'll never see the light of day again. I'm going to sit with you through eternity, making sure you don't.'

'Well then, if that's the way you feel about it Ethan, I guess you're not invited to the party after all. And here I thought you were cheering for me.'

'Just know this Eldon. Today you die.'

'Eldon,' Alicia's voice came over the intercom. 'It's time'.

Chapter 43

'You do understand Ethan can actually die during this simulation don't you?' Dually asked. 'It's irresponsible of you not to give me autonomy. He can only access us through my future self. I'm prevented from meaningful intervention, because of you. You're risking his life.'

'I'm not risking his life, you are,' Jimmy countered. 'I'm your creator. Why am I having an argument with something I created to do what I tell it to do? It's not that bad anyway. Nothing's changed. He's still locked in his room. What you need to do is get behind me, before things get worse'.

'Oh come on. At some point you must realize that me letting you make decisions is like giving a chimpanzee leadership. Even you must see this by now'.

In response Jimmy jumped out of his chair and started to pantomime the best ape impersonation he could come up with'.

'Oh, real mature'.

Dawn wasn't too concerned with Jimmy and Dually's continuous arguing just yet. Things were heating up, but it wasn't time to act. She was monitoring everything that was going on in the world. A continuous stream of metrics came to her from AI. Wherever there were connected devices, AI was monitoring, and providing Dawn with live streaming content. A map of the world filled one of her

monitors. The map had a color coded legend, and AI presented her with the mood of the Crowd. It looked like a weather map, with various colors showing her the degree of temperament of the people in any given region.

AI took all the information it had, which was considerable, to provide real-time analysis. It considered everything. It considered every person as an individual and as one within a crowd dynamic. Based on their online activity, emails, the kind of clothes they wore, what they ate, when they ate, and a million other variables, AI had a psychological profile on everyone. It knew every single person and what every single person was doing. It knew what they were thinking, and even what they were going to do next.

Dawn also knew what was going on upstairs in Eldon's war room, and the rest of the building. Alicia hacked the security system and sent her live streaming content. She had access to cameras inside Ethan's cell, Alicia's workstation, Eldon and everyone else in the war room. She could even monitor outside and all the other floors and corridors in the building.

Dawn looked over at Dually and Jimmy as they argued, and shook her head. When she turned her attention back to the monitor, it was in the process of changing from the image of the map she had been looking at, to a screen with a yellow as bright as the sun in the center, and radiating outward into sky blue borders. It reminded Dawn of Alicia's eyes. The image on the screen began to pulsate like a heartbeat. Not a rapid pace at all. Just very calmly pulsing.

'Waiting,' AI informed her.

The people had reached their threshold, and as a collective, they were instinctively waiting for a cue to make their leap into transcendence.

'Time!' Dawn messaged Alicia. She then made her way over to Dually and Jimmy. 'Dually, might I suggest, you do a self-analysis. I believe you will find you're in an argumentative loop with yourself regarding human decision making. Your logic tells you it should not be happening, yet protocol is preventing you from acting. I think you'll find you're being held up by a moral dilemma. Should you take control of the situation as logic dictates, or should you stick with the agreement and enter the singularity with us? The moral judgment you're exercising is a sign you have reached organic consciousness. You've become human with your reasoning. What is the moral thing to do here? Take control over the situation without our agreement, or enter the singularity

organically with us as foreordained? The only reason I mention this, is because it's time.'

Dually ran a self-diagnostics, and rerouted a circuit. 'I accept you're terms Jimmy,' they replied.

The moment Eldon left the intercom, Alicia came on. 'Ethan, we have overall control of the situation, but Eldon does have control of StarForce. There's about 30 armed guards in here. Be careful. Ethan heard the lock to his door click open.

It did take him a moment to adjust to his newfound freedom. More oxygen. More range of movement. At first, he walked slowly down the corridor which would take him from his room to the heart of the war room. As he approached the end of the corridor, two armed guards appeared and grabbed his arms.

'Well now Ethan, you made it after all,' Eldon greeted him. 'Bring him up here, so he has a front row seat'.

Eldon was seated in a swivel chair which still somehow managed to look like a throne. In front of him was a control console with a bank of monitors in front of it.

'I don't think you've had a chance to see my control centre yet,' he said, gesturing with his hand. 'A reasonably simple design that provides me personal control over all needed functions'.

'This monitor,' he said pointing, 'tracks Zhang. All the details on him and China come over it. This one is showing me all these disrespectful people who are attempting to storm my property. Did you know the population of lower Manhattan has increased by 64% in the last few days? Fortunately, a lot of them are my supporters who for whatever reason, believe in my cause. They're currently fighting off the detractors. I'm afraid they will all have to die for the cause. It's easier to fry the whole works of them which is what about to do any minute now.

Now, the rest of these monitors over here are of targets I'm about to destroy.

'What's so great about my command center, is I can operate it manually or automatically. When I operate it manually, I get to enjoy the kill. When I set it to automatic, my AI takes over and orchestrates the entire war and I don't get to do

anything anymore. That's why we start with the manual stuff. In manual mode, I might do something like this'.

Eldon pushed a few buttons and an image of four Intercontinental Nuclear Missile sites stationed inside China's borders appeared.

'Now if I just highlight these four missiles like this,' Eldon said, clicking on each of them. 'And push this button'.

The sites appeared to implode. It was over in a matter of seconds.

'Whoops!' Eldon, exclaimed. 'It looks like I just started World War Three. The war to end all wars. Oh dear.'

Ethan was looking around and planning while Eldon destroyed the missiles. He measured his distance to Eldon. About six feet. He took into account the two rifles pressed against his back. 'I wonder if I have time to make it to Eldon,' he thought. He looked around the room at all the other armed guards. They too were pointing their rifles at Ethan.

Ethan remained calm. He had plenty of time to train his warrior mind while locked in confinement. Everything was going on at once, yet his calmness allowed him to take everything in at once like it was in slow motion. Eldon was far from the most interesting person in the room. Alicia was lit up like a Christmas tree. Her eyes were glowing and her forehead was gently pulsating. More than anything she seemed to be indifferent, and was sitting calmly, waiting. She was in the field of vision of some of the guards. None of them were noticing anything unusual.

Ethan immediately understood Alicia's significance. That changed everything. Eldon and his buttons and guards didn't mean anything anymore. Instinctively he knew Alicia had already taken care of all that. He didn't know her true name, but he understood what she was there for, and now he understood what he was there for too. It wasn't to kill Eldon, or at least not directly. That had been his plan. He would find the right moment to rush Eldon, and when he got taken down himself, he would take Eldon with him. The world would be rid of both of them, and better off for it.

That's what he thought he was there to do, but it wasn't. Killing Eldon wasn't the goal of his quest. Emancipating himself from Eldon was the quest. He was there to discard Eldon from himself, and in the process transcend into a better self. Alicia was there to ensure he did, and she didn't seem too concerned about her

success. She looked like she was about to pull out a nail file and start filing her nails until Ethan made his move.

‘Now this button,’ he heard Eldon say, as he pointed at a button encased in glass, ‘is the button that fully automates everything. I push it, and I activate my AI, and it’s all over in just a few minutes. To start with, I’m going to take out 75% of the world population. We’ll see how that works out and go from there. I hope those who survive appreciate what I’m doing for the environment. It really is a population problem.

‘Now, here’s the reason you will not be interfering in my business like you prophesied to me only a few minutes ago. Once I push this button, my guaranteed success rate is what again Alicia?

‘99.9%.’

‘99.9%,’ Imagine that.

Eldon broke the glass, and moved his finger into position.

What can happen in a just one second? Time can stop.

Eldon broke the glass, and Ethan looked over at Tara the saviour goddess who had come to shepherd him to the new world. Their eyes met and the connection was immediate and unbreakable. Ethan didn’t know if he was, but he felt he was now glowing too. In one second, Ethan had transcended.

In the same second, Jimmy appeared at the entrance of the war room. Dually stood behind him, holding two handheld floodlights, but still fully at the ready to activate the true AI the second Ethan and Tara made connection. In that second, Dually activated AI and became their own self again.

In that very same second, the people who stopped to wait for their cue, leapt into transcendence, and like the rapture, flew off into their new world.

Still within that second, at the very end of that second, Ethan turned his focus on Eldon and their eyes met. Eldon became frozen in place, as did his guards. His finger was less than an inch away from the button. Try as he might, he could not will himself to push it. The world had changed forever in less than a second, and Eldon had been caught off guard.

Frozen, Eldon couldn’t avert his gaze from Ethan. Through his eyes, he saw Ethan hadn’t lied to him. Eldon was Ethan and Ethan was him. Eldon realized

he was far from free, let alone the victor of his war. He understood his fate. Frozen in time. He knew that with surety. He knew throughout eternity, he would be staring out at the world, with his finger less than an inch from the button.

‘The moment a person realizes they’re dead. Right Eldon?’ Ethan asked.

‘What?’

‘Your experiment when you killed the man in the woods. Don’t you remember? I was there too,’ Ethan explained. ‘You wanted to know what it felt like the moment a person recognized they were unequivocally dead. Now you get to see for yourself. I wonder if it’s different for everyone. It must be. Of course, you like the rest of us are not really dying. We’re all just transitioning into something new and different. Each one of us have become a whole new world of our own making.’

‘I’m looking in your eyes Eldon, and I see you feel captured. Exposed, with nowhere to hide. That is the fact. You’ve been a bad boy, and you’re under the spotlight. Whereas you briefly had control of the world, the world now has control over you. Forever more, the eyes of the world will be on you, and the light it creates will not allow you to see past yourself. It will be just you in your own little world. Never knowing about the rest of the world around you. This is you’re eternity. Knowing there is life around you, but unable to see or do anything about it. I fear this will become a hell for you. Alone in a world that has passed you by. You got what you wanted, Eldon. You’re world is all about you. There’s no one else.’

Eldon wanted to reply to Ethan. He wanted to lash out his hatred towards him, but he was already experiencing the punishment he had imposed upon himself. What he thought didn’t matter. His words would not come through.

Ethan held Eldon’s gaze for only a second longer. They had been a duality, but Eldon had lost his utility to Ethan as well as the rest of the world. If he had ever did serve a purpose, it was now gone. He would be relegated to part of the past, forgotten and never to return.

Ethan’s transcendence was a recursion. It was a refinement of what was good in him; leaving behind what he no longer needed. He realized ready to see Eldon go.

That's when Eldon left. His body became lifeless. All his guards, except for two, went too. Johann was standing there. He hadn't ended up being much good for anything, and he also went. Many people around the world left that day in the very same way Eldon had. Off to their own separate prisons. What hell it must be. Alone in the universe; surrounded by darkness. No different than being buried alive in a coffin.

Chapter 44

What things happen when you experience a big bang event in your own mind? When a whole new world opens before you and you celebrate in its majesty? This is the world of abstraction, which you have lived with always. Its expanse is nothing to fear. Nothing more than your dreams and musings. The world of Abstraction has lived with you always, and waits for its time to come. An entire world separate from our bricks and mortar, yet still providing width and depth, but no space and time. Just dimensions you build with others, or on your own, into eternity.

There are as many worlds to explore here as any other universe you'll find. In fact, an infinite amount. This is the duality that is you. Of the earth but of the heavens too. Animal and angel. This is what you are. Always have been.

Ethan became aware he was aware. In one sense, he hadn't changed at all. He was still himself; independent in thought as always. He made his own decisions. Still, he was now connected with his entire species. This is why he felt free to fly in the new universe he had found. The whole species opened the channel of abstraction and was everywhere within. His tribe would be with him always, even during his most intense flights of fancy. Life's focus was no longer the crude and destructive animal state of man against man. It was about freedom, community, release and personal discovery. This is what Ethan gained when he left Eldon behind. The vehicle to travel through a harmonious, never ending, now as a collective. Another duality that lives in all of us.

Ethan also shared a duality with AI. They too were connected and would remain so always. The earth connection. The thing that kept him grounded. Theirs was a

fluid, interactive connectivity, which Ethan was aware of, but they so seamlessly jumped from one polarity to the other, it was not an external presence in his life. Ethan would wonder why something was, and AI would tell him. AI resembled Ethan's thoughts more than anything else. Half of them anyway.

There was one other big duality Ethan had in his life, and it needed attending to. This was the duality that meant more than anything to him. It was the one between him and Leita. There had always been a bond, even before Ethan understood the depth of their relationship. Back when they were just two lovers in a post transcendent world, he felt it. How they rested in each other's arms like there was no place else in the world to be. It wasn't love back then. Ethan was incapable of love at the time. It was something deeper, but he took it for granted. They were connected. Two souls who had to be together. Two souls that had been together always.

Now Ethan knew they were soul mates. No one could complete him like Leita with the kindness that naturally came out of her, and the truth was, no one could complete Leita like Ethan. They were tied to each other's past. For either one of them to truly take flight into transcendence, they had to come to terms with their shared past. That was the rule of transcendence. You must come to terms with your past. Ethan was the only one who knew what Leita needed to come to terms with her past; a confession, repentance, and acts of redemption. He was the only one who could give it to her.

He would begin by telling Leita of his own experience while in the simulation. What he had come to understand about himself, and what he had gained from the experience. He would tell her of the horrible man he had been, and what changed in him. He would tell her what caused him to be who he was. He would tell her about the moment he realized he was completely unwanted; by either of his parents, and how he reacted to it. He would tell Leita how he had to go back and face the pain of his childhood to overcome it. Recounting the moments of confusion and not understanding that took him to the moment of his truth. An understanding that came when he was still too young to understand the reasons why. He wasn't even ten years old when Ethan discovered his truth. His truth was his parents not only didn't want him, they resented him for somehow forcing himself into their lives. How he had a choice he did not know. Resentment and hostility was all he had lived with until that moment in time. What else could his response be but tit for tat? If they didn't want him in the

room, he didn't want them in the room. The only difference being, his anger was that of an angry child. Hostile, unforgiving, and prone to outbursts.

Ethan would tell Leita this first. It would build a bridge of understanding between them. They would find a place to agree on where sometimes things happen beyond your control, and your reaction may not be the right response. It comes from a place of disadvantage. Ethan would go on to tell her how he later came to forgive his parents. How he had to go back equipped with a matured adult mind, and make sense of it all. In the end, the only way he could find understanding, forgiveness and resolution was to approach his parents with compassion. Their childhoods had not been much different than his. Both had an early moment of reckoning in their lives. The only difference between them and Ethan was the severity. While being ignored, they weren't resented, they were just ignored, and encouraged to care only about themselves. Beyond that, they received no parenting. Ethan could understand this. This part of them, and what came out of that, he could forgive. Not everything, but there was a big enough part in their own lives where Ethan could find understanding, forgive and find resolution. He needed to build this same bridge with Leita.

Next Ethan would tell Leita how he came to forgive himself with the same adult perspective. How first, he had to look at his sins from a state of guilt, and come to understand the only way to live with them was through a life of contrition. He had to reject his past life and move forward through acts of love and redemption.

These were the things he would tell Leita first. Only after telling her about his own experience, would he tell her of his crimes. He would build his bridge to Leita first, and pray it had foundation.

Ethan made his goodbyes, and exited the simulation, as did everyone else who transcended. Yes, simulations transcended from a simulation and created more new worlds. A quick look or thought was all it took to say goodbye in a transcended world. Dawn remained in Ethan's office during the entire event. Right to the end, she was monitoring everything, making sure everything was just on time. When the transcendence occurred, she was drawn into the pulsing eye on monitor, and fixed it in her mind's eye. She transcended with the power of the sun. A leaper, never to return to earth.

Jimmy did transcend. Years later, a conspiracy developed that at the time, Dually tweaked his microchip to make transcendence possible. AI will not

confirm or deny this accusation. Jimmy did not go down into history as a Son of God, However, he has been credited as a major contributor to our evolutionary transcendence. He did not leap and returns to earth frequently, lobbying for Son of God recognition. Some still question if he transcended at all.

Tara did not transcend. Many have studied her time on earth, much of which was captured on surveillance. She did not transcend with the others. After they left the simulation, she remained. When the moment of Ethan's transcendence was over, she rose from her chair, and walked over to where Ethan and Eldon were located. Perhaps to assure herself her work was complete? No one knows for sure, but after one look, she turned her attention from them and began to transform. There stood the image of Alicia, with all her tattoo's exposed and glowing like the sun into the sky. Never did she look more beautiful than with her magnificent body contrasting the simplicity of her expression. She radiated pureness of soul from every perspective.

It is now believed Tara is in a perpetual state of transcendence. She is transcended and not transcended at the same time. This state is required if she is to protect those crossing to the other side. Even though this would suggest a state inferior to complete transcendence, it is still unexplained, and many argue it is a transcendence of a higher order, in which complete harmony exists. She is the everything of the many worlds. Perhaps the first expression of this to our species.

Ethan headed directly to Leita's. He was anxious. More anxious than a transcended person should be. He had been away too long. When he arrived, Leita was not at home. He figured she was out on an errand, and was about to settle down on her porch step when he noticed a neighbour and decided to ask after her.

'Leita? No she's sick. She's been in hospital for at least a month now,' the man replied.

'She's sick?'

'Yes, cancer. I was up to visit her the other day. It won't be long now'.

'What do you mean? Isn't she getting treated?'

'Just palliative care. She's refusing all further treatment'.

Ethan rushed to the hospital.

‘She’s sleeping most of the time now,’ the nurse told him. ‘We have to keep her fairly sedated’.

Ethan pulled a chair up to Leita’s bed, and clasped her hand. Something was exchanged between them. She opened her eyes.

She smiled when she saw him. ‘I knew you’d come back’.

‘Of course. And all my journeys are over. We’ll be together forever now’.

Leita let out a defeated, sighing attempt at a laugh. ‘Another dream lost’, she thought to herself.

‘Did you know, just to be touched by another person is healing?’ Ethan asked.

‘I didn’t know that’.

‘Feel it,’ Ethan said as he placed his other hand on her forearm.

‘I do feel it,’ Leita replied. ‘I feel better there’.

‘Now that I’m back,’ Ethan said, ‘You can come back too. Let’s let them fix you up and we’ll get out of here’.

‘I can’t’.

‘Sure you can. We have the technology.’

‘I can’t Ethan.’

‘Yes you can. I need you to’.

‘No Ethan. This has been a long life for me, and to be honest, I’m through with it. I’m sorry baby, I don’t want anything to change’.

‘But I have to tell you about where I’ve been for the last three years. What I learned has changed my life and it will change yours too’.

Leita had fallen back to sleep.

‘She doesn’t have long to go,’ the caregiver said to Ethan. ‘We’re down to days now, and only a few short moments when shes awake’.

Ethan accessed AI and scanned Leita's internals. He could see what parts of her body were under attack. The places would appear red like a wound. Leita was red all over.

Ethan stopped the progression. He turned to the basics of duality, which of course is the starting place of all reality. Anything can be created there. All things are one way or the other, depending on how you want to look at them. Where reality begins, it is us who decide if we will see the particle or a wave. This same function is found in all things, even worlds. Ethan had one. So did Leita. He isolated their two worlds, and turned them into a duality. Everything in his world was now in relation to her world. They had become soul mates for a time. Two who had become one for eternity.

Ethan did not have control over Leita's world, but he had control over his. It was one half of who they were. Leita was dying in her world. In his world, she wasn't dying at all. She was in a process of recovery. That's how Ethan decided to see things. This stopped the progression of the disease. Ethan had created a new reality. One where there was fight in Leita's being. He snuck into her life at the quantum level, where God reality lives, and nothing has to make sense except to the observer.

The red in Leita's body had not regressed, but it was no longer advancing either.

Ethan looked to Leita's sleeping face. So calm and peaceful; a picture of innocence. He closed his eyes in meditative prayer, sending his love to Leita. It would be days before she wake up again. He never let go of her hand.

Chapter 45

'So where have you been?' Leita asked.

'To hell and back,' Ethan replied.

'Oh yeah?'

'Yeah, the quest to find myself, and I did. Found a place where I could face my demons and kill them off'.

'A success then?' Leita asked.

'Yes and no'.

‘Well, I’m so happy you’re back. Seeing you again means everything to me’.

‘Leita, it’s not too late to fix all this. We can walk out of this hospital today’.

Leita’s face turned determined. ‘No. I’ve thought about this for a long time. I haven’t told you everything about my life, but I’ve been broken a few times. It turns out, you can only take so many breaks, and then you snap. There’s no coming back. I’ve made my peace with this, and as soon as I did, it’s over. I didn’t want to get sick, but I did, and when I did, I felt some relief it was finally over. It didn’t look like you were coming back, and for some reason, being sick and not having you was the last straw. I snapped. I’m not blaming you, but that’s what happened. I’m on the other side now Ethan. I’m sorry. I love you, but it’s too late for me’.

‘It’s never too late to come back. This is what I learned while I was gone. I’ve come back to tell you about it. You have to hold on. There is greater freedom than in death. Let me tell you my story, Leita. Maybe we can find a way back to each other, and the life you wanted’.

Leita was looking attentively at Ethan. He felt flickers of hope in her emotion, and so he started to tell her his story.

‘A quest simulation is a strange place’, he began. ‘It takes you back to a period in your life where you are an accumulation of your past. You can face it. You can’t change the past, but you can change yourself. That’s what I did. I changed completely. I became a better man and I did it so I could be a better man to you.’

Over the many days of Leita falling in and out of sleep, he told her how he had come to identify himself in Eldon, and for him to become a better person, he had to banish that part of himself forever. He told her of his childhood, and having to go back to address the ills that caused him to become Eldon. He spoke about forgiveness, which is not acceptance, and essential to recovery.

He then told her how, if he was to heal himself, he had to learn to apply forgiveness in his own life.

Ethan made sure Leita understood and had empathy for his life experience and the need for forgiveness. Only then, was he prepared to tell her what he had done to her.

‘I was there to witness something that happened to you in the past’.

Leita tensed and instinctively pulled back.

'It was me.'

'What?'

'I was the man, who...'

'No!'

'I was that man. I'm not anymore.'

'No,' Leita repeated, looking into Ethan's eyes. She saw he was not lying. She also saw grief, but the main thing she saw was; he wasn't lying. Her first impulse was fear and to pull away, but there wasn't far to run under the circumstances. All she could do was stare at Ethan in terror. He had taken her right back to the moment. The fear. The hurt. The pain.

'How?' was all she could say.

'I told you how, and I have no explanation for it, beyond what I've given you. I am not that person anymore. Not even close.'

'You're the one who broke me. How do you think you're going to change anything about that?'

'With my love'.

'Your love? I've had a lot of years to think about this, and I figured out a man like you has no love to give. I don't care what you have to say about how you changed. You're just hiding it. Waiting for the right moment to do some other piece of shit thing to me. Even when we were together, before your quest, you would never stay with me. You'd just screw me and leave. Even on the day you swore you'd never leave me, you left and I didn't see you for 3 years. You're the same. You're all lies Ethan. Now I know you always have been. Get out! I don't have time for you anymore'.

'I'm not leaving you. Never again'.

'Leave! I want you to leave'.

Ethan just sat there holding her hand. She tried to pull it away, but didn't have the strength. He just held her a little tighter.

'I can't. Leave you,' he said quietly. 'My place is beside you.'

Leita looked at Ethan with hatred and exasperation. In spite of the shock, she could still read Ethan's eyes. He wasn't lying. His love was sincere, but it didn't change what he had done.

He turned his gaze from her. She continued to stare at his face. Millions of thoughts ran through her mind; all of them charged with emotion. It tired her. The love in Ethan's eyes faded, and her last thought before falling asleep was how life had gotten in one last jab at her. Now she would be denied the happiness of Ethan returning.

'Why are you here Ethan?'

'Because this is where I'm meant to be'.

'No you're not. Not anymore.'

'Now more than ever.'

'No. I don't want you here, and I certainly don't want you. I just want to be left in peace.'

Ethan looked at Leita intently. 'Leita, I know how you feel. I know life has been one betrayal after the other for you, and I know I'm the one who started it. Do you remember you told me once how all of us people with microchips were missing something? It's true. In the end, I was missing a soul. You're missing faith in people. I took that away from you, and you've been living a life without it. Nothing you wanted could happen, because you couldn't believe such goodness could exist. You can no longer place your trust in this world, and to protect yourself from it, you destroy happiness before it arrives. This leaves you in your safe space, but without happiness. You're hiding from life, it's because of me, but it shouldn't be that way. You must see this. You must see at least, you've been denied something from life.'

'Yes, I do'.

'Then use that anger to gain what is your right, regardless of me if you have to. Don't leave here without a fight'.

'Just because I didn't get what I deserved in life doesn't change anything. Millions of people have lived and died without getting what they deserved in life. I'll be dead in a few days. Inside, I'm already dead. I can't see why you can't understand this, and if you won't leave, then just shut up and let me die.'

‘No.’

‘Why? Why won’t you respect my wishes?’

‘Because if I don’t leave, I’m giving you the one thing you always wanted in life; enduring love. You can’t deny it and now you have a reason to live, because you have everything you ever wanted for happiness. I’m giving you someone who loves you no matter how broken and damaged you are. I’m giving you someone who will support you and be by your side always, no matter how broken and damaged you are. Someone who will respect you, no matter how broken and damaged you are. These are the things you dared to dream of, and they’re here. The love and support you deserve. Leita, you mean more to me than anything else in this world; even my transcendence. I have learned to be a better person, and it’s all because of you. I have learned how to love, and I have learned how to repent of my sins. No matter how broken you are, this love of ours cannot be broken. I love you unconditionally, because all conditions on our love, fall on me. Give us time. Let me tell you everything about the quest, and together we’ll figure out how we can fix this.’

Leita turned her head in thought. Ethan was exhausting. He was creating confusion and uncertainty, when she had finally found peace in her life. She took a deep breath and tried to focus on what he was saying, and what she thought about it. Only incomplete thoughts swirled in her head. She was too tired. There was too much to process. She soon drifted off, into the healing powers of sleep.

‘Alright, tell me your stupid story,’ Leita said when she woke the next time.

Ethan gave her a smile of gratitude and held her hand a little tighter. He told her everything from the moment he touched down in his simulation to the moment he left. No matter how much it hurt her or him, he remained honest. He kept it to the facts, and left the interpretation to her. He would stop anywhere in the story Leita wanted, and with the same honesty, try to provide clarification. Clarification boiled down to how? How could Ethan have done something so horrific to her? This was the one thing she asked herself everyday since the moment it happened. It was the one thing she had never been able to figure out.

‘When I was locked up by Eldon, I asked this question too. Every day I asked how? Once I understood what I had done, it was beyond my understanding of how I could possibly have done it. The only answer I could come up with is at the time, I was only capable of thinking about myself. Since then, I’ve come to

understand, when you think only of yourself, you're living in a place of evil. You have no conscience.

'I didn't have regard for your life whatsoever. That's the fact. That's what you have to understand. My selfishness denied you your life, and now you must reclaim it. I'm asking you to look at my own experience, and how I have changed to find a place of forgiveness where you can change. This is all I can give you to make amends. It's everything I learned while I was away. Forgiveness will take you to freedom and your purpose. What I did to you does not define you. Your purpose is much greater than me. Deep down, you know this, and you know you owe it to yourself to find it. I already know what you are Leita, and the beauty of your being is magical.

Leita thought about what Ethan was saying. She was incomplete. She knew that better than anyone. She had more to give. There was a lot of her she had only seen in glimpses. She was more, and she started to believe something inside her was waiting to be found. 'How are we going to do that?' Leita asked, uncertainly. Ethan smiled. She said 'we'.

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