

Entropicus

Book 1: The Mastery of Alchemy



Chris Deggs

This is a work of fiction except for the parts that aren't.

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Dedication

This story is especially dedicated to Professor Robert Pope a man who has dedicated his life to the betterment of humanity and who has stood against the tyranny of 'second law physics' which has speeded up the entropic process in human society.

Entropicus

Book 1: The Mastery of Alchemy

Preface

Lamos knew he was exposing himself, putting himself at grave risk, but he had to move in closer, despite it being the full moon. The loud chanting of "DIABOLUS, DIABOLUS, DIABOLUS," rang through the grove. The erotic dancing of drunken lascivious woman mixed with the yelps and whistles of masked menfolk. As he edged closer, he clasped his pendant close to his heart, entreating Ma'at to protect him, to deliver him from the madness. The drunken revellers had desecrated her shrine, a holy place and his responsibility. Lamos lamented the decline of virtue that preceded the destruction of the sacred space. He had to do something to stop the blasphemy.

He climbed atop a large boulder and there, bathed in the lunar spotlight, yelled, at the top of his voice, "STOP THIS DEPRAVITY NOW!"

Some masked faces turned toward him. Others followed, and a deathly silence hung in the air.

Ankira, a high priest of Diabolus, the Prince of Darkness, thrust his hand straight in Lamos's direction. "Lamos, your Goddess is powerless. Diabolus rules and will bring wondrous destruction to this land."

Other drunken men and women gathered around him, chanting DIABOLUS, DIABOLUS.

Lamos retorted, "IT IS BECAUSE YOUR KIND HAVE PERVERTED THE MYSTERIES WITH YOUR BLASPHEMY THAT DESTRUCTION IS UPON US."

"ENOUGH, LAMOS. JOIN US OR DIE." Ankira said, gathering his drunken army about him.

Lamos looked around him. The only way out was the way he came in. He leapt off the rock and hit the ground running only metres from his pursuers. They were out for blood. His legs were pumping as he raced through the grove. The perverts were hot on his heels. Only their drunkenness and being bloated from their Bacchanalian feasting gave him any lead at all. But he was flagging rapidly and knew he would not make it to the sanctuary, about one mile ahead. In his last defiant minutes, Lamos turned and cursed his pursuers. "FOR YOUR SORCERY, ANKIRA, AND YOUR PERVERSION OF THE MYSTERIES, I CURSE YOU TO HADES." As rough hands grabbed him, he Yelled, "YOU, DESECRATER OF DIVINE MAGIC SHALL BURN IN THE FIRES OF DAMNATION."

Then, Lamos was no more than a vague memory for a while in history.

Entropicus (the state where entropy is so advanced there is no awareness of it.)

**"Entropy is evil. It's worse than evil, because at least villains usually have a purpose."
~ Oscar Wilde on Entropy**

Chapter 1

Abbott Gallagher, a grand-sounding name for a not so grand life, silently cursed the mechanical minds that designed his world. His surname, Google informed him, meant 'foreign helper'. He certainly felt foreign in the world but didn't know if he was of much help to it. Any attempts he made, in his written opinions, to improve the human lot, seemed pointless in the face mechanised global society and all it entailed. But who was he kidding? How could he make any significant difference? Butterflies flapping their wings causing hurricanes on the other side of the world may well work in theory. Abbott thought that he thought too much. The world, now controlled by smart electronic devices smug in their perfection. But they still couldn't think for themselves - not yet anyhow.

Abbott had never achieved perfection in anything, but he wasn't alone in this. All humans had flaws. That was part of being human. This imperfection was manageable while Man could stumble through his evolution without being challenged by a superior intelligence that was very close to knocking him off his perch. But artificial intelligence was fast catching up, ready to take over. While humans squabbled with each other over a patch of dirt or something valuable beneath it, Artificial Intelligence took over from within, planting a virus in the human brain, while lulling humanity into a false sense of security with its cyber siren song.

Another day, Abbott thought, as soon as his mind could deal with the concept. Having just woken up he was programmed to reach for his smart phone. It read 6:15 am. Fully charged, waiting for his instructions, allowing him to think it was his device, not the other way round. The more humans relied upon this smart technology to get them through their day; the more artificial intelligence controlled them.

His phone rang. The caller showed up as 'unknown' Abbott said, "Yes, who's speaking?"

"If you don't stop spouting your anti-transhumanist crap on the Tweed Radio, your fucking dead!"

Then the phone went dead.

Abbott sat up in bed, stock still. Sure some listeners disagreed with his views, but it was the first time he'd received a death threat.

By the time he had taken his first caffeine hit of the day and gone through his ten-minute stretching routine, he put the hate caller out of his mind and began to feel better about himself, if not about the world. In fact, he tried avoiding the 'world' as much as possible. Although the negative news depressed him, being blissfully ignorant of what was going on did not pay the bills. As a journalist, his job demanded that he keep up with world events, as dreadful as they mostly were.

While drinking his second mug of coffee, Abbott scrutinised his notes. 'The machinations of civilisation are degrading our creative endeavours' he had written, wondering if it should be a bold statement or a question. He made a note to put this to Dr Lynne Becker, in the book review. Her latest book 'The Transhuman' with the 'Vitruvian man, as a robot, on its cover, scared him, regarding its portent. The whole subject was scary to Abbott. Mixing biology with bionics took all things mechanistically and his hatred of them, to new heights. Constantly having to deal with smug devices that continuously reminded him of his human frailties was bad enough but that people were playing second fiddle to robots was untenable.

Somewhere, in the background, the radio was playing a Christmas carol, a reminder to Abbott that the spectre of Yuletide was waiting to pounce on the world. 'Peace on Earth and goodwill to all men' taunted him as he rushed his breakfast. 'Peace on Earth!' What a fucking joke, he thought. No chance of that while power hungry and resource thieving political and religious leaders called the shots and fired them at anybody who stood in their way. With his anger building, Abbott Gallagher prepared himself for the intellectual clash of minds to come.

As Abbott drove to Tweed Heads and Tweed FM, where he had his weekly Gig on the 'Morning Show', an eclectic mix of music, mayhem and social comment. An educationalist had the view that kids were only schooled to become skilled artists, artisans and administrators to excite the demand for commercial gain. A jaded, cynical view, according to the show host, but one to which Abbott subscribed. Education, in his book, was conveyor belt curriculum, turning well-behaved automaton wage slaves into fodder to feed a greedy mechanistic system with no semblance of ethics whatsoever.

Dr Lynne Becker had done her research. She had heard Abbott Gallagher's views on robotics and saw him as a Dr Doom. To her mind, he was like any other two-bit shock jock playing to popular opinion as a self-elected spokesperson for the herd. What she promoted was important because she had a vision of humanity in the future. Her message was, 'If we don't do this, this will happen, scenario. In her last book 'Enhanced' about athletes finding chemically induced ways to improve their athletic performance, she concluded that what performance enhancing drugs were illegal today would not only be accepted tomorrow but would become obligatory in sports events.

In her new book, "Transhumanism or Perish, the subject of her interview that day, she put forward the view that once Transhumanism becomes accepted as the norm, human ways of being would change profoundly, starting with a much touted 150-year life span. As machines driven by smart technology proved to be much more reliable than humans, with all their foibles, fuck-ups and fantasies, artificial intelligence could overcome the biggest problems facing the world. It was only humanity's fear of the unknown that held back the progress of Transhumanism.

Aspects of Transhumanism, under other names, had been around for over one hundred years. Lynn's 55-year-old body was a mixture of bionics and biology, with her pacemaker that her been giving her borrowed life for the last five years. In 1899, J A McWilliam reported in the British Medical Journal of his experiments, in which he had applied electrical impulses to the human heart. In 1958 at the Karolinska Institute in Solna, Sweden, Arne Larsson, received the first successful pacemaker implant. From that day forward bionics and biology were integrated.

Dr Becker often used this as an example in her lectures to help allay any fears about Transhumanism. Of course, the body contained just a small aspect of bionics compared to its well-established biology. However, medical breakthroughs such as pacemakers, iron lungs, life support technology, etc. had all come about to help humanity, not enslave it. She couldn't see why the likes of Abbott Gallagher couldn't get their heads around that.

Chapter 2

It was a foggy morning in Armadale when the bailiff arrived. Ulysses watched as men in brown dust coats kept carrying his parent's things out of the house into a big van parked outside. His parent's faces were masks of sadness and anger, as removalists cleared room after room of their contents. Ulysses, just nine years old, thought it a kind of game, as the strange man in the grey suit kept ticking things off on a clipboard. The little boy had no idea of the shame his dad felt; he wondered why his mum and dad looked so sad.

After this unfortunate episode, the family moved from Armadale, where his dad had been a lecturer in mathematics at the University of New England, to Dorrigo, a plateau town, in the Mid North of new South Wales, where he could only get a job as a wages clerk in the forestry industry. Ulysses's mother had difficulty in dealing with the shame of being evicted in her hometown and she kept very much to herself.

As Ulysses came to understand why they had been forced to leave their family home, he found it difficult to forgive his father. It wasn't so much the gambling addiction itself. It was what he saw to be his father's pathetic weakness and lack of self-discipline, that he found unforgivable.

As a teenager, Ulysses Covington's two passions became study and rigorous exercise, both mentally and physically. He did not want to pass on any weak-willed genes to any progeny he was likely to sire. Also, he hoped his severe self-discipline, which to him was soul cleansing, would delete all remnants of his father's impuissance from his gene bank. It was around this time that Ulysses took an interest in robotics. His primary research took him back to 1927 when the *Maschinenmensch* 'machine-human' a gynoid humanoid robot was made. Also dubbed, 'Parody', 'Futura', 'Robotrix' and even 'Maria impersonator' it was the first and perhaps the most memorable depiction of a robot ever to appear on film, in Fritz Lang's film 'Metropolis'.

By the time Ulysses was studying digital technology at New England University robotics had taken some huge leaps forwards. From Heron's steam and water powered inventions in first century AD Alexandria, the science had reached the point when in 1975 Victor Scheinman stunned the world with his programmable universal manipulation robot.

Some conspiracy theories do have substance, Abbott Gallagher thought to himself, as he drove his 12-year-old Mazda into the Tweed FM car park. The particular 'c t' the interviewer had in mind was about how original purpose got demeaned in the name of a Global Economic Rationalism, controlled by a self-appointed privileged few. They classified the world population as a mere pawns for them to manipulate at will. Abbott went along with this; there was plenty of readily available evidence gave it plausibility. This mechanistic mindset that infected most of the human race worshipped Einstein's heat death law to such an extent that physics sees God as a steam engine. Although this is an amusing concept this entropic mindset is programmed into even the most up to date artificial intelligence.

Abbott parked next to a Mercedes convertible with the rego LBECK, leaving no doubt as to who owned it. Even Dr Beck's highly mechanised car made the journalist feel small in her presence. Fuck her; she's no better than me, Abbott thought, as he entered the radio station. Dianne's warm smile lifted his mood.

The petite blonde, with blood red lipstick, said, "Good morning Abbott. Your guest is being prepared and primed. So break a leg," she grinned. He returned a "Thanks," and headed to the compact kitchen and coffee number three.

Sitting in the cramped studio, Abbott sat close to Lynne Becker, who although carrying a few extra pounds, had a certain allure about her. Lynne had lightly coiffured her greying hair for the occasion. Abbott, wearing denim and a sweater, thought it odd that people should be so self-conscious of their looks on radio. Perhaps if they felt good, about themselves, they were more confident in the interview. Following sponsorship commercials, Abbott introduced his guest and asked her about her new book

Lynne explained that Transhumanism was about enhancing the biological human to bring about a smarter, fitter, harder working society better able to overcome major global problems.

Abbott had his questions ready. He was going straight for the throat. "Dr Becker, productivity is central to our society, so doesn't this Transhumanism merely name a new productive model of society where we are in danger of becoming just externalised objects?"

"It seems logical to assume, as with the emergence of industrialism or feudalism, following slavery that other changes will emerge."

"Yes, but will these new markets provide real solutions? And if so, will government and family remain as they are?"

She could see what he was doing, and she determined not to play his game. "Nothing remains the same, Abbott. Change is what evolution is all about."

"Of course. So do you see the significance of greater risk of adverse outcomes to humanity as we meddle or try to recreate what took millions of years to evolve?"

"And is still evolving. Transhumanism is just part of our human footprint."

"Okay Dr Becker, you spoke of Transhumanism solving some of humanity's ills but how do you know that? Isn't it just as ominous that Transhumanism may use the technology to provide the Armaments industry with new robotic weapons, far more deadly than we have so far seen?"

Dr Becker smiled. "humans have fought wars over space, resources, ideologies and will soon be fighting over water rights. Have you considered that new robotic weapons may be soldierbots, making it unnecessary for humans to give up their lives in battle? There may well be a logic-based blueprint for continuous war with disposable, compostable cyborgs."

Damn, she had made a good point, and Abbott felt like he was on the ropes. He needed to recover - quickly. "Robots programmed to kill and destroy. That sounds pretty dangerous to me." Before she had a chance to comment he stated, "We could well argue that Transhumanism will be a tool used by economic rationalists to try to make their flawed financial system work. It's like trying to push a car that only has three wheels."

She quickly came back with, "We need to stop and think with our unaugmented brains. So far, humanity is just treading water and getting increasingly tired. Surely enhanced humans, who have the greater brain power, are super fit, emotionally neutral and solution oriented, are going to have a greater chance of figuring out how to fix the fourth wheel." Lynne paused for a sip of water. Then, looking at the camera, she said, "Transhumanism is not the enemy here. Stale, outmoded and dangerously ignorant thinking is. Humans have dug themselves into a deep hole from which they cannot extricate themselves. Enhanced humans are the rescue party about to liberate humanity."

"From being human - yes. Okay, now the lines are open to see what you listeners think about becoming a human robot."

Chapter 3

ARL needed somebody who could pole vault over the fence and let them in. Olivier Leroy thought they were joking at first, but they assured him it was not the case. Nicki drove him by the facility to show him the fence. His best jump was just over 6 metres. As the wall was 15 feet tall, he figured clearing the razor wire at the top would be easy enough. The lack of a sand pit to land in did concern him. He could wear padded clothes, but their constriction could impede his performance. The group, called ARL (Anti Robot League) rigged up a fence for Olivier to practice his vaulting. After a warm-up session, he soon sailed over the top and landed on cardboard boxes stacked on the other side. They never told him what they planned to do, once they were in, and he never asked. The ten grand in his bank account was enough of an enticement to get him to play his part. One member of ARL, Abe, had worked in the Heron Robotics research centre. He knew it was easy to open the gate from the inside, without activating the alarm. He also knew where they would find their target.

Abbott Gallagher felt his true calling was investigative journalism. So whenever he got the chance to play that role he jumped at it. Most of the time he was either cobbling together freelance articles or working as a reporter on a part-time basis, for the Tweed News. Phil Rosendale, the paunchy middle-aged editor of the newspaper, called Abbott into his office one day. Such a summons meant he was either going to get a bollocking or a particular assignment. Phil was known to be a straight shooter, so the smile on his face suggested to Abbott, it was a job. Phil, a man who got straight to the point, said, "Ab, I want you to look at something." He handed the journalist an article from a Sydney newspaper.

Abbott looked at the article and scratched his head. "Why am I looking at this? It's from a Sydney rag, and it's five years old."

"Leroy has just gotten out of gaol, and he has a story to tell. And you know how we love stories."

"What sort of story? About life in prison? If so..."

Phil stopped him. "...He wants to tell a story about the night he jumped a fucking fence. And I want you onto it."

Abbott perked up. A real job, and one a lot of journos would kill to get. "What about contacts?"

Phil handed his man a piece of paper with a phone number. "Don't say I don't look after you, Ab. Now don't fuck it up. You never know. There could be a PP in it."

As he left the office with a spring in his step, Abbott wondered why, if the assignment was such a peach, Phil wasn't out there getting the credit? How did Phil find out about it? Why was Leroy spilling the beans to a tin pot local rag and were there any beans to spill? Abbott did tend to have a suspicious mind. But he'd follow it up anyhow. But not until he had spoken to the Prof, while they played their lunchtime chess game at a local cafe. The Prof, as the Grey Man was also known, was considered an oddity at Jack's, but as the Prof kept mostly to himself, nobody seemed to mind him being there. None of the customers knew why the elderly man with long straggly grey hair got called the Prof as he didn't come over as being at all well educated. None of the punters took much notice of him, except for Abbott.

The Prof dropped in Jack's Cafe most days, to nurse a cup of tea and read the newspaper. Accepted as an eccentric old icon by the locals he kept his counsel. But he did enjoy his chess matches against 'the reporter' as he referred to Abbott.

As the Grey man moved his rook to safety, he said, "They justify their tyranny by masking it with aesthetic excitement."

Abbott was used to such seemingly random pronouncements. They seemed to come out of the blue, hang around for a moment, then, if not responded to, dissipate in the ether. On this occasion, the journalist was intrigued. "Prof, you will have to elucidate."

The old man chuckled as Abbott moved his bishop. "Well, it's all a bloody con. Beauty in decay, atoms deteriorating, subject entropic enslavement. Aesthetics is nothing more than a temporary illusion that makes us forget about our economic slavery."

Sometimes, after they had parted company and the Prof went wherever, Abbott would recall and think about one or more of the little verbal bombshells that had exploded in his brain. But now he needed advice, and the Prof was only too willing to dispense his wisdom on just about anything. "Prof, I've been given a job which could turn out a bit dicey."

Moving one of his pawns, The Prof chuckled. "Don't do it then."

"Yes, but it could also be the scoop I've been waiting for."

"Then do it." Then the Prof's curiosity got the better of him. "Why is it dicey?"

Abbott moved his knight into position. "An ex-con wants to spill the beans about the night the police arrested him. That's all I know."

"How much do you want this story?"

"I don't know. Pretty bad I guess. But it could open a can of worms."

The Prof grinned. "What have you got to lose, except maybe your life?" Then he added, "And this game. Checkmate."

Abbott phoned the number, arranged to meet Olivier Leroy, and was on his way to Palm Beach, the one in Australia. The Prof's thing about aesthetics being an illusion to distract us from our economic slavery penetrated Abbott's mind. It made sense. He thought about all those fridges adorned with preschool scrawls and splashes of colour as the little angels created their first artworks. The illusion had begun. The economic slavery needed to purchase the four-star white goods appliances got forgotten, in the generous praise bestowed upon the child artist. Democracy talked of liberty, but there was no freedom. It was all a crock of shit. Abbott became disturbed, thinking about it. His driving became aggressive with frequent horn blasts and light flashes, aimed at motorists who impeded his progress.

He remembered reading somewhere, possibly in a social media post, that some ancient Greek, probably Plato, said 'All is Geometry'. Then, much later some person, perhaps Thomas Jefferson, said:

"Human liberty rested upon a complete government design based on the balanced principles of physics and geometry."

The words had impressed Abbott, even if he did not have a clear understanding of what it meant.

Number 23, 6th Avenue was a block of six units. Luckily one of the stacked mailboxes had Leroy inscribed on it. Abbott located unit three and rang the bell. Just an inch thickness of timber separated him from a barking dog, a giant beast by the way it made the door shake, jumping up at

the other side of the barricade. Then a voice. "Get down Spartacus. Go to bed." After the sound of a sliding bolt, Abbott found himself looking at an ebony giant, at least 6 feet 6.

"Yeah, what do you want? Olivier asked, suspiciously.

"I'm Abbott Galagher, and I believe you have a story to tell."

"Well, you'd better come in then."

"The dog?" the reporter asked."

The Negro grinned, "Spartacus is an old softy."

Abbott, unconvinced, sat down quietly.

The pole vaulter said, "I'll be back in a minute. Make yourself comfortable."

Eyeing the dog lying in a large basket in the corner, Abbott felt anything but comfortable. The room's decor was all pastel pinks, including the glass cabinet that displayed delicate china. It was an unusual choice of decor for an ex-con athlete. An aged framed print caught his attention. It showed a bunch of blokes, sporting top hats and tails, standing around, taking their turn at signing something.

"That belonged to my grandmother," Olivier said, breaking into the journalist's observations.

"As did this place, I'm guessing," Abbott said.

"Yes, it's hardly my style. But I'm thankful for it, till I get back on my feet."

Abbott's mind was back on the print. "It looks official, like its recording some significant event."

"Yeah. The signing of the American Constitution." Then, as an aside, "My grandmother was born in Alabama. She was a Yankeeophile, and she loved all things American. She was amused when my mother settled in Palm Beach.

Abbott switched on the voice recorder on his phone. "So, Olivier, what's this story about?"

"It's about some bastard that set me up. The Dobber worked for Heron Robotics, and he infiltrated ARL."

"Okay, give me the full version."

He did, and the story was not that inspiring. In a nutshell, the No Robotics League, a group of wannabe terrorists had a spy in their midst, a guy who went by the name of Abe Lincoln (no joke). In an attempt to raid Heron Robotics, Leroy was caught trying to let the NRL group into the research facility. The others got away, leaving the pole vaulter to take the heat. Funny, Abbott thought, while driving homeward, to Murwillumbah, the athlete had been very calm about the whole affair. Never once did he talk about exacting revenge on Abe Lincoln for dobbing him in. Oh well, a couple of years in the slammer can change one's perspective, the journalist reasoned, while pondering how to jazz up the story.

Abbott Googled ARL. Apart from The Amateur Rugby League, which dominated a few pages, he found a reference to a blog called the 'No Robotics Liberation' group. It hadn't been updated for some time and looked as though it might be defunct, hanging in cyberspace, a mere shadow of its former self. There was an email contact listed, but Abbott held out little hope that the link still existed. Still, it was worth a try. There was no joy there but 'who's is' came up trumps and provided Abbott with a web master address. This time, the link took him to ARL, which expanded to become the 'Anti Robotics League'. No imagination these guys, Abbott thought as he checked for a contact.

Olivier Leroy enjoyed the early morning freshness as he jogged along the beach with Spartacus in tow. Spartacus, more wolf than German Shepard, was his mother's dog and she would be returning soon; then she could look after the dog. Some people are attracted to dogs, others to cats. Olivier favoured neither, but looking after the German Shepherd was the price he had to pay to live in his mother's house. Jogging helped him think, and he was thinking about how to make capital out of his situation. Out of shape, in contrast to his peak fitness days, puffed after a couple of kilometres. He sat down on a rock. He thought about the letter. Why would Heron Robotics want to interview him? It certainly wouldn't be about his pole vaulting skills, and it was hardly likely to be a job offer. Still, it was enticing. He looked up and caught the admiring glances of a couple of female joggers, as they passed him. He began to feel better. He obviously still had what it took where the opposite sex was concerned. Pumped up, he jogged off in their direction, with Spartacus in the lead.

Something about the story niggled Abbott Gallagher. Namely, why did Heron Robotics see the need to have a mole in the ARL group? They must have thought it necessary to go to such lengths. ARL was small fry with a perhaps a dozen members, so how did they turn up on Heron Robotics radar? Now that angle would give the story more mileage. The journalist was about to research Heron Robotics when Phil Rosendale showed up on his phone. "Hi, Phil."

"How goes the scoop on that black athlete?"

"Not much mileage there. Leroy could be holding out, though."

"Why would he do that? He seemed enthusiastic about telling his story."

"Yes. Why would Mr Leroy do that without asking for payment."

"I dunno Ab. Not everybody is just interested in the money."

"Come on Phil. He's sleeping on his mother's lounge for Christ sake. He's just out of gaol and jobless. So why isn't he demanding a fee?"

"Okay, write up what you've got and I'll look at it."

"There might be a better angle. I'm following something up."

"Why the fuck can't you just stick to the assignment I gave you?"

"Ask yourself this. Why did Heron Robotics place a spy in a piss-ant group like ARL?"

Phil sighed, "Okay, what's the answer?"

"I don't know yet, but I bet you a dollar to a cent that Abe Lincoln would know."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No. But I've just got an excellent idea."

"When you get ideas, I duck for cover."

After listening to nauseous music for what seemed like an eternity, before being connected to a human, at Heron Robotics, Abbott was feeling infuriated. "I would like public relations?" Abbott said, having linked to a woman called Sally.

Indeed sir. Whom should I say is calling?"

Abbott Gallagher, from the Tweed News."

After being put on hold for a while, he heard a voice.

"Matthew Sheen speaking. How can I help you, Mr Gallagher,

"Background info on a story."

"What story?" the director of PR asked, cautiously.

"The Olivier Leroy one. I've got his side of the story. Now I need yours before we go to print."

"I'm sorry, Mr Gallagher, but I have to know idea what you are on about."

"It was about five years ago. Maybe before your time at Heron Robotics. I thought your company might want to make a statement."

"What does this Mr Leroy have to say?"

"It's not the sort of thing for the phone. Can we meet later today? Sorry about the rush but we go to press tomorrow and ..."

Feeling harried, Matthew condescended, "Yes, alright. 4 pm. Don't be late."

Damn, I'm good! Abbott said to his office. He checked his watch. Time for lunch. He grabbed his wallet, phone and keys.

Chapter 4

The Prof's real name was Harold A Scholfield, but he kept that to himself. Only his doctor and the Australian Tax Office were privy to that information. After settling in Tweed Heads some ten years earlier, he'd kept a very low profile. Having lunch at Jacks greasy spoon joint would have been anathema to him in the old days when he had and could afford a stylish lifestyle. As Professor of Social Studies at Griffith University (yes the term Prof is accurate) he'd earned a decent wage that provided him with a reasonably abundant life.

Harold came from humble beginnings, though. Having been abandoned, as a tot, on the steps of St Michael's Church in Bray, Harold was brought up by the Church Warden and his wife. He was a bright lad and got awarded a scholarship that secured him a place in Eton Young Harold hated it there, dominated by strict and oppressive role models. He pushed such memories to the back of his mind. The Prof didn't like to dwell on any aspect of his private life.

Abbot put the Prof, in his seventies. Although he tended to wear the same old shabby coat and Turkish hat all the time, his hygiene seemed reasonable. His grey/white long uncombed beard made him look scruffy, and his surly nature kept most people at bay so that no matter how busy the Cafe got, nobody apart from Abbott sat at his table. The seat opposite him was always empty, as though protected by some force field that could only be broken by Abbott's presence. The journalist arrived, ordered his lunch and occupied the reserved seat. The chess board was set up, and it was Abbott's turn to play white.

As the game commenced, Abbott said, "I've been thinking about what you said yesterday."

The Prof smiled wistfully, through his full unkempt beard. "Then tell me what I said so we'll both know."

Abbott moved a pawn. Then, after trying his coffee, which had just arrived, he said, "About aesthetics being an illusion to distract us from economic slavery."

Prof was impressed. "And what have you concluded from my pearl of wisdom?"

"That our liberty is part of the illusion. While we think we have freedom, we don't go demanding it."

"Right, so now you have this little piece of awareness are you going to treat it like a delicate treasure or are you going to spread a message with it?"

"I haven't taken it that far, yet."

"Abbott!" the Prof said surprised. "I would have thought you would be horrified at the way the power brokers have duped you. I would have thought you'd want to inform humanity of their leaders' duplicity." The Prof paused, then moved his queen.

"Shouting from the rooftops would only achieve me getting locked up. That wouldn't help anybody, least of all me."

Lunch arrived, relegating the subject to a back seat in Abbott's mind. The Prof made his move and sat back. "When they wrote the American Constitution the Founding Fathers presented their idea of liberty as an aesthetic, scientific vision, rather than a sustainable, practical ethical model."

As the reporter positioned his bishop, the Prof's words brought to mind the print belonging to Leroy's grandmother. "Why did they blow such a great opportunity?"

The Prof took a bite of toast, scattering a few crumbs with his next pronouncement. "An incomplete understanding of physics and geometry."

"How did that ..."

On a roll, the Prof said, "Church dogma and superstition which ruled scientific persuasion wouldn't tolerate any published disclosure of a balanced scientific world view." The old man paused to scan the board, then said, "Since the discovery of nanotechnology, we know this upgraded world-view does exist. At the time, though, liberty only amounted to freedom of religion."

Abbott was impressed. After digesting part of his burger, he said, "You seem to know a lot about this stuff."

The Prof laughed, not letting on about his past academic expertise. He thought Abbott was smart and wondered if he would be the one. Looking straight at the reporter, he continued, "The definition of liberty was hard for them to work out. The founders debated this in 85 essays published by the New York Times. Alexander Hamilton, one of the founders, encapsulated it with, 'Liberty is ensured, not by civic virtue, but by the design of government itself, which in turn, rests upon the principles of physics and geometry.'"

The journalist backed up his queen with a knight. "Check!"

"So, what do you think about that?" the Prof asked, sorting out his next move.

"The saying 'All is geometry' is clearer to me now but where does knowing all this stuff get us? The psychopaths that run this lost world don't give a shit!"

The Prof nodded sagely. He knew it was going to get a lot worse. "if the people don't know they're slaves they're not going to demand their libertarian rights."

Abbott looked at his watch. "Sorry Prof, I've got to go to see a man about a robot. Keep the game warm."

The Prof grabbed Abbott's arm. "The American Constitution was based on Newton's published physics principles, not Immanuel Kant's metaphysics. Think about that."

Abbott didn't think about it, not at that time anyhow. His focus was on his meeting with Matthew Sheen.

Heron Robotics was out on the Southport-Nerang Rd, tucked out of sight by surrounding bushland. A big sign screamed PRIVATE PROPERTY; TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED. Well, Leroy knew all about that. Following his Nav Sat directions, Abbott entered Heron Robotics from Ashmore Road. The reporter drove in, parked in the visitors' car park, and entered the reception, which sported the company's logo behind the desk. The receptionist scanned her appointment list, saw Abbott's name, and contacted Matthew Sheen. She then directed the reporter to his office.

It was 3.50 pm. Abbott knocked, and the personnel manager invited him in.

Matthew had thinning ginger hair and a sallow complexion. He was in shirtsleeves with a tightly buttoned waistcoat. He offered Abbott a seat. "Now, fill me in." the PR manager said.

"I take it you will be up to speed about this incident by now."

Matthew picked up the newspaper article. "Yes. Somebody jumped the fence and tried to let his friends in to do damage. Luckily for us, he was apprehended before he could open the gates."

Abbott smiled. "I believe there was somebody called Abe Lincoln working here at the time.'

The PR manager adjusted a pair of glasses that had slipped down his perspiring nose. "I don't know anything about that. What does he have to do with this?"

Abbott scanned the article about the arrest. There was nothing about Lincoln. "Quite a lot I would say, seeing as he was your spy planted in the ARL camp.'

"I sincerely doubt that."

Well, Mr Leroy attests that it is true. Abe Lincoln worked here in some security capacity. It was he who alerted the guards about the break-in. It was because of him that Mr Leroy had to spend two years in prison."

"He probably deserved it, and this Mr Lincoln would have saved this company lots of time and money, for which I assume Heron amply rewarded him." He looked at the reporter opposite, who put him in mind of young Elliot Gould in the 'Mash' movie. "I know nothing about any spies and, quite frankly, Mr Gallagher I do not see any reason why we would bother infiltrate some small crackpot group."

Abbott smiled, "Yes, I have been wondering about that. It doesn't make much sense, on the face of it. I shall just have to go to print with what I have."

Matthew shook his head, "This whole spying thing has to be utter nonsense."

"I'll quote you on that, shall I, Mr Sheen?"

After the news hound had left, Matthew spoke into his intercom. "Get me Mr Covington, Susan."

It was late afternoon by the time Abbott arrived back home at his Brisbane Street flat in Murwillumbah. There was just one recorded message on his phone. It was from Phil asking for a progress report. Abbott brewed coffee, then grabbed his mobile and pressed Phil's contact. Hearing the editor's voice, he said. "Nothing much to say."

"How did you get on at Heron Robotics?"

"Plausible denial."

"Is he lying?"

"Don't know, but I don't think so. I mean if the company planted a spy, it's not exactly illegal, and it makes them look smart."

"So Leroy's telling porkies?"

"Won't know until I've spoken with Abraham Lincoln."

"How the fuck are you going to find him?"

"I'll work that one out tomorrow."

That dealt with; Abbott pondered the prof's question. A quick Google search showed him that:

Newtonian Physics, upon which the US Delegates predicated the American Constitution based its theory of political science on published Newtonian Physics. This scientific philosophy became the Whig theory of political science. Kantian 'metaphysics of morals', on the other hand, explained a more substantive procedure in due process of law. "

After further searching, Abbott read that:

Although Kant agreed with certain Newtonian principles, such as there being no general duty of government care to aid the poor, a government could not ethically enact laws that created a charity class who become virtual slaves to the economic system."

Abbott, becoming interested, sipped his coffee, and read on:

Kant stated that when the law itself created poverty, Government, as the author of that law, has an absolute duty of care.

Then it became apparent what the Prof had been saying. Of course, the Government would not hamper itself with such a responsibility, which is why charities are not set up by government bodies, but rather by good meaning volunteers.

Abbott, satisfied with at least some understanding of what the Prof was on about, made another coffee and settled down to writing the Leroy article. It didn't have much meat, but at least some readers would be intrigued by it.

Ulysses Covington, now a world player in the Transhumanist stakes, got picked up by a smiling chauffeur near the cab rank at Logan International Airport. The company driver then whisked him off to Boston Cybertronics in Waltham, Massachusetts. Ulysses had earned his place at the table for the part Heron Robotics had played in the production of the latest ATLAS model. He joined the select group comprising a secret enclave of top robotic scientists, politicians and a US Army general. They were there to teach the robot new tricks. Like a games coach training a rookie, DARPA had given the team one month to teach ATLAS the moves it needed to ensure its success in the next DRC (Darpa Robotics Challenge). Covington learned these were ability trials, in which each robotic contestant had to perform a required series of disaster response like tasks.

Covington was enjoying his expenses paid stay at the Ritz-Carlton when he received a call from a Colonel Barney Cormack. They arranged to meet for dinner in the hotel's main restaurant. The DARPA head hunter had been watching Heron Robotics research programmes for some time, and it was time to pounce. He was especially interested in Heron's synthetic police force project.

"Ulysses, we've been watching your company with keen interest. We have a project in mind we think will interest you."

He looked at the middle-aged ex- marine. The smart suit ticked him as an executive, but the generic brush cut and craggy features showed him to be the veteran military man from bygone days. "I'm intrigued. Tell me more."

Barney eyed the other man. "Ulysses, how do you see the world in ten or fifteen years?"

Covington gave a nervous grin. "That's a big ask. In what respect?"

"concerning outsourcing law and order."

"I haven't given that much thought."

"Not many people have. But it is coming. Mark my words. And when it does we have to be ready. Every police department already outsourced some administrative functions. Things like IT, administration, records storage and the like. But now 'real' police services are on the table."

"That is interesting, Colonel."

"Yeah, cost and political leanings are bringing this about, Many Senators are of the opinion that private secret services are more efficient and perform better fiscally." He paused to drink some beer.

"Look, Ulysses, a hundred years ago, the secret police were replaced by government police to make them more professional. Now we're looking to private firms to improve the police force."

"Yes, it's ironic, isn't it."

"No, it's just circular progress. Of course, the very best of police and security services: FBI, CIA, NSA, etc. will still be provided by the government. But, as we work our way down to smaller and less well-funded police departments and sheriffs' offices, service levels are more uneven. Also, smaller police forces don't protect us from terrorist and international criminal syndicates. Often they function as meter maids, traffic cops and jailhouse guards, and these services have a lot of room for improvement."

Covington became intrigued. "Okay, so where does my company come into this?"

"Supercops." He let the word hang while he forked a mouthful of steak into his mouth. "DARPA has a \$2 billion yearly budget for research into creating a super soldier as well as developing a robotic police force."

"Synthetic police force! We've been looking into that, but Heron is nowhere near moving beyond the concept." Ulysses responded, watching the other man.

Barney said, "That's why we took an interest in your company. We believe Robocops is where we are going to be in ten or fifteen years,"

Seeing some doubt in Ulysses' face, added, "Mark my words about this, and we want Heron to be part of this operation."

Covington sat wide-eyed a piece of t-bone dangling off his suspended fork. It was beyond his wildest dreams. He would have access to a large slice of the DARPA budget. "This is very exciting, Colonel."

Barney nodded, "Good. Let's drink to a fruitful and meaningful partnership," He said, raising his glass.

After a torturous but discipline building time in public school, Ulysses went to university to study chemistry. Genetics intrigued him and, although at the time nobody was able to map the genome, he knew his future was in genetic engineering. It was while working for Meditech that Ulysses began looking beyond medical science for genetic engineering applications. He had a vision in which future needs would demand all kinds of commercial uses for genetic manipulation.

His work centred on DNA manipulation and gene expression control, from which his team created specific functional cells. By just altering a fraction of genetic information from each cell, Ulysses took its characteristics, effectively reprogramming cells from one type to another.

This work led to Dr Covington's fascination with Kurzweil's vision, building machines at the nanoscale. Ulysses' idea took on the big screen with the tiniest of things. He saw the world and our bodies rebuilt, molecule by molecule, with benefits ranging from full repair of the environment to expanding our human capabilities far beyond the limits of biology. This vision was very exciting, especially as nano-technology worked hand-in-glove with genetic manipulation. In the 1980s and 90s, Dr Covington's hero was Eric Drexler, who's visionary concepts included designs for many of the essential nanotech building blocks – including machines that could pick and place single atoms as part of the construction process by using nano-cranes, by employing a chemical process.

Finally, Ulysses became a pioneer in the robotics revolution. Inspired beyond measure, he set up Heron Robotics, just a name at the time, on the Queensland Gold Coast. Named after his ancient Greek hero, Heron, who's steam and water driven devices were way ahead of their time. His

company researched NRG (nano, robotics and genetics) the big small three in cutting-edge science and technology.

It was this series of successes that got Ulysses Covington noticed by DARPA (Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency) Colonel Barney Cormack looked over the large desk at General Logan Schulz's facial expression. The old soldier didn't give much away, but there was a little tic at the corner of his left eye that indicated his excitement. "It looks good but is he up to it."

"The man's a genius. His record speaks for itself."

The General docketed his Havana. "Barney, I trust your judgement in his ability to deliver the goods. But does he have the will and constitution to move with us on this?"

"Personally, Logan, I think he's got it. But we can never be too careful. To be on the safe side, I can get him into Project MKUltra." Barney said, his CYA self-preservation kicking in.

"As a subject?"

"It'll be for his own good."

Logan sucked on his big cigar. "I want current reports, Barney. Okay, you're dismissed."

Both men now worked in civvy street, their active military careers behind them, but old habits of deference to rank persisted.

Heron Robotics, Abbott Discovered, did not just research into robotics. They also carried out R&D in genetic and nano sciences. Knowing nothing much about the business he had no idea as to whether it was standard practice or not. To Abbott, the people who experimented with this weird stuff may well have been wizards for all he knew. But his curiosity got him wondering if everything they played around with was kosher. Else, why would they need to plant a spy in a small protest group? And did ARL go to Heron Robotics to blow up a robot, or was there something else they were so concerned about they risked carrying out sabotage. Of course, back then, they could all have been off their faces with some hallucinatory chemical and just put a pin on a map. But Abbott thought it unlikely. He had to speak with Olivier again.

Matthew Sheen Checked, for the sixth time, to see if his boss was available.

Covington's secretary told him, "Dr Covington is due back this morning and will be in his office in the afternoon."

"Let him know I need to see him urgently."

Susan looked at her boss's diary. "Mr Sheen, he has six appointments already. I can squeeze you in around 5 pm."

How dare she push him to the back of the queue when the company's reputation was at stake!. "It's critical that I see him as soon as he gets here!"

Susan said, "The Vice President and a bunch of directors may not agree, Mr Sheen (she nearly giggled when she spoke his name).

Matthew was not a happy man. Abraham Lincoln did not exist, not in the employment files.

He leant back in his padded office chair and scratched his head, perplexed. What sort of idiot would fall for a name like that? Come to that, what kind of idiot would use something that obvious as a

pseudonym? The world was becoming crazier. Luckily the News had not published the article that morning. But it was only a matter of time, and he had to get his story straight.

The Prof, sitting alone in Jack's Cafe in Kennedy Drive, had similar thoughts. The world was becoming crazier but not because people chose inappropriate names, although Harold thought it could be a symptom. No, the reason why the world was going mad was that stupid people didn't heed wise warnings. Plato, one of the greatest thinkers ever, in the Prof's book, defined evil as the unformed matter in the atom, when released into the physical world. But nobody listened, and mad scientists started splitting atoms like there was no tomorrow, which may very well be the case if some idiotic national leader presses the red button. The Prof chuckled as he stirred his cup of tea. Folks thought he was just a cantankerous but harmless old duffer, and, he reckoned they might well be right. But the Prof knew things of which the general populace was blissfully unaware. He was aware that, if humanity did not get its game together, human extinction was not far away. He kept this knowledge to himself, not because if the public knew this their sense of doom would throw them into a blind panic. That would be a step in the right direction. It would show that most people are not brain dead and still have a survival instinct. No, the reason the Prof wouldn't tell them is that, were he to do so, it would not have any profound effect on them at all.

He sighed deeply and waited for his friend's arrival. It made him smile when people referred to him as the 'Prof'. What they didn't know was that he spelt it 'Proph', because he was prophetic. He had been so since he was a child in Adelaide. Being abandoned by his mother could have had something to do with his gift. Or, seeing as she did not care for him, he might have been dropped on his head as a baby. The point is that he had, what some people call, the second sight. He could tell what was going to happen, well in some instances. Clairvoyance is not an accurate science. He wanted to be able to share his visions with someone - anyone. But everyone he encountered was too prejudiced, dumb or full of self-importance for them to do anything useful with the forecast. Even Abbott, although he was improving, was not ready for the knowledge. The Proph sighed again. At least he wouldn't be around when the curtains lifted to reveal what was behind the illusion. He knew it wouldn't be pretty.

At just about that time Abbott turned up, ready to carry on the game and enjoy one of Jack's Big Burgers.

Dr Ulysses Covington was a jubilant man. A contract with DARPA would ensure big time funding for years to come. The trip had been a huge success.

Angela Durant knew that he had been to the states on important business and she was gagging to hear the details. "Okay, don't keep me in suspense any longer."

"Give me a chance, Angela. I've only just got back," he laughed. Ulysses looked at the petite middle-aged woman who had been his right-hand person for ten years. She had worked as long and hard as any in the company. "What would you say if I said we had a lucrative contract with DARPA?"

"Her eyes fairly bulged in their sockets. "I would say I'm dreaming." Then she said, "You not winding me up, are you?"

He tossed her a Manilla folder. "It's only a temporary contract. We'll get the proper one when we're all agreed on the details."

Angela tended to act on impulse, which is why she had never made CEO of the company. It was also why she jumped up and gave Ulysses a huge hug. "Congratulations, this contract is fantastic news."

Ulysses secretly agreed with her sentiments. Despite his strict upbringing by an authoritarian mother he had managed to look kindly upon the world. Ulysses considered himself very fortunate to be in a position where his skill and endeavour could be beneficial to humankind. He looked down at Angela. "So far, only you and I know about this, and I want to keep it that way, at present. So don't breathe a word of this outside this office."

The Proph also felt he was a benefit to the world, or at least he would be if the world lets him be so. He looked across the table at Abbott. The reporter was working out his next move very carefully. The bishop he had just lost left him at a distinct disadvantage.

The Prof made one of his 'left field' pronouncements. "Newton understood what Kant meant, you know."

Abbott moved his knight. It wasn't a strong move, but it was the best he could muster. "I didn't know that."

"Oh yes, some unpublished articles of his, Heresy Papers, unearthed during the last century, proclaimed his firm conviction that the mechanical description of the universe had to be completed by a more natural philosophy based on the physics principles of particle movement." Prof then moved his rook into a protective position.

"Why are they called the Heresy Papers?" Abbott asked, finishing off his coffee.

"Because until nanotechnology discoveries validated them, challenging the second law of thermodynamics, was considered science blasphemy, by the likes of Einstein, Eddington and many others. Nanotechnology has clearly demonstrated that Newton's conviction belongs to the physics functioning of a quantum biological evolution." The Proph then went in for the kill. Checkmate, I believe, he trumped with a pop-eye wink.

Reluctantly the journalist toppled his king. "One day, Prof, I'm going to whoop the pants off you." Abbott smiled. "Now what were you saying?"

The Prof had him hooked and was reeling him in. "It's taken around three hundred years for science to understand Newton's more profound physics."

"So, if science now agrees that Newton was right, what's the problem?"

The Proph chuckled. "Nanoscience finds it difficult to deny, but other hard sciences stick to their old mindset. Newton's balancing 'First Principle' was that of the ancient Platonic Science for Ethical Ends. Platonic means much more than love without sex."

"What else does it mean?"

"Plato knew that Anaxagoras' Nous concept was lacking ethics because it did not follow a fractal self-organising principle. Professor Petar Gugic, who published that the Nous (mind) is constructed upon fractal logic, made this connection."

There was a lot of stuff Abbott couldn't follow. He feverishly typed notes into his phone, to follow up later. "Wow Prof, you're like a walking encyclopaedia." Then Abbott remembered he had never seen the Prof walking. He made to get up.

The Proph grabbed his hand like a drowning man grasping onto a piece of flotsam. He wanted Abbott to be the one. "This clearly demonstrates that the physics and geometrical principles upholding so-called Western Democracy has no ethical content, which is why the world is in such global chaotic turmoil."

"You are a little ray of sunshine today, Prof," Abbott grinned.

<http://www.sustainability-research.org/science-art/>

Kurzweil on coming revolutions in genetics, nanotech and ... (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.theequitykicker.com/2010/08/19/kurzweil-on-coming-revolutions-in-gene>

Chapter 5

Olivier Leroy was surprised to see other fit looking men awaiting their interviews. He had just finished filling in his form, which had some questions he thought a bit odd when a door opened, and the first applicant got ushered in. The Black athlete went back to his form. Why would they want to know if he would be willing to have improved memory, hearing, stamina and a sharper intellect? Why wouldn't he? Olivier thought. Any such enhancements could only be useful. But for them to make a point about such improvements, on the form, had him a little concerned.

Then he received a phone call. It was that journalist. "Sorry man, it kind of difficult for me to talk now."

"Heron denies sending in a spy. And, honestly, I can't see why they would bother with infiltrating ARL."

Olivier walked towards the door, keeping one eye on the interview room. "Look, man, this is a terrible time."

"I just need to know the names of other people who were in ARL."

Agitated, the athlete said, "I don't know man. It was a long time ago."

Now Abbot was getting pissed. "The article goes in the paper tomorrow, and right now your story is not holding up."

The interview room door opened, and the applicant left. "Fuck man, I could get called any minute. I'll talk later."

Abbott thought, well fuck you, mister. I have better things to do than squeeze bits of info out of you, dick head. Abbott, becoming agitated and frustrated, needed to calm down. But he was blocked at every turn. It didn't make sense, though. Why was it so difficult to find out anything? Grabbing a snack, he checked his emails. Among the usual, bigger dick, stay harder longer, chain letter mail, he spotted one from a Helen Cleaver, webmaster for the ATL (Anti Transhumanist League), At last, he had a contact.

Abbott wrote:

Hi Helen, I'm trying to track down members of a now defunct action group called the Anti Robotic League. Do you know of an Olivier Leroy and Abe Lincoln? Please contact me. He gave his mobile phone number, then pressed send. Now all he could do is wait.

He organised some food for himself and transcribed his notes from his conversation with the Prof. He searched for Plato's nous. Wikipedia offered, Hermotimus of Clazomenae, who, during the 6th century BCE, was the philosopher who first proposed, the idea of nous being fundamental in the cause of change. He stated that physical entities are static, while the mind creates the change. He belonged to a class of philosophers who held a formal theory of material and active principle entangled in the origin of the universe.

Further research revealed that Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, born about 500 BC, was the first person who is known to have explained the concept of the Nous (Mind).

Anaxagoras said the Nous arranged all other things in the cosmos in their proper order and set them rotating, and continued to control them to some extent. The Nous had an unusually strong connection with living things.

This Nous concept was fascinating to the journalist. The idea that those ancient philosophers knew about the workings of the mind and the nature of atoms all that time ago, he found mind boggling.

Still, on the trail, Abbott checked on Plato who, he found, used the Nous concept in many ways, which was not unusual in everyday Greece at the time and often referred to 'good sense'. Plato expressed disagreement with Anaxagoras' Nous because of the philosopher's materialist understanding of causation. Socrates reckoned that Anaxagoras failed to develop an entirely adequate teleological and dualistic understanding of the mind of nature. Plato argued that relying on sense perception can never lead to real knowledge, only opinion. He argued that Nous must somehow perceive truth directly.

This philosophy was heady stuff, and Abbott needed a short break.

He grabbed a coffee and went back to work and delved deeper into Platonic thought.

Plato posited that what our mind sees directly, so as to understand things, must not get caught up with constantly changing material things, but rather, unchanging entities that exist in a different way (forms and ideas). Plato knew that Nous and perception were dual aspects of one physical activity. He held that perception was the source of knowledge and understanding (not the other way around).

It was all becoming too involved for Abbott's brain. But what it came down to, he figured, was that a universal consciousness existed that had something in common for all life. This simple understanding seemed to fit in with what the reporter knew about fractal geometry. He'd read, somewhere fractal logic referred to a self-similarity with each part of the pattern being almost identical to the whole. He made a record of this point to tell the Prof the next time they met.

Ulysses Covington looked at the letter again. It had the DARPA letterhead and was from Colonel Cormack. He congratulated Heron Robotics for getting the contract and requested his presence at an official signing presentation. He would be met at the airport and taken to his prepaid luxury suite to await further instructions. It sounded like directions from a James Bond Movie. The letter was more of a summons than a request. There was more than a hint of a suggestion that non-compliance could result in a lost contract. There was an RSVP, and he only had five days to make up his mind.

Dayton Lynsey was a master of poise, even when confronted with a problem involving the use of the reasoning faculties. Lord Lynsey, a nobleman of high intellect, always sought to reach a solution by obtaining as many facts as he could glean bearing upon the question. Dayton despised those of immature mentality, the easily overwhelmed when confronted with even the most elementary intellectual challenges. He learned to be qualified to solve the riddle of his destiny, unlike the sheeple who were led and taught in simple language.

Dayton often walked around his extensive gardens, alone, just him and his universe swapping notes. According to him, his mind was one of the few mature in the world. He saw himself as a philosophical pagan, an intelligent man who, over the years had esoteric and spiritual teachings revealed to him. While the inferior and unqualified minds received only literal, or exoteric, interpretations, he recognised, in the marble statues of gods and goddesses that adorned his grounds, symbolic concretions of abstract truths. As he strolled past his garden statuary he gazed upon his altars, dedicated to Priapus and Pan; Dayton felt their procreative energies warm his being. Dayton, passing his sundial, realised it was time to leave the peacefulness of his garden and address his Soter work.

The Bogangar Headland was one of Helen Cleaver's favourite places. Sometimes Southern Right Whales passed by, and pods of dolphins frolicked in the turquoise ocean. From the cliff tops, the rugged surfers appeared small and fragile, as they rode impossible waves. Helen loved the smell of the sea and had been an avid swimmer, until the accident. She wheeled her chair away from the cliff top, the one she had, in her darkest moments, considered getting too close to the edge. At 35, childless and wheelchair bound prospects seemed poor. They say the darkest hour is before the dawn. She thought that might well work for nature, but she could not see beyond her darkest hour. Life seemed pointless and useless. But some unknown force had made her turn her wheelchair around, just as she was teetering on the edge, in both mind and body. At that moment Helen determined to do something useful with her life.

Some years before, she had turned her attention to the threat of robots and now, to have any independence, she had partially become one. There's irony for you, Helen thought. Like all human-made things and inventions, she saw inherent imperfections as being part of the robotics package. On her website, she had already raised concerns about the intricacy of robotics flooding society. It was high time to remove the rose coloured glasses and have a permanent watchdog committee looking at the potential impact of 'artificial intelligence' on human society.

Helen set up a blog to understand the implications of a world ruled by machines or real robots. Although many contributors argued it seemed highly unlikely that robots would ever achieve such autonomous power, as shown in famous Hollywood movies, such as Terminator or War Games, she wasn't so sure. People would have to be blind not to see the writing on the wall as increasingly advanced and sophisticated robots driven by faster and smarter computers, played ever increasing roles in human society. Human dependence on smart devices, would, eventually, lead to such a robot controlled community.

Helen considered the biggest threat posed by computers and robots was increasing autonomy in unconscious emotionless machines that were bereft of ethical considerations. Robots, with no morals to govern their decisions and actions would become a major threat to humanity, especially as technologists had programmed all AI with a destructive directive.

Another ethical issue Helen saw to be a potential problem with robots was the ongoing debate whether it is ethically and morally right to design robots which take away the jobs of human workers. The view that robots could deal with the mental and onerous tasks currently performed by humans was all well and good to many narrow-viewed folks. But what about when robots became brain surgeons, she argued.

Her album of her reminiscences snapped shut as the man approached her. He had dark wavy hair, windblown and longish. His two-day stubble and worn brown leather jacket gave him a rakish look. "Hi I'm Helen", she said, smiling and extending her hand.

Abbott had only seen a head shot of her. He tried hiding his surprise to see her in a wheelchair. He felt some embarrassment at first. "Hi, I'm Abbott."

She laughed to cover his discomfort. "As you can see, I have wheels instead of legs. Well, the legs are still there, but they don't do much."

Her light-heartedness made him feel more at ease. Abbott had no idea as to why he felt uncomfortable around disabled people? Did he have a fear that it could so easily be him in the wheelchair? "I'm interested in your Website," he said.

The day was warming up. She felt the healing heat of the sun on her face. "You can push while we talk if you like."

As they moved across the top of the headland, Helen said, "It surprised me that anyone would still remember let alone be interested in ARL."

"Leroy brought it to my attention. He said that Abe Lincoln was a spy for Heron Robotics. Can you confirm that?"

"We were indeed set up by somebody. How else would Heron know what we were doing? I didn't know who Abe was, but if there was a plant in our midst, he is the most likely candidate."

"So, what exactly was ARL? I mean what was your philosophy?"

"When early researchers in artificial intelligence tried playing god we knew the writing was on the wall. It was only a matter of time before the robots made to serve us would become smart enough to dominate us. Remember Deep Blue?"

"Wasn't it the IBM computer that beat what's-his-name at chess."

"Yes. Anyhow, we became concerned that robots would displace workers, leaving humans without jobs."

"But wasn't the argument that most robotic devices simply do a particular job better and with fewer errors (once programmed correctly)."

"Yes, that's true. But once robots take over from humans, it's the thin end of the wedge. We knew it was only a matter of time before robots took over people."

"Okay, so what happened then?"

A few like-minded students and I formed ARL and looked for a target to make our case. Heron Robotics was it."

"Why did you target that particular company?"

Helen turned to look at Abbott. There were very few companies specialising in robotics at the time - in Australia at least. And Heron is local and didn't seem that well guarded. But there was something else."

"Oh! What was that, Helen?"

"Our worst fears were founded. They were experimenting with turning humans into robots."

"Do you mean Transhumanism?"

"That's what they call it now. Once we heard Heron was carrying out secret experiments to combine genetics with bionics, we tried raising the alarm. But their PR stuff was good, and everyone seemed to be excited about this brave new technology."

"So your group decided to go activist?"

"That was when we got Olivier involved."

"From what he told me he was just in it for the money."

"We accepted that. We just needed the athlete to get us in."

"Was Abe with you guys that night?"

"Yes, he kept us motivated. He was excellent at that."

They came to a public bench on the headland. Abbot sat down. Now, at the same height as the paraplegic woman, he said, "Helen, how did you find out about the research Heron was doing, if they kept it a secret?"

Now facing him, she said, "Someone found out. Come to think of it; it was probably Abe."

Abbott nodded. "That would make sense if he worked there and if they were setting a trap. But what gets me is why they thought your small group would mount a terrorist attack against them."

Helen became animated. "They're the terrorists, not us."

"I guess that's a matter of perspective," Abbott smiled. "But it still doesn't answer my question."

Helen sensed the interview was coming to an end. This realisation saddened her as she had enjoyed his company. "Do you fancy going for a coffee?" she asked, wanting to find out more about him.

He checked the time, grinned, and said, "Sure, I've got time for a quick one."

They sat in the Pandanus Restaurant, drinking cappuccinos, chatting away. He learned that Helen was a kindergarten teacher, a job she loved. But the auto accident had put an end to that. She became deeply depressed and unmotivated. With her career in ruins and her life severely affected she knew she had to find something that got her up in the mornings.

"I can't imagine how terrible that must have been for you." Abbott sympathised.

"No, of course, you can't. The worst part was that I felt numb emotionally. I wanted desperately to feel something. After all, it was only my legs that had lost all sensation. I wanted to feel anything. Do you know what feeling came back first?"

"No."

"Anger. I felt intense anger. After going through three of the grief stages, the anger was still there, stronger than ever. So I had to channel it into something. As soon as I heard about Olivier's release from prison, memories of the ARL days came flooding back. I had a channel in which to direct my anger. So here we are," she smiled.

Abbott checked his watch again. "Helen, I've enjoyed this meeting." He handed her his card. "If you think of anything to do with the case, give me a ring." He could see sadness clouding her smile, as she took the card.

Nous - Wikipedia. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nous>

Chapter 6

Dayton Lynsey had a job to do. It wasn't going to be pleasant, but Soter agents didn't question it. Dayton had to take certain steps to advance the cause, but he still didn't know everything about his mission. Lord Lynsey had no idea he was to be a catalyst to bring several elements together. He didn't even know the location for the catalysing to take place. Dayton had travelled widely to all cities of the ancient world and those in particular that had temples for public worship and offering. In each community dwelt philosophers and mystics, who, profoundly versed in Nature's lore carried on the old traditions. In ancient times these individuals usually banded together, forming seclusive philosophic and religious schools. The more important of these groups were known as the 'Mysteries'. Descendants of such people still existed. Dayton Lynsey had made it his life's work to seek them out and prime them for when their help would be needed.

Many of the great minds of antiquity got themselves initiated into these secret fraternities by strange and mysterious rites, some of which were incredibly cruel. Dayton saw the Mysteries as 'Sacred dramas' performed at particular times to bring about specific results. He was versed in the most important shows, those of Ast, Sabazius, Cybele, and Eleusis. He had been initiated and instructed in the secret wisdom, preserved for ages.

Although Dayton had never met the Proph and wasn't likely to, they both shared a deep respect and love of Plato, who was an initiate of one of the Khemmetian/Egyptian 'Holy Orders'. Later, he got severely criticised because he revealed many of the secret philosophic principles of the Mysteries in his writings. Dayton pondered such profundities as he sat looking out of the huge window, at the gardens of Lynsey Hall beyond.

Lynsey Hall, like most stately homes referred to as such, was misnamed. Such residences may or may not have started out as halls, but they developed into sprawling homes, castles for noble families of many generations.

Margaret Daintree married into the family when she became wedded to Dayton ten years before. She had an aristocratic air about her and seemed to float down the spiralling marble staircase, into the entrance area, with its array of heraldic memorabilia. She was on her way to the kitchen when Lynsey called her. They saw very little of each other these days. He was always chasing up something odd or was locked up in his study. It used to worry her, and she felt very lonely at times, in their sprawling stone icebox. But she had learned to compensate for his neglect with her social occasions, one of which she was about to organise when her husband stopped her. "Yes, what do you want?" she asked, sounding as haughty as she could.

"Something came up that I need to attend to, my dear. I'll be away for a couple of weeks."

Fine by me, she thought. "Oh, I hope everything is alright."

"Nothing for you to trouble yourself with, my dear."

A sharp looking Corporal picked Ulysses Covington up at Dulles International Airport and conveyed the Australian to Langley, a few miles from Washington DC. Ulysses was awestruck! The DS&T (Department of Science & Technology) was massive with a labyrinth of corridors and numerous departments. Eventually, the robotics expert came to a door with a plaque reading 'Col. B

Cormack'. In response to Ulysses' knock, Colonel Cormack came to the door to greet him. "I trust you had a comfortable flight," The retired officer said, inviting the Australian into his office.

"A bit jet-lagged," Covington answered, forcing a smile.

"Isn't this place something," Barney crowed. "Spending time here is like spending time inside the imagination of the CIA."

Ulysses, feeling overwhelmed and wondering if that was a good place to be, just nodded.

As he followed the colonel through the building complex, he explained, "All our DS&T workers are technical intelligence officers, but they work in many different disciplines ranging from computer programmers and engineers to scientists and analysts."

Ulysses wondered why, when Americans give information, it always sounded like some sales pitch?

Barney continued explaining, "The DS&T partners with many other organisations in the Intelligence, military, academia, and national laboratories. By working with the private sector, like Heron Robotics, we all get to achieve mission success. The DS&T brings unique tools, capabilities, and expertise to our most difficult national security challenges."

Ulysses wondered what it was all about, but instead of asking questions he meekly followed his guide.

As they passed computer programmers, Barney stated, "We are assigned around the world, meeting regional requirements for clandestine collection, conducting audio and video surveillance, providing secure communications for CIA assets, and training

The Engineering section was next. The Colonel commented "We are stationed along with National Clandestine Service officers in the field, advising and assisting them on the full range of technical operations and how they can augment, and confirm aspects of their trade craft.

They finally arrived at the sign saying Department of Science and Technology. Barney turned to Ulysses, "Here, they enable tactical operations by analysing data as well as writing longer-term strategic assessments. They design, build and operate reconnaissance satellite systems to support global information superiority. They also research, develop and apply advanced technologies that provide the nation with a significant intelligence advantage, and much more."

"Okay, I know what you people are doing here but what am I doing here?"

Barney grinned, "All will be revealed soon."

Olivier Leroy was one of the chosen, but it was not a religious experience, despite the white gown. He signed the disclaimer giving Heron Robotics and Heron NRG the right to enhance his eyesight. The money was in his account, and an anaesthetist was counting him down to sleep. The surgeon and his team then began their work. With delicate and precise laser surgery a small spiral cuff electrode was placed around the optic nerve at the back of his left eye. The surgeon then connected it to a stimulator, implanted in a small depression in his skull. Later, when he came round, Olivier was instructed in the use of the externally used camera, which sent information to the stimulator. This function, in turn, translated them into electrical signals that directly stimulated his optic nerve.

"What the fuck have you done to me?" he asked Dr Marco Contoldo, the head scientist.

Marco scanned the notes. Mice and rabbits didn't question the tests. But now he had to work with humans consultation had to be approached with decorum. "Mr Leroy, you have nothing to be

concerned about, the procedure was a success, and you should start to gain the benefits from enhanced vision within a few days."

Not mollified, Olivier said "What's with this camera gizmo and the fucking implant in my skull. I didn't sign up for that."

Dr Contoldo smiled, "Actually you did." He passed the contract the ex-athlete had signed, across the desk. "But there is no cause for concern. The procedure is entirely reversible. In fact, the trial is for only three months. In the meantime, you will report on a weekly basis."

Harold A Scholfield sat, reading Abbott's story about Olivier Leroy while sipping tea. It would entertain some readers and help to pay Abbott's weekly bills. But other than that it offered nothing. The Proph knew things that would make a great story, beyond the nightmares of the common folk. Things 'he' would rather not know. Hidden knowledge came to him, not as lightning bolt revelations, but rather as quiet thoughts breaking through the noise of his mind. However, his years of meditation training had quietened his mind to some extent. He knew that human survival was at stake. Well, he didn't need to be an Einstein to know that the world was going to hell. Pollution, poverty and political corruption were clear signs that the Western Empire was doomed and would crumble in decay, the fate of all previous civilisations. But this time, there was something else, a hidden element that had infiltrated the human mind over hundreds of years. It was like a cancer that could eat away it's host without being noticed. Then it strikes with the deadliness and speed of a cobra, killing its host horribly and painfully. The Proph knew cancer that had been eating away at the human psyche was ready to strike. And it would do so by causing destructive physics to go too far. Or it could occur because the Earth's biosphere turned into to grey nano-goo. Or humanity's final hour could come about at the behest of a mad scientist who finally achieved making a black hole. There again it could be a nanowar in a briefcase, which had enough deadly toxin to wipe out the human race. There were many ways humanity could wipe itself out of which the socially engineered myopic minds of the populace remained blissfully unaware.

Harold sighed deeply. It was the way of things, and at this late hour, there was little people could do to avoid their extinction. Humanity needed new information, new survival information and it wasn't going to come from television or newspapers. The way the Proph saw it, it had to come from moral mathematical consciousness, the language of a good universe. He looked up from his reverie, to see Abbott, grinning in his face.

"I see you've read the article, Prof."

"It's big on conjecture but lacking in fact," the Proph returned.

"I don't think that's the end of it. I believe there is a lot more to this than meets the eye." Then Abbott ordered a coffee and sat down. The chess pieces were smartly lined up, ready to do battle.

Before the white pawn made the first move, the Proph said: "When the scientific scrolls of the Alexandrian Library were burned in the 400's because, according to Church superstition, they were the Devil's work, Europe entered the Dark Ages, a horrific period of ignorance, fear and disease."

Abbott nodded, sagely, but offered nothing.

The Proph moved his piece, saying "Later, Plato and Aristotle were forgiven, by Augustine, for being born Pagan,"

"That was big of him."

Augustine also had the Greek Philosopher elevated to the level of Church Father, yet their work was considered evil. How do you figure that?"

Abbott moved his pawn. "How did the Church explain that?"

The Prof stared at the reporter. "That doesn't matter. The point here is that irrationality and confusion spread throughout the Holy Roman Empire. Because, although the Church considered Plato to be one of the good guys, anybody caught teaching Platonic ethical mathematics was imprisoned, tortured and finally executed in the name of God."

"Why was studying the Greek works considered an act of heresy, Prof?"

"Because the Church's mathematics came out of Babylon."

"How were they different?"

"Babylonian mathematics gave us the date and time. Platonic ethical science gave us infinity."

Abbott, puzzled, said, "I don't understand."

The Proph said, "Let's get back to our game."

As the match progressed, Abbott, pleased with himself, had the Prof's king backed into a corner.

It was at this moment that the old man came out with one of his pronouncements. "Science is still in the Dark Ages, as proven when Newton's unpublished work was discovered and got dubbed the Heresy Papers."

Abbott felt like a golfer about to putt into the hole when a team member coughs to put them off their game. Sighing, he said, "Okay, so how did the Church come to have so much power over the people?"

The Proph chuckled. "You get people when they are at their most vulnerable, feed them fear and superstition as truth, and they follow you forever."

"That's a bit cynical, isn't it Prof?"

"Cynical or not, it is nevertheless the way religions work."

The Journalist pondered over his move, then guarded a whole row with his remaining rook. Looking up from the board, Abbott said, "What happened to Platonic science after it was banned?"

"Toledo scholars attempted to discover the hidden knowledge, in Spain during the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries. Mohammedan, Christian and Jewish scholars all worked together to bring about the lost ethical science."

"Wow! That's amazing. So did they do it?"

"They set the groundwork for the quest to be transferred to Italy in the 15th Century, where, with the help of Sultan Mehmed II and the Medicis, it became known as the Renaissance."

The Proph snuck in a back way and snatched one of the reporter's bishops.

Damn, Abbott hadn't seen that coming. In the Davinci Code film, it said that Leonardo understood this secret knowledge."

The bearded man manoeuvred one of his knights into a stronger position. "Leonardo sold out to the Duke of Milan."

"What do you mean?"

"His understanding of technology contributed very little to the knowledge of the forbidden spiritual mathematics ethos, the exact reason for the science-art Renaissance. Leonardo's flying machines had been experimented with centuries earlier by Mohammedan scientists."

"Really!"

"Oh Yes, Abbott. In the 9th Century in Spain, Ibn Firmas constructed and flew a glider off a mountain."

"What? That's a thousand years before the Wright brothers!" Abbot became agitated. "Why weren't we taught this stuff in school?"

The Proph wiped his nose. "So what else haven't we been told? Think about that."

Abbott did, as he drove to Cabarita Beach, to meet with Helen. She had phoned him to say she had more information about the break-in at Heron Robotics. She wouldn't tell him over the phone, and they arranged to meet at her place. After the mental workout with the erudite Prof, he needed some respite. A pleasant chat with Helen might put him in a more relaxing frame of mind.

As he came off a roundabout and drove to the coast, mindful of koala warning signs, the prof's ramblings plagued his mind. Maybe they weren't random ravings. He began to detect an order, a timeline of events, concerning the progression of science. But there were lots of pieces missing, like the bit about an Arabs flying some 500 years before Leonardo came up with his flying machine concepts.

Apart from a ramp to the front door, 30 Tamarind Ave didn't stand out from other houses in the street. It had a lawn out front with a couple of flowerbeds and melaleucas. Helen greeted Abbott at the front door and invited him in. She wheeled through to the kitchen and put on the kettle.

"It's good to see you again," she said, smiling.

"Yes, it is." He genuinely meant it. She was pleasant to be around. "You told me you had something for me."

Helen said, "Yes, I do, but that wasn't the only reason I wanted to see you."

"Oh!" he said, wondering where the conversation was going?

"Don't get me wrong, Abbott, but you seem like a nice person. It's just that I don't have anyone I can share my feelings with."

Oh dear, he thought, feeling somewhat apprehensive. "I'm not sure about this. I'm only a journalist."

She reached out and took his hand. "You are much more than that. You have a warm heart. I know it." She paused, then said, "Before the accident, I had well-toned calves and thighs. Now they are flaccid and withered, hidden under a blanket most of the time."

He didn't know what to say. "Oh, I see." Jeez, that was pathetic, he told himself.

Embarrassed, she said, "How about a cup of tea?"

"That'd be great," he said, feeling let off the hook.

As they had tea and biscuits, she said, "I was thinking about my ARL days, and I remembered something Abe said. It was about Heron carrying out stem cell research. I didn't think too much about it at the time but ..."

"Maybe he was feeding you guys misinformation. I mean if he were a spy he wouldn't be helping you guys, would he?"

She sighed, "Yes, I suppose you could be right. I just thought ..."

He patted her arm, giving her goose bumps. "Don't worry. It's Okay."

She became tearful and grabbed a tissue from a box on the nearby coffee table.

Abbott melted inside. "Someone needs a hug." He crouched down and put his arms around her, and she cried into his shoulder.

Helen felt cared for and protected for the first time in weeks. She put her arms around him and hugged him tightly. "I need a friend right now."

Abbott let her go. "Hows the tea coming along."

"Oh! Sorry," she smiled, wheeling into the compact kitchen.

"Abbott followed, I'll help you."

She stopped and turned to him. "It's okay; I'm not completely helpless."

It felt like a smack in the face to the reporter. Abbott had apparently hit a raw nerve. It was best to back off, and wait in the lounge.

Helen arrived with two mugs of tea, sugar and milk on a tray, and she hadn't spilt a drop.

Neither of them mentioned the incident, and they sat quietly enjoying their tea.

Abbott put his empty cup back on the tray. "Thanks for the tea, Helen. I have to get going but give me a ring if you need someone to talk to," he said, kindly.

"Thank you, Abbott. That means a lot."

Colonel Cormack marched up to the General's office at DARPA HQ, knocked loudly and, upon invitation, entered. "General, the guy from Heron Robotics, is being processed in Langley."

General Lomax looked up, through his smoky cigar haze. "And?"

"Do we have to give him the treatment?" Barney had checked on the protocol for MK Ultra. As a form of mind conditioning, the CIA had first used it in the early 50's. It later received bad press for using unwary test subjects and was officially halted in 1973, officially being the operative word.

"Colonel, I thought we had dealt with this. Do you realise what is at stake here, if Covington gets cold feet?"

Barney said, "I thought the government stopped all that MK Ultra experimental stuff in 1973, but it's still going on. So how come the CIA is still using it?"

"Barney, you know better than to ask questions like that. Hell, Mike Robbins from SID is doing me a favour, so keep it hush, hush."

"I won't say anything. But Jesus, the intelligence community is leaking like a fucking sieve these days. And it's my ass on the line too."

Ulysses Covington didn't know how he got to be sitting alone in the darkened room. He wasn't restrained physically in any way, but he wasn't able to move and couldn't take his eyes off the Wizard of Oz that was playing in front of him. A disembodied voice gave him a particular interpretation of the movie's storyline. The voice kept repeating that 'somewhere over the rainbow' is the 'happy place' At the same time, he felt increasing degrees of physical discomfort. His mind had to go to the happy place to dissociate from the mounting pain of the electromagnetic impulses.

The handler was pleased. The subject was responding well. Dr Covington had a strong sense of loyalty and dedication. The handler had to channel that commitment and focus it on the DARPA project. The subject was only there for a few days, so the handler had to go for the Alpha effect. Alpha was within the base control personality, making it the easiest to manipulate quickly. The subject needed to be mentally healthy as well as dedicated. The next stage would be to give the subject greater physical strength and visual acuity, which would be accomplished by deliberately subdividing the subject's personality. This process, in essence, caused a left brain-right brain division, allowing for a programmed union of Left and Right through neurone pathway stimulation. Upon completion, the subject would be totally unaware of any mind manipulation but would no longer pose any risk to the project. Ulysses remembered nothing of the process once it was complete.

<https://www.cia.gov/offices-of-cia/science-technology/who-are-we.html>

Chapter 7

Dayton Lynsey looked through the powerful magnifier at the delicate fragments of papyrus. They were spread out in front of him; they looked like pieces of a big jigsaw with most pieces missing. He looked up at Dr William Tate, The curator of the Queensland Museum's Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan. He'd scrutinised over a hundred fragments of the ancient writing, dedicated to Ma'at, the Khemmetian Goddess of Universal law and order. Rubbing his tired eyes, Dayton looked up at the curator. "This is an extraordinary find, Bill. Thank you for alerting me."

Dr Tate had been instructed to let the English lord in on the fantastic find. He said, "So they are part of the main book of the dead?"

"Yes, further parts of a very delicate jigsaw". Dayton was looking for particular pieces, but he kept that to himself.

Dr Tate had never heard of the pompous Pom with the shaved head and trimmed goatee. He thought he knew all the big names in Egyptology, but he'd never come across a Dayton Lynsey. Looking at the English academic, he said, "This is amazing. It will give the Museum some much-needed publicity."

Lynsey struck verbally like a death adder. "I don't think so, Dr Tate. You will not tell anybody at present. We will tell you when you can disclose this to the media."

"With respect, Dr Lynsey I'm in charge of this department", William stated, barely keeping himself in check.

Dayton remained calm. He'd dealt with 'office dictators' many times before. Smiling, he said, "Doctor, do you know what a 'D' notice is?"

"Of course."

"Right. I'm putting a 'D' notice on these fragments."

William spluttered, "What do you mean?"

"It means that you will keep quiet and honour the Official Secrets Act, you signed when I arrived here."

"I didn't sign any ..." Then he remembered the document. "I thought that form was for me to authorise your viewing."

"I am not responsible for your assumptions, Dr Tate. Now, I need a list of anybody else who knows about this. And I need it now."

Feeling hot under the collar, William just wanted to distance himself from the officious, pompous, English prick, before he did something he would later regret.

Academics who tried to big note themselves cut no ice with Lord Lynsey. As soon as Dr Tate had left to get the list, Dayton took out his smartphone and took macro shots of particular pieces of the papyrus. These he then eMailed to a private account.

Dayton got his list from the aggrieved Dr Tate. He eMailed that also. The group would make sure the people named in it kept quiet about the papyrus. With his work completed it was time for Dayton to relax. He flew private charter to Sydney, in preparation for his patronage of the Opera House that evening.

Gavril Takac, the recipient of the attached scroll fragment images, downloaded them to work with them at a higher resolution. The Russian emigree checked the portions against a screen image of the entire Pyramid text scroll. By superimposing the fragments sent by the 'Catalyst' over the parchment layer, the picture became more complete. Now he could see that the subject of the book was the Chief Builder of the Temple of Amun: Amenhotep. He was believed to have held office in the reign of King Amenhotep II (the great-great-grandfather of Tutankhamun). But Takac was looking for something else. Some indication that the sacred geometry and symbology served as a form of mind control upon those who entered the temple. The recipient studied hard into the night, looking for patterns that could affect the brain in certain ways. Although not known of, initiated scribes, throughout the course of history, recorded several accounts of rituals and practices resembling mind control. One of the earliest writings giving reference to the use of occultism to manipulate the mind was in the Egyptian Book of the Dead. The book was a compilation of rituals, heavily studied by secret societies. It described torture and intimidation (to create trauma). The use of potions (drugs) and the casting of spells (hypnotism), ultimately resulting in the total enslavement of the initiate. Other parts of the papyrus related to black magic, sorcery and demon possession (where outside forces manipulated the victim). It was the forerunner of 21st Century mind control; that became a science in the modern sense of the term, with MK Ultra being a good example. Thousands of subjects were systematically observed, documented and used in experiments. At last Takac had good news for the catalyst.

A little bit of intimidation normally did the trick. Physical violence was not necessary unless people didn't get the point. Nick Gibbon had no personal gripes with the people he threatened. As Nick saw it, he was just a messenger. However, his message was not so much a telegram as a threat-a-gram. This time, Nick had the target's home address, so he didn't even have to contact the subject directly.

He sat in his car, just up from 30 Brisbane Street, listening to classical music on the car radio. Nick munched on hot chips while waiting for the subject to leave. He knew the subject would be going out because he had arranged to meet with the reporter on the pretext he had some pertinent info on the Leroy case.

At 6:15 pm the subject left his home and drove off in a Mazda sedan. At 6:30 pm Nick Gibbon was inside, creating havoc. Before leaving, he left a note on the coffee table. After which he fled, leaving no trace of his presence.

Abbott sat in his car, waiting at the shopping centre in Kingscliff. The source who phoned him was running late. "Fuck, he must have got cold feet or something," he cursed to the heavens. Just then Helen called him. Shit! That was all he needed. The day had been a bastard. He hadn't eaten since breakfast, which meant he missed out on the Prof and chess. "Hi Helen, how are you?"

"Wondering how I'm going to be able to eat a jumbo size pizza all by myself. I don't suppose you're hungry."

He was ravenous. Why not? His meeting was shot. "Love to, be there in 10 minutes."

"10 minutes. Where are you?"

"Kingscliff. Just down the ..."

"I do know where Kingscliff is."

As they ate pizza together and cracked a bottle of red, Helen said, "Thanks for coming round. It gets lonely here at times."

Abbot finished chewing. "Thanks for the meal. I hadn't eaten or played chess, all day."

She laughed, "You're a chess junkie."

"I like chess- yes. But it's not just that. The old guy I play with is interesting. Everyone knows him as the Prof. He seems pretty destitute, but he knows and shares interesting stuff."

"Like what?" she asked, handing him her plate.

From the sink, he replied, "Oh, stuff about science and ancient philosophers."

"Sounds riveting," she laughed. She hadn't laughed so much for a long time.

As the evening turned into night and the dishes washed, Helen wheeled her chair up close to Abbot. She took hold of his hand. "Can you lift me up and place me on the sofa?"

He looked at her thinking how hard such a simple thing he took for granted must be for her. "Er, sure," he said, placing one arm under her knees and the other under her right arm. She was no light weight. Bracing himself, Abbot got her onto the lounge, feeling the softness of her breast as he did so, he felt his manhood stirring.

She felt his touch but never mentioned it. Helen thought about how Fred used to caress her when they made love. Although she had no feeling below the point of her spinal injury, Helen still had memory sensations of being turned on sexually. "Abbott, why don't you sit down beside me for a while?"

He could think of a lot of reasons, but he hadn't been in intimate female company for weeks. "Sure," he muttered, feeling her body warmth as their hips touched.

"Can you put my legs on your lap? I have no feeling there, but it's still pleasant."

Abbott did so and felt himself getting turned on. This sexual feeling can't be right, his judgement said. He tried moving her legs away from his unruly erection. Of course, she couldn't feel it but just to be on the safe side.

She couldn't feel it, but she could see the bulge in his jeans. She smiled, "Abbott, I do believe you're getting turned on."

He could feel the redness and wondered if she could see his embarrassment.

She rescued him, saying, "It's okay you know. I'm feeling it as well, and I would love it if you made love to me."

Abbott couldn't believe his ears - or his luck. But having sex with a paraplegic woman! He badly wanted her, but his prejudice, which horrified him, stood in the way. To refuse, would be a huge insult to Helen. "Are you sure?" It seemed a safe response.

She placed her hands behind his head and drew Abbott to her. As they kissed, her hand got busy with the zip of his jeans. The deep French kiss made her feel as though she'd gone back in time to the way it used to be between her and Fred. As they kissed, Helen moved events along by taking Abbott's hand and placing it on her breast.

Unable to stop himself, Abbott caressed them greedily. As he sucked and kissed them, she moaned and sighed softly.

Helen felt like she was in heaven, her upper body writhing. But her ecstasy was tainted by the harsh reality of how much she missed the sexual tingle between her legs. But this was the best it had been

since the accident. Although she had no vaginal sensation, her mind made up for it. Erotic memories abounded from her past. It was all she had, And sometimes, like the present time, it was enough for her to achieve orgasm.

Lynne Becker, stretched while standing on the balcony, 25 storeys above street level overlooking the Boston waterfront. She had moved there, from New York, after being employed as chief of robotics at Boston Cybertronics, a go-ahead company that built advanced robots. Her department specialised in behaviours: mobility, agility, dexterity and speed. In her view, Transhumanism was the only viable way for humanity to continue on Earth. As a purely biological species, Humanity was destroying and polluting its home. If Transhumanism did not come to the rescue, Lynne gave humanity another twenty years, tops, So she was entirely dedicated to the robotic cause. Her long time hero, Isaac Asimov, one of the world's most renowned science fiction writers, had long been her inspiration. During his busy life, Asimov wrote over 470 books and came up with the Three Laws of Robotics in 1942 which many science fiction story writers still used as a character platform for robot moral behaviour.

These three laws were:

1. A robot may not injure a human being, or through inaction allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey the orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the 1st law.
3. A robot must protect its existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the 1st or 2nd law.

Dr Becker firmly believed in these laws, but they became clouded where Transhumanism was concerned. Many scientists, including Stephen Hawking, warn that AI is the biggest threat to human kind.

Once bionics became more important than carbon based life when humans and robotics entangle and cyborgs become a reality as a 'natural Earth species, such laws will no longer be possible, or relevant. Although it went against her principles, Lynne Becker accepted such a necessity. In her book, humans proved to be bad tenants of the Earth. Perhaps intelligent cyborgs could do better.

Lynne went inside and shut out the city noises below. Even 25 stories up, she could hear the sounds of human activity at street level. Lynne checked the time. Damn! She had to get a wriggle on, to be in time for the meeting with Colonel Cormack, in her office in thirty minutes.

The scene that met Abbott, when he arrived home, was devastating. His place looked like a tornado had ripped through it. There was a mess everywhere. The only part of his home not ransacked was his coffee table, with the ominous looking note on it. Still, in profound shock, Abbott reached for the piece of paper. He took several deep breaths to try and calm himself. He felt hatred for the perpetrator who had violated his private world. It was a though somebody had gotten into his head and fucked with his mind. All feelings of guilt about screwing a person with paralysis disappeared. He gingerly unfolded the note. It read, 'LEAVE THE LEROY CASE ALONE!' That was it, pure and straightforward. Then he noticed the small print. 'Hope you like the way I've rearranged your flat. If you persist, it will be your limbs that get the same treatment. A cold chill shot up his spine. With a shaking hand, he grabbed his phone. He pressed Phil's contact, waited, then spoke, "Some bastard has done my fucking place over."

"Abbott, do you know what time it is?"

"Yes, but I've been threatened."

"Jesus, can't we discuss this tomorrow?"

"I've been warned to forget the Leroy story."

"Fuck, Abbott. We were asleep."

"Well, you're fucking lucky. I can't even find my bed."

Matthew Sheen rubbed his tired eyes. He had spent hours poring over the employment records. Nobody called Abraham Lincoln had shown up. It didn't surprise him because it would have been a false name. If he were a company spy, Abe Lincoln would have been a code name. Matthew was looking for a link between the two. He figured that if Heron had used an employee to spy on ARL, it would probably have been someone from security. He was checking the security staff records when he came across a passport-type- photo of a man sporting a bizarre-looking Abraham Lincoln beard. Profile details showed an address and phone number. He smiled, "Gotcha!"

Olivier Leroy started getting headaches a couple of days after the implant. He contacted Dr Contoldo and got his receptionist.

"Dr Contoldo is not available at present Mr?"

"Mr Leroy. Look, when will he be available?"

"What is the nature of your enquiry?"

"I'm on the testing programme, and I am experiencing some uncomfortable side effects."

"I will leave him a message to call you. But I wouldn't worry if I were you. It's normal for the body to have to adjust."

Yeah, lady, well you're not the one with the fucking disc in your head, he thought. "Are you a doctor?" he asked.

"No, Mr Leroy, I'm not. But I deal people with similar complaints daily."

"Yes, well do the job you're paid for and get Dr Contoldo to ring me."

He replaced the receiver. So much for Contoldo's 24/7 pledge. Olivier felt dizzy and had to sit down.

Ulysses felt on top of the world, a new man, since getting back from his American trip. For the first time, he had not even suffered any jetlag. His first job, after arriving at HERON NRG, 'the new branding for his company' was to send out a memo to all departments involved in R&D. It informed all agencies that DARPA projects had to be given priority over everything else on the table. All progress reports were to be sent directly to him. The initial contract was worth several million dollars, and he had it, signed and sealed, in his safe. The brief for 'All Seeing Eye' sat on his desk. He looked at another report that was waiting in his inbox. It's title 'Latest advance in Robotics' was highlighted in red. That meant it required his personal attention. He read that two makers on opposite ends of the globe, Ivan Owen in Bellingham, Washington and Richard Van As in South Africa, teamed up to build a custom robotic hand. It had been made for Liam, a five-year-old South African boy who was born without fingers on his right hand. Ulysses spoke into his intercom.

"Susan, Get David Frome." David Frome managed the Robotics Department, which was now separate from NRG.

Phil Rosendale, unshaven and grumpy, scrawled article positions on the page-gridded whiteboard, in his office. Hearing someone enter his domain, he turned and faced Abbott Gallagher. "What were you on about late last night?"

When I returned home, my flat had been turned over. The intruder left this threatening note." The reporter handed the warning to his editor.

Phil put on his reading glasses. "Have you reported the break-in to the police?"

"I wanted to speak with you first."

"Yes, but not at one in the morning. Christ, I didn't even have time to shave this morning."

Abbott felt bad about that. "Yeah, sorry, but it was a bit of a shock."

Phil sat behind his desk. "Close the door and give me a blow-by-blow."

Not on your life, Abbott thought, remembering the wild, crazy sex. "I received a call from somebody who claimed to have some dirt on the Heron case."

"Bloody hell mate. Don't tell me you fell for that one."

"Well, how the hell was I to know? Anyhow, the source didn't turn up at our arranged meet."

"No surprises there. the intruder was probably busy doing your place over."

"Brilliant, Einstein."

"You dumb ass. You fell for the oldest trick in the book."

"Okay, maybe you can stop rubbing it in and listen for a minute."

Phil stopped smirking.

Abbott stared at his boss. "This tells us two things: One, Heron Robotics has something to hide. And two, They employ heavies to ensure it keeps hidden."

"How do you know Heron hired the intruder? It might have been some nutter listening to your radio show."

"Maybe because I haven't mentioned the Leroy case on my show."

"Okay, you've made a good point. So what do you plan to do?"

"Drop the story, of course!"

"Don't be too hasty, Abbott. This assignment is very exciting journalism; it could get you an award."

Abbott, not so enthusiastic, retorted, "It could also get my arms and legs re-shapen if I pursue this story."

Come on Abbott. Where's your backbone?"

"Fuck knows, once the ransacker gets his hands on me."

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Chapter 8

The dust-covered Mercedes taxi came to a halt by the small rundown church. Dayton Linsey paid the driver, told him to wait, donned a broad-brimmed hat and dark glasses, grabbed his leather briefcase, then stepped from the cab, into the searing heat of the day.

Ahmed Ali waited in the shade, on the crumbling steps leading into the little chapel. Although it was only a short walk to the entrance of the old Gnostic Church, Dayton was sweating profusely by the time he got there.

The cleric stood in front of the door in a feeble attempt at guarding the entrance to the religious building. Dayton presented his bonafide. The elderly cleric, satisfied Dayton was expected, stood aside to let the sweating Englishman in the white linen suit, inside, where it is much cooler."

Dayton entered the ancient building. As he passed a window he looked upon the timeless scene, the silver ribbon of the Nile; the triangular sails of the feluccas, as they moved up and down the sacred river. He turned to the priest, "It's very peaceful here, away from the noise of the city."

The Gnostic priest smiled, showing gaps between his teeth.

Dayton, having had his moment, focused on his mission. "Okay, Ahmed, let's see what you have." While waiting for the priest to return with the artefact, the agent placed his case under a wooden bench.

The Gnostic priest returned and proudly held up the jar. "It was discovered last week, buried in the ground, near Nag Hammadi."

"Who discovered it?" Dayton said, examining the jar.

The Arab grinned, "If they knew he took it, he would be in big trouble. So I don't want to say his name." The priest didn't know why the Englishman was in his chapel, but he felt uneasy.

"I need to know where he found it," Lord Lynsey said removing the contents of the jar and placing them on a silk cloth.

"I will ask him for you."

The Englishman looked at the leatherbound codices. There were six in all, and they could have been some of the earliest copies of Gnostic writings. Previously they had only been known of through derogatory references made by early Christians. Dayton knew that the entire history of Christian and pagan Gnosticism was shrouded in the deepest mystery and obscurity, because, although the Gnostics were prolific writers, little of their literature had survived. As exciting as this was, the Englishman was looking for something in particular: a clue about a mystical power, not even spoken of by the few who knew of its existence. He turned to the priest. "Pack them up. I will take them with me."

Unsure, Ahmed said, "I was just told to show them to you. I have no authority to let you take them away."

"They cannot stay here. I will hide these codices somewhere safe until we can study their content."

Ahmed argued, "Nobody comes here except holy men like myself."

Ignoring the Arab's view, Dayton said, "You must not speak of these writings to anybody."

The Arab grinned. "Like I say, nobody comes here." He hesitated then packed up the codices.

"Nevertheless I'm taking them with me. Dayton picked up the jar, and its valuable contents, and walked out of the chapel. He took out his mobile and pressed a contact marked 'Soter'. As soon as he received a response, Dayton said, "Operation Recovery complete. Carry on as planned." He entered the taxi, clasping his treasure. Tapping the driver on his shoulder, Dayton said, "Drive." As the cab drove off, Dayton pressed a sequence of numbers on his phone. A moment later a deafening explosion blew the small church apart, All that was left, once the massive fireball disappeared, was the corpse of a priest, buried beneath tonnes of rubble. The driver, looking at the explosion in the rear view mirror, sat wide-eyed, but said nothing, while he focussed on the hot, dusty road ahead.

Abbott managed to get to Jack's for lunch. It had become something of a ritual, and he hated to miss out. The Prof was waiting at his usual table. One or two regulars cheered when the journalist walked in. One said, "What happened to you mate. The Prof didn't know what to do without his boy."

Abbott said, "Fuck off, Ernie. I'm not that predictable, am I?"

"Not predictable," said Ernie. "I set my watch by you."

"Ernie's words, even if spoken in jest, had a profound effect upon Abbott. Bloody hell I am that predictable, he thought, as he sat down opposite the Prof.

The Proph was stoic about the whole thing. He did not get involved with the cafe banter.

Jack brought Abbott's coffee and maxi burger to his table. I'm going to order something different tomorrow and shock every bastard here, Abbot thought, as he manoeuvred a pawn.

It was not long before the Proph made one of his disjointed statements. "When Columbus discovered America, in 1492 it caused major conflict between Spain and Portugal,"

"Oh," was all the journalist could manage, chewing a mouthful of burger with all the trimmings.

"The Roman Church tried solving the problem by issuing Papal Bulls declaring servitude for all infidels, under Christian Law."

"I bet they liked that,"

"Whether they liked it or not they were enslaved, in the name of God. And the two nations became very prosperous. Other Western countries got into this 'survival of the richest' act and joined the fight to derive power and riches from the slave trade."

Abbot moved his knight. "So the Church was responsible for slavery."

The Proph also moved a knight. "It went beyond that, The 'slave rush' excited daring and patriotic aristocratic adventurers, who supported economic science under the illusion it was for the advancement of their national cultures."

"In what way, Prof?"

Well, in England, such skills as harvesting fish from the oceans became an industry supported by religious doctrine, forbidding the eating of meat on Fridays and Saturdays."

"So that's how the custom came about," Abbott commented, trying to show interest. He had no idea where the conversation was going, but it took his mind off shagging a disabled person and his trashed home. Not to forget about the threat from the intruder, which left him very disturbed. He put the Prof in check with his castle and bishop.

The proph got out of check and prepared his attack. "Yes, and this custom had another advantage. The men who fished at sea became experienced sailors, ripe pickings for the press gangers, who forced then to man ships of war. Naval superiority was necessary to control the lucrative aspects of the slave trade."

Abbott was beginning to see a picture emerging. He protected his king with a castle. "So the Navy protected the slave traders to ensure profits from global trade by exploiting national resources with cheap native labour, all of which came from the methodology of religious persuasion."

The Proph chuckled. "Now you've got it."

"Yes, but where does it get us now?"

The Proph wondered if Abbot was ready for real knowledge? Perhaps soon, if he sticks with it and develops the necessary mental toughness to carry out the arduous task ahead, he thought. Looking up at the board, he continued, "This practice shows us the sham we call civilised society, which is built on unethical practices; the rotten foundations of a doomed culture."

"Okay, I get that we all fucked. Is there anything we can do to change it?"

"We build anew upon a foundation based on ethics. We get rid of corrupt, religions, parliaments, academia, merchants, etc. and we start anew."

"Easier said than done."

"Is it. Descartes, Bacon, Newton and Leonardo, told us we live in a mechanical, not moral universe. People believed them, and that led to the dire straits we find ourselves in now. Newton came up with a more profound understanding of physics, but by then it was too late. The idea of a clockwork cosmos was much more acceptable." The Proph paused, Then added, "So, it doesn't take many people to change the way the world thinks if they have a powerful enough message. And, if you can modify the way people think Abbott, you can change the world."

The Prof's words stayed with Abbott all afternoon. Back home the journalist carried out research about Leonardo da Vinci and discovered the artistic genius became mechanistically-minded after making war machines for the Duke of Milan. Abbott couldn't concentrate for long, though. He was so caught up in his crazy life problems he had forgotten to check his messages. Helen thanked him for last night. Phil wanted to know if he had gotten any further with the story. But the third message, somebody had recorded on his mobile brought him instantly alert. The voice claimed to know the identity of Abe Lincoln. Abbot felt the hairs stand up on his neck. He pressed the phone icon, heard the ring tone, then a voice. "Matthew Sheen speaking."

"I got your message. When and where?"

"I get off at 5 pm, so I'll see you at 5:30ish near the Southport surf life-saving club."

Having made the appointment, Abbott thought of the night before and the warning. Fuck! What was he doing? It could be a trap. The voice sounded different, but that didn't mean anything. Then he looked at the time the call was logged on his phone. It was 6 pm. The reporter, checked his log and found the person who had trashed his place had called to make the appointment at 6:13 pm, thirteen minutes after Sheen's call. So they weren't the same person. Abbott sighed with relief. But his comfort was short-lived. What if more than one person was after him. Who else, though? He could hardly see Mr Sheen ransacking his place.

Harold Scholfield went home every day and prayed. He prayed that the world that was rapidly unravelling would stagger on, at least for another day. Harold didn't know how much longer he could hang on to the poison chalice that had been his lot these many years. Now, he was too old to lock horns with the Diabolus Society. The Proph sensed his time was near and welcomed it. But he had one more job to do.

Dayton Lynsey also had a job to do. A job that only he could do well. With the Gnostic jar under wraps, another piece of the jigsaw was in place. Now he was on another assignment for the Soter Group. Gone was the white linen suit. Instead, he dressed in the everyday clothes of ordinary Israelis - jeans, Nikes and baseball cap. Dayton was waiting at the Yad L'banim in Ra'anana, a city in the heart of the southern Sharon Plain, for Ben Solomon. They hadn't laid eyes on each other for ten years. Ben had requested the visit, so Dayton knew it had to be something important. Seeing the Israeli approaching, The Englishman said, Shalom Ben,"

"Shalom Dayton. It's good to see you, my friend. I have a Jeep waiting to take you to my home."

Dayton followed Ben to the old US Jeep that had certainly seen better days. As they drove along the scenic route, up into the Shomron hills, Dayton found the whole experience exhilarating.

Ben said, "The Green Line, which separates Israel proper from Judea, Samaria and Gaza, is nothing more than the 1949 cease-fire line. The media would have you believe it's a recognised international border. It was always meant to be temporary and never legally binding."

"This has been going on for decades, so why bring it up now?"

"Because now it is different. I can detect the signs. They always bring about chaos where situations are tense. I know it is them."

Dayton felt his friend's concern.

The Soter Alliance agent needed no further explanation. The 'Them' he referred to was called 'Diabolus' who had just one aim, which was to destroy everything, even if it meant eradicating themselves in the process.

"So that is why you wanted to see me. Have you located a source?"

"I do not have the resources at hand. I look to the ones making the most noise about this. I think they have infiltrated the PLO."

This latest infiltration was not good news. The Alliance did not want a Middle East war on their hands. "I will give this some thought Ben. Thank you for alerting us."

Within 30 minutes they arrived at the Chai Bar Yakir mini safari park. Ben said, "Tomorrow we come here for lunch. We can forget about the troubles of the world, even if just for a little while."

Dayton smiled. He couldn't let up for a minute. He looked out at the Nachal Kana Nature Reserve, as the old Jeep revved in low gear, it's worn tyres churning up small stones and gravel. As Ben negotiated the old Jeep over the rough terrain, Dayton said, "Ben, I think I know how to approach your problem. We find a friendly journalist in Ramallah."

"Do you know any?"

"Back in 1993, we funded a news agency, whose purpose it was to find out the new Palestinian Arab entity's attitude to Israel. We had to determine if their recognition of Israel was genuine. We raised funds to hire Palestinian journalists and Arabic-speaking Israelis. There should still be one or two around."

"How do we find out?"

"Don't worry about that. I have ways of finding out about all kinds of things."

Leaving the overheated Jeep at the entrance, Benjamin took Dayton Lynsey through the lush grounds of the sanctuary, to his home.

Dayton, impressed by what his friend had achieved, commented, "You have done miraculous things here. I already feel much more peaceful."

Benjamin gave a half smile. "Peace is in short supply here. We have to find it where we can."

Ruth and the children came out to greet Benjamin and their guest. Benjamin introduced them in turn, starting with his wife, Ruth. He said, "Ruth will show you where to freshen up. Then we will eat."

Dayton felt very content to be spending time in such a beautiful place separated from all the hatred and fear. Tomorrow the unsavoury work would have to continue. But for one night at least he felt secure in the bosom of love and peace.

While Ruth and the children set up the outdoor picnic tables, Ben was busy cooking his famous Kosher pitot on his taboun grill. It was unlike anything Dayton had ever tasted, and there was more than enough to go around. Ben had made a big batch, more than they could consume. Dayton enjoyed the pita-meal, which was washed down with a cup of tea brewed with herbs and leaves picked right off the plants, by the kids. Dayton, used to living on the edge, hadn't felt so laid back in a long time.

Olivier swallowed a Tylenol to ease the stabbing pain behind his eye. Dr Contoldo was not overly concerned about the headaches, saying they would soon go away. He was more interested in the Black athlete's enhanced vision. Olivier was not convinced. He complained, "My headache hasn't eased in over a week. Something must be wrong."

Contoldo smiled. "Mr Leroy, sometimes it takes a little longer for your body and mind to adapt. Let me know of any changes that occur and come to see me again next week."

"What about the painkillers. Is it okay to keep taking them?"

"If you have the need, by all means, take one. But use them sparingly. In any case, the pain should start easing soon."

Olivier hoped so.

Abbot Gallagher ate hot chips while he waited at the Surf Life Saving Club in Macarthur Parade, Main Beach. Mr Sheen drove slowly along the seafront looking out for the reporter's metallic blue Mazda 626. Spotting it, he parked nearby.

Abbott noticed the late model Honda Civic parking two spaces away. A man with thinning ginger hair got out and looked over at him. Abbot recognised him as the guy he spoke to at Heron Robotics. It seemed as though 'this' meeting was genuine. The reporter leant over and opened his passenger door.

Mr Sheen climbed in, immediately explaining, "Mr Gallagher, I'm not a whistleblower. I wasn't convinced by your story about somebody called Abraham Lincoln. I thought that Leroy fellow was giving false information."

"Let's cut to the chase, Mr Sheen. You said you had a name for me."

"Yes. After you had left, I became curious and decided to check the personnel records. There was nobody called Abraham Lincoln registered as working for us in the last ten years. So I looked at the profiles of security staff who worked at Heron at the time of the attempted break-in."

"I don't need your life history. Do you have a name or not?"

Yes, You see, one of the security staff at the time sported an Abraham Lincoln type beard. Well, it could be a coincidence of course, but ..."

"The name please," Abbot demanded, losing his patience.

"Yes, indeed. "The guard's name is ..." he said, fumbling in his pocket. Having found his prize, a scrap of paper, he read, "Barry Ryan and that was his address five years ago."

Abbott pocketed the note. He turned and shook the PR guy's hand. "Thank you. Well done. Now perhaps we can get to the bottom of this spy business."

Mr Sheen got out of the car. He turned to the journalist. "Please don't say you got this information from me."

Abbott smiled. "Don't worry. Nobody needs to know my source."

Back home, Abbot contacted Leroy and arranged to meet him at the Palm Beach Hotel. In the meantime, unable to put it off any longer, Abbott made an attempt to tidy up his unit. It was daunting. After putting his furniture up the right way, he needed a beer. Cursing his intruder yet again, he grabbed a 'New' from the fridge, which thankfully was still working. With beer enhanced bravado he yelled out, "YOU FUCKING PRICK! IF WE EVER MEET WE'LL SEE WHO'S LIMBS GET RE-ARRANGED."

The following evening Abbott who sat nursing a beer in a sheltered area just outside the hotel had another ready for his guest. There was a chill in the air, and it had started to rain. Live entertainment had begun in the hotel bar, which was rapidly filling up. Abbott looked at his watch just as the lanky Black athlete arrived, wearing wrap-around-shades.

"I've been trying to contact you for days," Abbott said.

"Yeah man. Well, I've been busy looking for work."

Abbott thought he saw the guy wince but made nothing of it. He showed Olivier the passport picture of Barry Ryan. "Is this the man who called himself Abe Lincoln?"

"Where'd you find that, man?"

"Nevermind. Is that the guy or not?"

"Yeah. The bastard's easily recognisable by that beard."

"Which none of you bothered to mention. It would have made my job a hell of a lot easier." Abbott said, swilling his beer.

"So, who is the prick?"

"His name is Barry Ryan. He worked in security at Heron Robotics."

Olivier said, "He's the bastard who dobbed me in. I'd love to get my hands on the fucker." Then he spasmed with pain. Shit, he shouldn't get excited like that.

"Are you okay, Olivier? You look troubled."

"Yeah. It's just a fucking headache."

Abbott nodded. "Do me a favour and let me track down this Barry Ryan. Okay?"

"I'll leave a piece of the shit, for you."

"He's small fry, but he can tell us about the big fish. Right?"

Olivier cringed with pain. He gritted his teeth. "Fuck man. I can't put up with this," Olivier stated as the sharp pain got worse behind his enhanced eye. In a blinding rage, he swept the glasses clean off the table.

Abbot got up and manoeuvred the black guy away from the hotel and towards his car. One of the bar staff was at the site of the broken glass. Witnesses pointed in the black man's direction. Abbott opened the passenger door and bundled Olivier onto the back seat. Desperate to get away before a ruckus started, Abbott was just about to swing into the driver's seat, when the angry bar steward confronted him.

"What happened back there?" the steward demanded.

"Sorry, but I've got to get him to the hospital."

"Someone's got to pay for the damage," the waiter said.

Abbot opened the driver's door. "He's had a fit. I have to get him treatment. Got it?"

Chapter 9

Ramallah was one of the most vibrant cities in the West Bank. Dayton realised why, as he experienced the religiously relaxed atmosphere, in which alcohol flowed freely; people packed the movie theatres, and cafe's abounded in the business district. Modern Ramallah, founded in the mid-1500s by the Haddadins, a clan of brothers descended from Ghassanid Christians, was the de facto capital city of the Palestinian administration. Dayton's cab drove by the Mukata'a, a two-block compound and the West Bank headquarters of the Palestinian Authority. At night, its white tower lit up and was visible from most parts of the city. Apart from containing government offices and conference rooms, it housed Yasser Arafat's mausoleum, next to where the Israeli Army held him under siege in 2002. This building was where Dayton Lynsey had arranged to meet with Abadi Akram, a reporter for the Maan News.

The journalist stood by the entrance of the mausoleum, smoking, as he waited. Seeing the Englishman alight from his taxi the Palestinian journalist stubbed out his cigarette.

Dayton approached the journalist. "Are you Abadi Akram?"

The hawkish looking man in jeans, INXS t-shirt and Cowboys baseball cap looked at him. "He did so much for our nation."

Dayton returned, "Indeed a great man."

It was the agreed password. "Let us go inside," the reporter suggested.

They passed the regular honour guard, standing watch at the memorial, as they milled among the tourists. As the pair passed by the plaque where the Israelis had cornered Arafat in 2002, Dayton said, "What have you got for me?"

"The main person pushing the border dispute at present is Mahmoud Habbas."

"What do you know about him?"

Abadi surreptitiously handed over a file. "Destroy this as soon as you can. The Hamas do not take kindly to being investigated."

"Thank you for your help." The Palestinian nodded, and Dayton walked away. But he was not unnoticed. A man, in the shadows, with a camera, followed the Englishman out of the mausoleum.

As Barry Ryan, retrieved the spare key from under the flowerpot by the front door, he was amused that she still kept it in the same old place. But then she never changed, not while he was with her, anyhow. He unlocked the door, entered, and got the surprise of his life. She had changed! Helen was in a wheelchair! As she rolled up to him, wearing a short, sleeveless yellow sun dress, he leant down, and they shared a warm hug and a kiss on the cheek.

Barry took a step back. "My goodness, Helen, you look beautiful, but what in the world happened to you?"

Helen backed up her chair a bit and replied, "I broke my back in a bad car wreck about a year after Olivier got arrested."

"My God! I'm sorry to hear that, Helen, how bad is it?"

"I'm totally paralysed from the waist down. My spinal cord got severed at what the specialist called the T-10 level. It's a complete injury".

Barry, in denial, pretended not to understand what that meant entirely, but he knew what she was saying. Helen would never walk again, and couldn't move or feel anything below her injury. He forced a smile. "I had to see you, after seeing your new website."

"It's not safe for you here, Barry. Olivier is telling his story to the papers. People are looking for you."

"Who's looking for me?" He asked, startled.

She looked at his beardless face. "At least they won't be able to recognise you from your picture."

"What picture? Helen, what is it that you are not telling me?"

"Nothing. I'm just concerned about you. That's all."

"No need to worry on that score. I just wanted to see you again before I left."

"You're going, Barry. Where?"

"I've had it with the Tweed. I'm heading up north. But I need to speak with Olivier first."

"I don't think that's such a good idea. Olivier believes it was you that doxed him in."

"Then I'll have to put him straight about that. Do you have his contact number?"

She shook her head. "I haven't seen him or spoken to him since he went inside."

Who is the creator and determining God of such new creatures as cyborgs or Frankensteins? It was a question that Dr Lynne Becker often pondered. As a dedicated Transhumanist, she advocated the improvement of human capacities through advanced technology. But it wasn't just gadget technology she wholly supported. It was the grander sense of strategies for eliminating disease and providing economical but highly efficient products to the poorest people in the world. Lynne wanted more than anything to help improve the quality of life and social interconnectedness. There were still a significant number of Luddites out there, who, in their ignorance never considered technology. They took no notice of the cyber world because it seamlessly blended in with the fabric of society. But they would immediately take note of its absence if it became unavailable. Lynne pondered these things, as she waited to be shown into Dr Covington's office. She didn't like to be kept waiting, but there was nothing she could do about it.

Angela Durant seemed to be getting nowhere with her argument. She persisted, "Ulysses, I hear what you are saying about the DARPA contract, but I still think putting all our eggs in that particular basket is not sound policy for our business."

He looked straight at her. "DARPA is giving us more work than we can easily handle. We have a cast iron contract, so where's the problem?"

"Ulysses, I don't know how to put it in plainer language. It's not just me who is concerned about this policy change, which seems to have been an autonomous decision on your part. Other directors are with me in this."

Ulysses got up. "We will have to continue this later. Dr Lynne Becker is waiting to see me."

Angela stood up and straightened her pencil skirt. "Ulysses, this will not just go away."

He took three deep breaths. He liked Angela, even fancied her but kept that under control. However, she would have to go if she didn't get on board. The last thing he needed right now was a boardroom fight. He had to keep it quiet from DARPA. He spoke into his intercom. "Send Dr Becker in now please."

As the tall, now, a red-headed woman entered his office, Ulysses Thought she was sexy. He reminded himself, keep your mind on the business at hand. "Dr Becker, my humble apologies for keeping you waiting. Please sit down and tell me what this is about."

She sat, put her leather briefcase on her lap, opened it and extracted a folder. "Dr Covington, Colonel Cormack sends his regards and has sent me here in his stead."

"Okay, so how can I help?"

"I will need your project progress reports. It's just a formality to make sure we're all on the same page."

"Sure, what do you need?"

"Your reports and a bit of desk space."

"I'll deal with it right away."

Abbott Gallagher was getting nowhere trying to contact Barry Ryan. He wasn't at his old address, which held no surprise for the journalist. There was no listed phone number for him. Damn! He was drawing blanks all round. All he had left was to go back to Leroy. Maybe he knew something else. Abbott dialled Olivier's number, but there was no answer. He left a message. Frustrated, he decided to go to Jack's for lunch.

The Prof was in his usual spot drinking tea. At least something was ordinary about the day, the journalist thought, about to sit down opposite his mentor. Soon coffee and a burger would arrive. Damn, he was too predictable. So he went to the counter and called Jack, the bearded, pony-tailed proprietor. Once Abbott had the man's attention, he said, loud enough for the other customers to hear him, "Today I think I'll have fish and chips with a pot of tea."

Jack stared at him. "Are you all right mate?"

"Fine, Jack. Why?"

"Fuck me!" "Am I hearing right?" "Someone call a fucking doctor!" were among the surprised comments of the regular customers.

Jack looked rooted to the spot. "Are you sure?"

"The cafe owner's look of surprise amused Abbott. Feeling very proud, he went to the Prof's table and sat down.

The Proph looked up, seemingly oblivious to the customer responses. "Your move," he said, simply, indicating the game in progress.

Abbot scrutinised the board and tentatively moved his remaining bishop into a stronger position.

The Proph moved a pawn, freeing a passage for his queen.

Abbott was waiting for the Prof's latest pronouncement. He didn't have to wait very long.

"There hasn't been any spiritual scientific advantage for human survival, utilised from ancient Greek philosophy until the recent advent of quantum biology."

Jack arrived with Abbott's lunch. Many pairs of eyes, not believing what they saw, followed his fish and chips, as the proprietor placed the plate on the table. The Proph quickly glanced at the different food, then he said, "This chemistry, as a medical science was found to guide healthy human evolution within the 'molecule of emotion' discovered in 1972 by Dr Candace Pert."

Abbott backed his bishop with a knight. "So is this, 'molecule of emotion', whatever that is, the human solution?"

The Proph moved his bishop a safe distance from his opponent's king. "This, along with other recent discoveries, has brought about the emergence of the 21st Century Renaissance. The exciting prospects of physics technologies, linked to a holographic spiritual reality for human well-being, is now possible."

"If what you say is true, why isn't it happening?"

The Proph smiled, wistfully. "Although humanity can be liberated from its barbaric slave mentality, it needs the will to do so. Without this will, humanity won't survive."

"How come, you're so certain about this?"

"Abbott, we need to choose between Einstein's mythological reality and Buckminster Fuller's critical path. Back in 1959 C P Snow, a molecular biologist stated that the fate of civilisation depended wholly on our ability to understand the difference, which Fuller said, is about humanity choosing utopia or oblivion."

Abbott retreated his threatened bishop. "And no choice means oblivion."

"Which means humanity must be made to make a choice, by referendum or something. But humanity has to be educated to make its decision." Harold, pleased with the reporter's grasp of such profound issues, added, "Here's the catch 22. If humans did have the nous to make such a decision they would already have made their choice - and chosen survival."

Abbott, moving his knight into a challenging position, responded, "And if humanity doesn't have the sense to see this, it's doomed."

The Proph shook his head, "I'm afraid so. We humans are so unaware of our intuition for survival that we have no alert warning system of our impending doom."

"So we have to get people to listen to their intuitions."

"Sadly, Abbott, I don't think we have time for that."

The reporter frowned, "I don't get it. We blindly follow this or that faith, when it comes to religion. Why the hell can't we have confidence in an evolved humanity?"

The Proph shook his head. He then moved in for the kill. "Checkmate."

Benjamin watched the people visiting the grave. He spoke quietly into his phone. "No sign of him yet." The arrangement was that he checked in every ten minutes.

Dayton Lynsey made sure his personal phone was in scramble mode. "Are you sure the time is correct?"

"A big crowd is gathering. Mahmoud wouldn't let them down. He has to make a good impression."

"Are we sure he is a Diabolus agent?"

Dayton was concerned. It seemed that Benjamin Solomon was not completely committed and that could cause problems. "Benjamin, you seem unsure of something. Tell me what's troubling you."

"This is Mahmoud Darwish's grave. He was an excellent poet, full of love for the people of this nation. He understood loss, exile and dispossession. It's just that ..."

Dayton pre-empted him. "I get it. It's a sacred place. It's also where Mahmoud Habbas is going to be spreading his message."

"Dayton, you haven't answered my question."

"His background was fed into our database. he ticked 80 percent of the boxes."

"I Thought the line was 85 percent."

"Benjamin, It's close enough. Besides, we cannot take the risk."

A black Mercedes limousine pulled up at the entrance of the Ramallah Cultural Palace. Two bodyguards got out and opened Mahmoud Habbas' door. Flanked by his guards, he walked through the cheering crowd, to a podium, set up especially for the occasion. Adjacent and nearby was Mahmoud Darwish's memorial, which had been completed in 2004. The eight year long RCP project had been supported by the Government of Japan and overseen by the United Nations Development Program. The complex, a landmark in Ramallah, was a source of pride for the locals.

By the time Minister Habbas started his prepared speech the 736 seat auditorium, was full. The Centre had hosted diverse events, ranging from Classical music and hip hop to business conferences and exhibitions. A political campaign speech was a first for the compound.

Mahmoud, getting into his stride, said, "The Green Line is just a line in the sand that separates the armies of Israel and Jordan. It has no bearing whatsoever on any territorial claims by Israel. The media spin experts try to fool you. Don't let them! Don't listen to their lies."

The crowd chanted and cheered.

Mahmoud continued, "Resulting from the 1994 peace agreement with Jordan the Green Line got replaced with a 'mauve' international border line on the map corresponding to the Jordan River. The armistice agreements of 1949, preserved the territorial claims of all parties and didn't establish definitive boundaries between them."

More shouts and chants from the burgeoning crowd.

"My friends, the false importance placed on the Green Line, marking it as a legitimate border was just a ploy to incite Israel to violence against Palestine." Mahmoud shook his fist. "The Jordan River is the real internationally recognised eastern boundary of Israel. You've all heard the lies and the spin. This explanation is the true story."

The crowd wanted to hear this. A huge cheer erupted in response to Mahmoud's emotive words.

It was time to bring down the curtain. Dayton pressed the Soter contact on his phone. "Operation Birdsong is confirmed." Then he terminated the call - and waited, unaware that a spy was watching him. He received a text. You are being watched. There's an assassin behind you. Move slowly out of the area."

Dayton knew the drill. No sudden moves. Walk calmly to safety with no attention paid to the hunter. He had absolute trust in his back-up. Even so, he felt a chill shoot up his spine. If the man watching his back did not time his move perfectly, Dayton knew he would be dead.

Mahmoud Habbas was busy stirring up his supporters with promises of controlling the Gaza Strip, once he was in power. Watching their hero in full swing, Habbas' bodyguards missed the tiny red

dot dancing around the speaker's temple. One of the guards noticed something, but it was too late. By the time he heard the muted gunshot, Mahmoud Habbas was already lying bleeding and lifeless, on the platform.

Dayton heard the report and the yells of the crowd, as he walked towards Benjamin's Jeep. Behind him he heard a muffled scream, drowned by the outpouring of grief, coming from the Centre. He breathed a sigh of relief. His job was done - for now.

Benjamin looked as white as a ghost. "It is done then."

Dayton nodded, "It had to be done."

Having dealt with a few day-to-day chores, Ulysses went back into his office.

Dr Becker looked up and smiled, "Very impressive, Dr Covington. You have things well organised."

"Of course Dr Becker. DARPA is our most important client. We know the importance of having everything up-to-date."

In the same calm tone, Lynne said, "I glad you brought that up. DARPA has brought forward the deadline for Operation 'Blue Metal'. The prototype has to be ready three months before schedule."

Ulysses sat down. "That means you'll need ..."

She finished the sentence. "The arm and hand by April next year."

He quickly did calculations in his head. With his present staff levels and testing time, it wasn't going to be possible. "I don't see how ..."

Lynne had been concerned about this. She thought that DARPA was unreasonable, but it wasn't her call. "Dr Covington, your contract with us states that you will meet all our deadlines. is that not so?"

He felt a sharp pain like his nervous system had become hot-wired. Immediately, the rainbow tune came into his head.

Dr Becker saw his lined forehead relax. She smiled sweetly. "I take it you can accommodate us, Dr Covington."

"Of course. I will make sure we bring the date forward, as you request."

"Excellent. Now, why don't we go to your favourite restaurant so that I can buy you lunch."

There was no response, except Spartacus' insistent bark, in reaction to Abbott's door knocking. Although Olivier had not sounded well over the phone, he had told the reporter he wanted to see him. So why wasn't he responding to the dog's bark? Abbott wondered. He must have heard the noise! Hell, any residents at home would have heard the dog. Then the reporter became aware of footsteps from above. He looked up to the third floor and saw an old woman looking down at him.

She pointed at Abbott with her walking stick. "Who are you? Why are you stirring up that damn dog?"

"Sorry, but I'm trying to get Olivier to open the door."

"What was that?" she asked, her poor hearing made worse by the dog's gruff barking.

"WE HAVE TO TALK AWAY FROM THIS DOOR," Abbott shouted.

She got the message, and they went downstairs, with the woman taking her time. Stopping, short of breath, she said, "The dog has been barking off and on all day. I don't know what's gotten into the beast."

Abbott shrugged, "I don't get it. I spoke to Olivier less than half hour ago. He asked me to pop around."

The old lady said, "I hope he's okay."

"Do you have any reason to think otherwise?"

Before she had a chance to answer, a taxi pulled up near the entrance and a black woman got out.

Ignoring Abbott, the old lady hobbled to the door. "Emily, it's great to see you." The elderly resident turned to the journalist. "Come on young man. Make yourself useful and get Mrs Leroy's cases."

Then it clicked. "The woman laden with luggage was Olivier's mother. She would have a key. Maybe the dog's excitement was about sensing his owner's arrival. He'd heard the animals had a sixth sense for things like that.

He followed the two chatting women upstairs, laden with her bags. They eventually reached her door. Puffed, she struggled with her key. By now the dog was going frantic.

Emily said, "Hush now baby, mummy's home." Upon opening the door, the giant beast leapt up and started licking her. "Get down baby. Good boy."

Mysteriously mollified the wild beast became instantly docile. It was then that Mrs Leroy turned to the strange man. "Thank you for your help. I can take them from here."

Abbott plonked the big cases down. "I came to see Olivier, but he didn't answer the door."

She looked at Abbott, bemused. "And who are you?"

The old woman hung around sticky beaking. Abbott said "I would prefer to talk privately.

The old lady huffed but took the hint.

Emily desperately needed to put her feet up and have a cup of tea. Abbott offered to make it. As he did so, he explained how he'd come to meet her son and why he was interested in his story.

As the black woman received her tea, she said, "So you're going to find out who set up my son."

He sat down with his drink. "He asked me to come around. So where is he?"

Unperturbed, she said, "The boy was going to be here to carry my bags in, but he weren't. He's probably just gone off somewhere. He'll turn up when he's good and ready."

Benjamin felt horrified, not because of the assassination, but owing to what would probably happen next by way of reprisal. He glanced towards the Englishman, who would soon be out of harm's way. "Who do you think they will blame?"

"The Israeli's probably, But we have something in place."

You don't understand, Dayton. If they saw me with you, that will be enough for them to come looking for me."

Dayton looked at Ben, his face showing concern. "I would never do anything to put you or your family at risk. An alternative reality story is already news as we speak. To be on the safe side you and your family can be relocated, on a purely temporary basis."

"Relocated! Where?"

Dayton smiled, "An all-expenses paid holiday to England."

"Holiday? England? When? How?"

"Tonight you will travel to an Israeli air base? From where you will be flown to a US air base, and on to London. You will then be escorted to a safe house. We will have people in place to guard your property while you are away."

Benjamin's mind was trying to grasp this bizarre situation. "Thank you Dayton, but I cannot just leave things like that. We have plants to tend to and ..."

"Ben, I can't force you to do this but for your family's safety ..."

"It's okay. I just had a brief panic." Benjamin stopped the Jeep and looked straight at Dayton. "We never know what will happen from day-to-day, living where we do. Every day is a blessing from God. We are thankful for that."

"At least let me have men guarding your perimeter for the next few days."

Benjamin laughed. "Will I have to give a password to enter my property?"

A media release went to air that evening. The narrator announced, "A Minister for the Hamas Party, Mahmoud Habbas was fatally wounded while addressing a large crowd of followers at the Ramallah Cultural Palace, this afternoon. At first, it was thought to be a Mossad hit. But later revelations show that Mohammed Ibrahim Likud, a rival for the leadership at the upcoming elections, was found hanged, in his apartment. He left a note explaining that Mahmoud Habbas would be a bad leader who would provoke a war with Israel. He had to stop him but couldn't live with the guilt."

Helen Cleaver had her kitchen designed in such a way she could easily reach what she needed, from her wheelchair. She carefully selected the ingredients she needed for that night's meal, a lamb hotpot. It had to be perfect for Abbott Gallagher, her new friend and lover. Since the accident, she never thought she would be in another relationship. She was amazed when Abbott (she loved his name) showed interest in her, sexually. The poor darling felt uncomfortable shagging a disabled woman, but it didn't deter him. She felt like a slut, throwing herself at him in such a lewd fashion but he made her feel good. And more importantly, special. As she diced and sliced vegetables, her thoughts went back to Barry. Being in a relationship with him had been good. But the shock on his face, when he saw her wheelchair bound, told her that Abbott was a much better boyfriend. She hoped the subject of Barry Ryan would not spoil the evening she had planned.

Lynne Becker had Ulysses' full attention, as they ate dinner in the Travel Lodge restaurant where she was staying. "The bottom line is that if we continue to allow bodies attached to brains to run nations we will not and cannot avoid profound social consequences."

"While I agree that political consciousness is a sham these days because no politician has answers or solutions to the severe problems the world faces, the likelihood of bad bots taking over scares the hell out of me."

Lynne chuckled, "The bad bots scenario is a myth. We will always have control of our creations. We have to prepare now. We have to foretell it and anticipate its consequences before we unleash terminator cops on the streets. Movies like Terminator have helped condition the human mind."

People go on about mind control," she laughed, "but Hollywood has been doing it for decades, and nobody realises the fact."

Ulysses waited until he had finished chewing. "The way I see it is that 'Transhumanism' envisages a leap of such magnitude that within given directive implications are not readily restrained."

She fixed him with her gaze. "I'm beginning to worry about you. Try seeing Transhumanism as a top to bottom revolution, eventually encompassing everything. Then it will be the way of life. Everybody challenges change and loss. Doomsayers have nothing useful to contribute, only fear."

Ulysses topped up their wine. "It seems that we are more socially and politically deranged than in any other period of history. While science might progress in increments, the social consequences require great concentrations of social energy, if we wish to preserve what we value and aspire to in other fields.

"That's romantic nonsense, Ulysses. Just look at the rubbish society values - a Big Mac, the Internet, gambling, football, etc. And as for aspirations, beyond getting the latest pair of Nikes, it's a joke." She took a sip of wine and continued, "The reality is that we need to employ ethical calculus in rewriting subordinate legislations."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean regulations and protocols for trialling new medicines and applying them to the therapeutics goods. The administration has to market new medical products or technological and biological objects interacting with humans. Incremental change this is not! Transhumanism is revolutionary for better or worse."

Ulysses was feeling uncomfortable and completely out of his depth. Her fast answers were blasting him out of the water.

Lynne, seeing his discomfort, started humming 'Over the Rainbow'. He began to relax and not fight her. She had done her job.