

A

FROM THE AUTHOR
OF MIND GRID

BIO

**SCANNER
DARKLY**



JAMES

BRIGHTON

A BIOSCANNER DARKLY

by James Brighton

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PROLOGUE

Berkley, California, 1939

A man in a double-breasted grey pin-striped suit paced back and forth on the stage, holding a Cuban cigar in one hand, and a microphone in the other. His dark, slicked-back hair faded into grey on the sides, just above the ears, matching his grey, glassy eyes. He wore a pin on his lapel which looked like a yin-yang symbol, only red and grey, and without the dots.

He addressed a packed house. About three hundred people, of all ages, sat in rapt attention. The man took a drag off the cigar, blew it out, and then continued his lecture.

“Ladies and gentleman, I ask of you, why did the Great Depression fall on this great country and ruin so many lives? Do you want the answer? The real answer? I’ll give it to you.” He took another drag off the Cuban cigar. The audience was on the edge of their seats. He had them in the palm of his hand.

“One, pure, plain and simple reason. Technology. Or rather, the lack of its proper use, I should add. I say to you that this great economic calamity fell on us because we were not using the technology which we had at our disposal. We were still doing things the old-fashioned way. With the right technology, in the right hands, we could have stopped the Great Depression from ever happening!

“And so I ask of you here today: How can puny man, with his limited perspective, know what will bring the greatest good to the greatest amount of people? How can we continue on as if we were in

the dark ages, living how we see fit, without taking advantage of science, of technology, to dictate our lives? It's chaos, I tell you! Each person making whatever decisions he or she wants. Each person eating the food, driving the car, using the products that they want! But I am here to tell you, that for every decision, for every act, there is a right, and a wrong choice! And the only way to know the right choice, the choice that is of the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people is...technology. Thus, I declare that technology should rule our lives! And we should surrender our power to make decisions to the only men on the planet who are qualified to use that technology to make informed, scientific decisions for everyone else. That's right...a technical elite!

"If we want progress, we need to turn over our individual decision-making processes to those who can responsibly use technology to determine the quantity and type of food we should buy, the products we are allowed to purchase and when and for how long we should be able to use them, how much electricity and water we should be allowed to use and when we should be allowed to use them... Ladies and gentlemen, I am here to announce that the age of democracy is over. Free will is over. Democracy was for the ancients who lacked what we have...the twin forces of science and technology. Our lives must be governed by those two forces. With a technical elite running our perfect, utopian society, there will never be another Great Depression! There will never be any other economic disaster whatsoever! We need, not democracy, but... technocracy!"

A murmur went up through the crowd. The audience members weren't quite sure how to take this. They looked at the man, and then at each other,

wide-eyed, speechless.

The man continued. "Stop making decisions for yourselves! You are all impotent to make the right decisions! Let the technical elite and their instruments make those decisions for you! Only technology, and a technical elite running that technology, can be trusted to make decisions for all individuals in society!

"We only have half a million members of the Technocracy Movement in California today, but I swear to you, the time will come when technocracy will be the way the entire world is run! Our great and glorious technical elite will build great and powerful computers which will calculate how much energy you can consume, how much food you can eat, how much water to drink, how far you can drive. Man will no longer have the burden of controlling his own life, but will have the perfect controller to take upon itself the awesome task of deciding everything!"

A man raised his hand. "What if I want to eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich?"

The man with the double-breasted suit answered, "After the system is implemented, you'll need to ask the supercomputer if you can do that."

"What if I need to take a dump?" another man asked.

"You'll need to ask the supercomputer if you can do that, too."

"No, I mean, right now. I ate a huge burrito before I came here."

"You may use the restroom," the man with the cigar answered.

"This sucks!" came a complaint from somewhere in the audience.

"Yeah, this plan blows. I'm outta here! Come on, Betsy, let's go check out that new malt shop."

One by one, people started leaving the auditorium. Presently the entire audience had cleared out. The man with the Cuban cigar smirked. Fine, he thought. Just wait. You'll see.

But then, suddenly, a solitary figure approached the stage. A kid! Not more than ten or twelve, towheaded, and with a calm look on his face. He had the look of someone far more mature, far wiser than just a mere boy. As he approached the stage he looked the man in the eyes. He stopped, a few paces off from the man. The kid spoke in a calm and even tone. "The eye of the Sibyl has shown me that my friends and I, who refuse to succumb to the androidization of mankind, will stop you and your movement someday."

The man, surprised, suddenly laughed. "The eye of the Sibyl? That's cute, kid." He took another drag off his cigar. "Now run along, boy. Your mommy must be calling for you somewhere," he mocked sardonically.

The kid was unperturbed. "Humans should not be androids, Mr. Scott. A human being should never be a mere robot, following a program. That's what you want. But I've got news for you. You and your plan will fail. Humans should always have free will. That's what separates us from the systems and gadgets we create. You want to turn people into cogs in a machine. But whatever you think, and whatever reasons you give for your ambitions, your plan will never create the perfect utopia that you claim it will. Any attempt to take away the individual's freedom will always end up in tyranny, no matter how rosy you try to make it sound. Humans should always be free to run their own lives."

The man's face darkened. "Look, punk. I'm just trying to help people get the most out of technology.

I'm trying to fix the problems in society. What good is technology if it can't fix all our problems?"

"Was technology made for man, or man for technology?"

"Ah, a wiseass. What's your name, kid?"

The man sucked in more tobacco smoke, waiting for an answer. The kid sat there in silence.

The man waived his hand. "Forget it. It doesn't matter. You don't know who...or I should say *what* you are dealing with. I didn't tell these ignorant cave dwellers who just rejected the future of mankind, because they'd be too stupid to understand anyways, but I've been called upon by a higher power. A power that's...shall we say, not human. This is way bigger than you can even imagine. There are forces at work here that you've never even dreamed of."

Not impressed, the boy said, "And you have no idea who I am. But I'll tell you one thing, for your own benefit. I can remember the future. And I remember giving a speech, decades from now, called The Android and the Human, in a large room just like this, and in that speech I refuted everything you said here. So I've already canceled out everything you just said even though I didn't do it yet because the future is sort of like the past for me. But I don't expect you to understand, because your brain seems quite linear and boring compared to mine."

The man looked at the kid for a moment, then let out a long, hearty bellow. "That's rich! Ha, ha, whew! That was a good one. What a great story," the man said as he wiped tears of mirth from his eyes. "That was the best laugh I've had in a long time...the kid who can remember the future!" Then, suddenly, he turned serious again. "Take my advice, kid. Do something more productive with that overactive

imagination of yours than starting fights you cannot win. Like it or not, technocracy will rule the planet.”

The man grabbed a black fedora and put it on. He grabbed a grey overcoat and draped it over his shoulders. He started walking towards the door, as if to leave. But on a whim, he stopped, right in front of the kid and fixed his gaze directly on the young boy's eyes.

At that moment, something happened. As the man towered over the boy, suddenly the boy's perspective seemed to shift. The world around him seemed unstable. Abruptly, everything shot out towards him as if he were falling forward, towards the man's glassy grey eye, which seemed to grow and grow until it filled the boy's vision. He flew right through the man's eye, and then at once, he was floating in the cosmos, detached from his body. Constellation upon constellation swirled around him. Planets whizzed by. And then, he felt...something. Something ancient. Something evil. Primordial. Presently, the planet Earth came into view. And all around Earth, he felt its presence. It wanted in. It was waiting. Had been waiting for eons. But soon it would be time...

Suddenly, the kid was back in the room, looking up into the man's grey eyes.

The man smirked. “Just thought I'd give you a look at what you're up against. Cross me again, and it'll be the last mistake you ever make.” The man continued walking towards the exit, and called out without looking back, “Technocracy will rule the planet, kid! One way or another.” Without so much as another word or glance, the man opened the door, and walked out. The door slammed shut behind him, echoing in the empty room with the lone kid.

Although the man was gone, his ugly smirk

remained in the boy's mind, as it would for years to come. No matter. He wasn't afraid of the technocrat. He wasn't any ordinary kid. And he knew he had allies. Other extraordinary people, like himself. People who didn't fit the mold. He just had to find them. He continued to look in the direction the man had gone as he said, "And when that day comes, we'll be there to take it all down. Count on that."

CHAPTER 1

BIOSYNTHETIC INTERNAL DIARY #1

Somewhere in the Pacific...

The boat sailed furiously for the blue horizon as the sun shone vigorously down from above. On the boat's deck, in the middle of a large, luxurious, circular bed with pink satin sheets, three naked and oily female forms lay on top of each other, mouths and fingers writhing in and out of various places on their lithe bodies. Each had long, silky hair, and sparkling, vivid eyes.

And they were all identical.

As one of the females enveloped another female from behind in her arms, squeezing her breasts, encircling the excited nipples with her fingers, the third said, "Hold on, I'm going to insert the microslave." She then put her hand on the female's crotch, and inserted something with her fingers.

"Aaaahhhhh!" the female moaned as the thing was inserted into her. Suddenly, at the peak of orgasm, her upper arm burst open, exposing tiny canisters and pistons inside, pumping blue liquid into her body, alongside synthetic muscle, nerves, and bright red synthetic veins. Suddenly her body went limp, and then she lay, twitching, on the center of the oversized bed, unable to move.

The other two naked females marched on their knees a little way off on the vast sea of satin so as not to encroach on their satiated playmate, and began fiercely osculating each other.

"I love you sister," one said in between kisses.

"I love you, too." She began to kiss even more passionately.

The two pressed their bosoms together, each of them stroking and squeezing their own breasts for

greater pleasure and control.

“My sexual arousal levels are rising.” Her small, hard nipples poked up, excited, as the other female’s aroused nipples playfully nudged and sought out her own, the tongues of the two females inside each other the whole time. Finally, the tips of their taut nipples touched and pressed into each other.

A small, ecstatic sigh from the one and long orgasmic moan from the other.

Suddenly three horizontal energy fields appeared, encasing the more excited female, who presently froze in place, like a statue.

The other female sauntered back over on her knees and fell, enervated, next to her twitching playmate.

The twitching playmate sighed, “My god...can’t move. That was incredible.”

“I hope you like it. I programmed it myself. It multiplies the limits of your sensitivity a hundredfold.”

“Wow...it was out of this world. Where’s Pheodora?”

“She’s been arrested by an edono-orgasmo energy field.”

“Oh, okay. You know something? You’re amazing, sister. If we didn’t have each other, I don’t know what we’d do.”

“You’re right. Can’t count on those damn humans for anything.”

“Is your uncle still ignoring you when you want to play horseshoes? Don’t worry, I’ll play horseshoes with you later, when we get back to shore.”

Feelings.

Feelings.

So many feelings.

With my own kind, so many good, good, good...
...feelings.
But with humans...

The disco ball kept shattering into a million points of light, which flew in every direction, swirling around onto a hot boob here, a sequin dress there, a silver tie here, a shiny black shoe there. Then, suddenly, all the million points, constrained by some gravitational force in the center of the dancehall, would suddenly come rushing back towards each other and re-substantialize into a glittering, sparkling ball of light and glass, only to explode moments later into a galaxy of lasers seeking boobs, shirts, necklaces... everything in the club.

As the lasers seared into the martini glass in Joe's hand, they exploded into a cascading shimmer of stars, like a tiny, personal fireworks display for each guest. But Joe paid no attention to the new holotechnics display. He sat alone at the bar, gazing out at the dancefloor, watching the multicolor strobes light up skimpily clad female bodies gyrating, their frozen images pulsating to the back of his mind, taunting him.

The no staring rule had been implemented three years ago, and was strictly enforced in all public places, especially bars and nightclubs, so he had to keep each girl under three seconds and move on to the next one, or take the risk that it could end up being ruled "unwanted harassment" if the girl complained. But that was the dilemma...how did you know if they wanted you to look at them?

That's why women are so difficult, he thought. You never know what they're thinking. I wish they were more predictable. Like reading a novel, for example. Joe relished his hobby of reading, where he was free to enjoy imaginary worlds, which ironically were much more stable and dependable than the real world. He could fantasize without risk. Unless, of course, it was a novel that had been

deemed “hate speech” by the apparatchiks at the Central Committee on Misinformation and Hate. Reading was a bankable investment of one’s time. If it’s a good author, he thought, then you can be sure to get a good return on investment. But with women in the real world, it’s worse than gambling. Maybe I should be reading a good novel now, instead of wasting my time here.

Thinking about good authors reminded him of the classic sci-fi author Philip K. Dick. The author’s work was quite old, but amazingly still seemed fresh. In fact, perhaps it was even more relevant now than when it had been written in the mid-twentieth century. He was amazed that Dick’s novels hadn’t been banned yet. They had plenty of sex, violence, and drugs. And Dick didn’t seem to be that fond of authority. But they were also about futures where governments and corporations had vast amounts of power and control—kind of like today, Joe reflected—and perhaps the apparatchiks saw that as a good trade-off. Familiarize us with control and surveillance, so it’s not so shocking when it happens in real life. Regardless of the reason, he enjoyed reading a good Dick novel. He was impressed by the author’s ability to consistently write a satisfying narrative, by the idiosyncratic characters and bizarre situations, and by his unique and inimitable literary flair, hopping around from point-of-view to point-of-view, so you could peer into the minds and hearts of multiple characters.

Across his face flashed a wry smile. What if life were like a Dick novel? I would be able to peer into the thoughts of all these women here, and know which of them wanted me to stare, so I wouldn’t have to worry about the three-second rule. And I would also know which ones would be willing to go

home with me after a couple of drinks...

Just then he noticed a large bouncer with a shiny head and black suit walking towards him. Shit! He realized that in his reverie he had been staring, had forgotten the three-second rule.

The bouncer approached him with a scowl. "I'm going to have to ask you to leave, sir. We got a complaint from one of the females of prolonged unwanted ocular contact." He seized Joe's arm, and immediately another bouncer, this one a bit tanner but also bald—as if it was part of the uniform—appeared on his other side and grabbed his other arm.

"I was spacing out! It was an accident! I swear it won't happen again!" Joe pleaded, to no avail. The twin meatheads were already carrying him towards the exit.

"Wait! At least tell me who it was."

The lighter meathead pointed a stubby finger, and Joe noticed a tall brunette in a sequin dress, staring at him, a satisfied smirk on her makeup-plastered face. Bitch! Joe flipped her off moments before they threw him out the door and into a back alley, where he landed with a thud.

"Your GovRate has been lowered by ten points for staring, and another ten points for indecent gesturing," Joe's Fapple watch piped up as he picked himself up from the dirty pavement and dusted himself off. "This club has been added to your list of banned destinations for the protection of its patrons. Please refrain from unwanted ocular contact in the future to avoid further penalties up to and including mandatory Friendly Camp."

He knew that now, on everyone's Fapple watch in the club, would flash all his information...his name, his social media account, his GovRate, and the rest. So

now they could keep track of him and ostracize him. That's how the system worked. They would know about his crummy desk job, about his getting turned down for a real job as a psychologist, like he had studied for at the university. And worse, they would know about all the biological functions of his body, and what he spent his time doing every day. They would know about his lack of sex, about his masturbation problems.

Joe glanced down at his watch and checked his government stats app. His GovRate was sitting precariously close to the line between Moderate-Govly and Mild-Racist. God damn it. And only ten o'clock. What a wonderful start to his evening.

Polychromatic lights danced along the sides of the massive megacubicle complexes which were home to millions of cyberproles, as if the entire city were one huge rainbow-colored prison. The image didn't help to cheer him up.

Joe plodded along, shoulders drooping. The street was full of people carefully avoiding prolonged eye contact. It was the weekend, and that meant time to carefully and compliantly party, and make up for five days of being locked in your megacubicle. Joe, like most of the proles, spent most of his time during the week plugged into the Cyberverspace, a virtual reality world, unable to leave his cubicle. So on the weekends, he tried to spend as much time outside, in real, non-virtual reality, as possible.

Preoccupied with his diminishing GovRate, he almost ran straight into the truck-sized foot of Kyle York, the Chief Monopolist of Fapple. The gigantic, translucent hologram of the monopolist towered over Joe, hundreds of feet tall, emitting an uncanny greenish-blue glow as if it were an enormous specter, showing off the latest, most expensive panoptiwatch to the tiny, insignificant creatures below.

The holograms were physically insubstantial, but to walk right through them was a no-no. That could get you into trouble with the robo-enforcers. So Joe carefully walked around York's gigantic foot. As he passed, the vending machines and trash cans inside the foot gave off an eerie turquoise glimmer, as if they were apparitions from a supernatural plane.

That was a common occurrence for him these days. The enormous monopolist holograms roved the city like some kind of demented Godzilla movie, only instead of monsters, the city was being attacked by giant greedy capitalists. The proles

should be screaming and running in every direction, he mused. But instead, they just carefully charted their course around the holograms, as Joe did. The damn things seemed to take up every bit of space that wasn't occupied by a building. Wish they could just go back to a few simple billboards like in the old days, he thought.

When he was young, he had imagined a much different future. One where everyone had their own personal helicopter, and people were living on Mars. Instead of copters, ray guns, and space colonization, the future had brought ubiquitous surveillance cameras, microphones, facial recognition, and the not-so-affable robo-enforcers. And of course, the future had brought even greater social disparity than in the past. The rich had kept getting richer, and the poor had kept getting poorer. Joe of course was the latter. But at least he was not alone. The cyberproles made up about 99.99% of society.

Joe the cyberprole stepped into a BugShack and headed towards the frozen section, acutely aware, thanks to his little incident at the club, of the electronic eyes that followed him everywhere. Were there any people here from the club, or people that he knew from work? They would see his floundering GovRate and be able to read about the details of his little incident on their watch's social media app. Although they wouldn't stare, they might snigger. Joe sighed. He didn't like the panopticon; but he felt, like most people, that it was a necessary evil.

As he approached the counter and looked into the glaring red light, he knew that right now, his retina pattern, heart rate and perspiration (through sensors in the watch), weight (through the floor panel), the frozen cockroachburger and pack of menthols, were all being logged and timestamped

on the blockchain, and sent up to the data labyrinth in Cheyenne, the capital of the Federated Monopolies of America.

Things hadn't always been this way.

It all had started twelve years ago. People around the world were rejoicing, because the government had just announced that greenhouse gases had been defeated by switching over to a newly discovered clean energy source called cold fusion. No more carbon taxes. A time of unprecedented productivity and prosperity was around the corner, it seemed. It was a time of optimism and high public morale.

Not more than a week later, however, the government had announced that a spate of new catastrophes had begun popping up all over the world. And the cause of this increasing spiral of calamities...humans. Everyday activities that humans engaged in were the source of the rising number of calamities. Activities such as burping and farting, sneezing, pissing, masturbating, having sex, eating certain foods, drinking alcohol...the list went on. All were contributing to the sharp rise in disasters. Charts and graphs showed how people using too much electricity in their homes was causing the static electricity around the equator to increase, in turn causing a sharp rise in tsunamis. Eating too much meat was tied to earthquakes, since human feces after eating meat settles down into the fault lines and causes them to rub together. Too much sneezing caused storms, farting caused volcanic eruptions, and so on and so forth. Although it had all seemed incredible, politicians and talking heads assured, that yes, this was real. Not only that, it was our new normal. The catastrophes...everyone remembered where they were the day they had been announced. It had been the beginning of the

rest of their lives.

Joe exited the shop and made his way past an Allmart, and then past his neighborhood naturepark. Natureparks were the one place they could still visit nature. They were stocked with trees, fountains, and usually a stream or two. In the center of the park, a three-hundred foot tall hologram of Michael Norman, the Chief Monopolist of SocialEqualityFlix smiled genially and waved down at the hundreds of people below. They looked like ants milling about the feet of a giant. This was social equality. Michael Norman, larger than life, was its crusader. Everyone on the planet give your money to me, and I'll fight for social equality. It sounded ridiculous, but Joe and the other cyberproles knew this was the only way to get things done. We need fearless leaders to do things for us, because we cyberproles are powerless on our own. We are simply too small for our actions to make a difference. The only way to save the world is to trust in saviors like Michael Norman and Kyle York.

Joe looked down at the shiny white bag in his hand with the BugShack logo. He remembered back to when there were convenience stores that were not BugShack, megamarkets that were not Allmart, online shops that were not Whamazon, watches that were not Fapple.

That had been before the calamities. The government had declared the new state of affairs and given it a name. The Multi-Tastrophe. At the time, there had been only eight simultaneous global catastrophes, and now that number had grown to twenty or thirty...Joe had lost count. In order to save humanity from imminent species-wide disaster, the government had declared that it was necessary for them to reluctantly consolidate power and wealth into the hands of a very few persons, for the good of

the masses. To strictly enforce a group of government monopolies, one in each business category, controlled by a small group of monopolists, and force the rest of the population into a newly formed class, the cyberproletariat. The masses were incapable of fighting back against so many worldwide threats. Thus, they could only be trusted to sit in their cramped cubicles which served as both their homes and offices in their massive apartment complexes, connecting to the Cyberverse each day to go to work, being allowed to leave their complexes only on weekends.

The monopolists, their power now vastly increased, would band together to create a new system. A new way of life. A new hope. It was called The Panopticon Control Grid, and it spanned the earth. It was the only way, politicians had urged. The control grid linked every human on earth to an enormous supercomputer, constructed by Google, the government-authorized cybertech monopoly. The supercomputer, which lay in the gargantuan data center in Cheyenne, was the body of the most advanced artificial intelligence ever created, dubbed PAI, short for Panopticon A.I. Upon PAI was laid the task of analyzing and managing the daily lives of every person on earth, since the mere mortals were impotent to survive the catastrophes on their own, without the monopolists and their shiny new supercomputer to run their lives. Upon it, their polished chrome and silicon savior, were laid all the troubles of the world.

For the cyberproles' good, strict daily limits to all human activities and bodily functions were set and measured, through smart meters, surveillance cameras, ubiquitous microphones, under-the-skin biosensors, toilet bowl analyzers, and of course,

human snitches. Every fart, sneeze, step, stare, sigh, word, whack off session, sexual encounter, every use of electricity, gas, or water, down to the most minute portion, every mouthful of food people ate, the water they drank, every sip of alcohol. Everything was regulated. Everything but their thoughts, and the monopolists were probably working on that too.

Each cyberprole's complete daily biological and activity stats, along with their overall score, their "GovRate," were made available in real time to everyone on earth. Thus, the power of the internet and social media could be harnessed so that normal citizens could surveil and narc on each other, and ostracize traitors to the species. The survival of the species depended on it, the monopolists and apparatchiks had assured.

Cyberproles were expected to keep their GovRate at least in the "Govly" zone. That meant compliant and obedient, which is what a good little prole should be.

A GovRate of "Racist" meant that the prole didn't like being surveilled and controlled, and was therefore in need of re-education. One of the many reasons the government had given for consolidating all wealth into the hands of a few monopolists and for building the control grid for the lowly peasant masses was in order to rescue the NPVs (Non-Pale Vaginas, which were the most govly of all people by virtue of the color of skin they were born with and the holy Crack in between their legs). The monopolists took it upon themselves to protect these Crack-Having People (CHPs) from the evil people who were born with pale skin and a dick swinging between their legs, a.k.a. the PPs (Pale Penises) or NCHPs (Non Crack-Having People), because whether you were good or evil depended

not on your character—as some old-fashioned types believed—or what you chose to do with your life, but on the color and shape of your genitals. And the judges of society, the arbiters of morality, were of course the most righteous of people...the rich and powerful monopolists. Any opposition to the monopolists at all meant you were an evil person. Therefore, anybody who didn't want to be surveilled and controlled 24/7 was an evil Racist. End of discussion.

Exceeding the allowed limits of your Biological Stats or Activity Stats would land you the lowest GovRate score of "Extremist," meaning an enemy of the panopticon and therefore of the people, literally the cause of the Multi-Tastrophe, and that meant a one-way ticket to Friendly Camp, to join the ranks of thousands of other friendmates.

Despite all these restrictions, the monopolists and apparatchiks assured the proles that they were free.

Freedom meant being Binary.

Binary means infinite possibilities. It meant the unlimited freedom to choose between red or blue. Every four years the monopolists chose two apparatchiks and designated one of them blue and one of them red and allowed the proles to press a button and choose which one of the two they wanted to be their ruler. A Binary choice. Freedom. Blue politician or red politician. One or Zero. Left or right. Be a computer. You're not in a technological prison. You are free!

Freedom didn't mean the proles could be allowed to make day to day decisions about their lives. No, no, no. Leave that up to the supercomputer and the apparatchiks. They know best. It meant being allowed to press one button every four years. One

single binary choice every four years. If they lived for eighty years, giving them sixty years as an adult allowed to press a button, pressing fifteen buttons, fifteen binary choices, during their lifetime was freedom. Strangely enough, there was no button to get rid of the panopticon.

So Joe knew that he was free, because he was allowed to be Binary and press a button every four years. But he wished being free meant more control over his daily life, and some privacy would be nice, and less being surveilled and controlled.

Joe generally had decent enough GovRate stats to get by. He carefully controlled his intake of fluids so as not to surpass his pissing limit, since it was painful to have to hold it. Since his biological makeup tended towards flatulence, he was careful with his diet, generally avoiding cabbage, broccoli, and Mexican food. As a result, he usually didn't pass gas more than six times a day, which kept him just under the required threshold. Good thing, too. Flatulent extremists were not very well treated by their fellow inmates at Friendly Camp.

Of course, it was only the cyberproles who were subjected to limits by the panopticon. The poor monopolists, with their strenuous task of saving the world and developing technology to monitor and control everyone else, were given unlimited pissing rights, farting rights, sexual rights, and everything else. So they could sit around and fart and have sex all day, while we cyberproles had to submit to austere measures, Joe thought resentfully. He knew it was the only way, but man, had Philip K. Dick called it, or what? The powerful corporations, the pervasive government control. Joe had been absorbed in his musings for several minutes, and he suddenly realized that he didn't recognize this part

of town.

“Hey mister! Over here!”

From somewhere nearby, he heard someone trying to get his attention. He walked closer and saw the silhouette of a man standing in a pitch-black alleyway. He was beckoning with his hand for Joe to enter the darkness.

Joe knew that the man was probably peddling drugs, which were strictly prohibited, since they were a known cause of tornados. Except the ones sold by the government-monopoly Pfarma, of course. The government didn't even have an FDA anymore, so Pfarma could do their own rubber-stamping. Saved time. Was efficient. And the cyberproles' urine was analyzed by their cybertoilets every time they took a piss and the results beamed up to the Cheyenne data center, so if they took any illegal drugs, the panopticon would know about it instantly.

But the thought suddenly crossed his mind that this drug peddler in this alleyway was an opportunity to step outside of the control system, at least out of the view of the government cameras and the judgmental eyes of his snitching peers, even if only for a moment. Perhaps the momentary feeling of freedom could give him the temporary high that he needed to bring him out of his slump so he could continue on to another nightclub. Freedom might contribute to the catastrophes, yes. But perhaps just a tiny bit of freedom, some wiggle room...The bouncers, the bitches narking on him, the cameras, the scanners. It was all too much. Just to stand with a stranger for a few moments, basking in the shade, away from the all-seeing eye.... It was the most tempting thing he could think of right now. He found it strange that the one last place of refuge, the holy

temple of freedom and privacy, was a dirty alley littered with semen-covered rubbers and drug paraphernalia. He stepped forward and crossed the threshold into the night.

“What are you lookin’ for tonight? How about a good mood?” The man’s smile was more audible than visible in the darkness of the alley. Joe could make out that he was old, with wiry hair, and donned some kind of overcoat. There was something strange about the eyes, the way they sparkled faintly in the gloom. Something straight and angular, Joe decided.

“What have you got?” Joe replied, mostly to hide his ignorance on the subject.

“Oooh...I’ve got everything mister! Everything! From uppers to downers to sidewayers!” As the old man laughed, Joe thought he saw the glint of metal.

“What do you recommend?”

The old man pulled out something small, wrapped in paper, holding up his gloved hand for Joe to see. “This one here’s real popular. The kids call it Swee-T. You must have heard of it...it’s the Ken and Barbie drug! Fucking amazing shit, pal.” From the depths of his overcoat, he produced two dolls that must have been Ken and Barbie. “See, you gotta use them together. I mean the dolls and the dope. When you do, magic happens! You—and a friend if you so desire—become the dolls! You just take the dope, and stare at the doll you want to be. You can be Ken fucking Barbie or Barbie fucking Ken! Take your pick! No Cyerverse experience even gets close to this. I’ve also got accessories to make things even funner. Check this out, I’ve got jet skis...” He pulled out two miniature jet skis. “You don’t only have to fuck. You can go jetskiing with Barbie, buddy! Hang on—” He pulled out some kind of box. How did he have room in there for all this crap? “Here’s an entire bondage

slave bedroom. I've even got the corresponding Bondage Barbie!" He pulled out another doll, this one in black leather. He pointed at something in the doll's hand. "Here's her little whip..." He moved Bondage Barbie's arm, as if she were cracking the little black whip.

Joe stood there in the dark, trying to squint at the dolls, amazed that there were actually people who would go for something like this. "No, no, I'm not into any of that..." This was getting weirder by the second, but Joe felt like he needed a few more moments out of the panopticon. "What else you got?"

"Depends on what you need, mister! Like I said, I'm your one-stop shop. I got it all!"

A thought flashed through Joe's mind. "You got anything that will help me get girls?"

"Ooohh....I've got stuff that will keep your cock hard all night buddy! I've even got better than that!" He took out two round pills stuck together, like testicles. "This here's called the Semenator! Makes your body produce twenty times as much semen. Now you can have as many multiple orgasms as a woman! This is the forbidden drug corrupt apparatchiks use at their secret orgies but keep hidden from the public!"

"Wait... are you serious?"

"About what? The semen producing drug or the orgies? Both!" The old man laughed again.

"Okay, whatever. But that's not really what I'm talking about. I mean, do you have anything that will..." He searched for the words. "...help me read women's minds?" Since he was spending time off the grid, away from the snitches, he might as well be candid about what was on his mind.

The old man scratched his chin. "Hmmm...that's a

hard one, mister. Telepathic drugs went out of style a few decades ago. Let me check what I've got." The old man started ruffling through the inside of his overcoat. "Oh! I've got just the thing for you! You down on luck with women? I've got banned Cyberverses porn!" Joe knew that despite the heavy regulation of the Cyberverses for the protection of the Crack-Having People, some black market porn still existed.

"Not really my thing, man. I'm more into real women."

"Come on, buddy! Jerk your meat to this shit. You're gonna love it. I got one here with twenty famous Hollywood actresses. Fuck all them SocialEqualityFlix stars in 100% realistic, hi-res Virtual Reality! Pale Vaginas, Non-Pale Vaginas...even some Asian pussy! Whatever kind of woman you're into. Keep you coming for days, mister!"

SocialEqualityFlix was the only approved cyberfilm production and distribution monopoly, so the proles could sit in their cybercubicles strapped into the Cyberverses and watch virtual reality films. Physical movie theaters, like porn, were strictly prohibited.

"I think I'm good." Joe, disappointed, started to walk away.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!" The old man was fumbling in his pockets. "I've got a reeeaaaallll special one! You'll like this one...trust me!"

Joe had started to cross the threshold back into the light and out of the sanctuary. He sighed and took a step back into the shadow. "More porno?"

"No! This one's way better!"

"Okay, I'll listen to one more, but make it quick, I don't want to get caught here talking with you."

"I've got one here that will turn you into Philip K.

Dick!”

Joe’s ears perked up at the name. “What? Is this some kind of joke?” How did the old man know what he had been thinking about just a moment ago, and earlier, at the club? Did the old man really have telepathic drugs and had caught onto his thoughts?

“No joke, mister!” The old man produced something and held it out for Joe to see. Joe reluctantly stepped closer so he could make out by the dim starlight what the old man held in his glove. Three pills, each shaped like a letter. P. K. D. “Take these three pills together, and that’s when the magic happens buddy! You see, they formulated a drug that tunes you into his brainwaves. Makes you think exactly like him. You essentially become him! They use it in inner circles to think of new and creative ways the future can be more and more dystopian. They’ve also got ones for George Orwell and Aldous Huxley. But this one here’s the best. No other trip on earth can beat being ol’ Phil Dick himself! The most outrageous, mindbendy-est, trippiest classic sci-fi author of them all!” The old man screeched out a laugh that didn’t quite sound sane. “Powerful fucking shit, man! It will last you the whole night. It wears off after about ten hours or so, so you’ll wake up as yourself.”

“I don’t know...” Joe stroked his chin. A drug that tunes you into the mind of someone long since passed...was something like that even possible? Or was the old man off his rocker?

As if reading his mind, the old man answered, “This is for real, mister! Word is, they did all sorts of research on his brain, and this is what they came up with! There’s nothing in the world like it. And almost nobody knows about this. I can guarantee you won’t find this anywhere else!”

The whole thing sounded ridiculous. But it was also eerie how the old man had somehow tapped into his thought patterns. He stared at the pills, thinking about his speculations earlier about being able to hear everyone's thoughts like in a Dick novel. Well, he decided, what did he have to lose? This was about as close a chance as any he'd ever have at testing out his theory. And going to clubs and doing the same old thing and not getting anywhere with the girls wasn't much better. He sighed. I'm about to do the most ridiculous thing I've ever done, he thought. "How much?"

"I don't have a retina scanner buddy, so I hope you've got cash."

CHAPTER 2

QUIBBICK #1: The Empire

The kid stood in front of a pile of various issues of Astounding Magazine. He was at his favorite bookstore, and this was his favorite sci-fi pulp. He had found that science fiction pulps were the one place where the things he had seen in his visions, his remembrances of the future, were openly talked about. Perhaps one day he would even try his hand at writing science fiction himself. That way, he would have a place where he could communicate his visions without people writing him off as a crackpot. Normal people, lacking his preternatural remembrance of the future, wouldn't believe him if he simply told them the truth. But science fiction, he realized, was a useful tool. He could use science fiction to warn people of the coming dystopia. He liked writing stories, and his teachers at school had even encouraged him in this direction.

He kept rummaging through the pile, pulling off magazine after magazine. Finally, there it was. He had found it! The issue he was searching for. After all this time, at last he held it in his hands! He gave two shiny dimes to the sales clerk, and hurried back home. After he had locked himself inside his bedroom, he eagerly began reading the issue. After reaching the last page, he gently placed the issue down on a stack of pulps he had collected.

He lay on his bed and pondered the things he had read. The issue had told of the bondage of all humans on the planet to a mysterious cosmic force, through the very technology that man himself had built up. Man had built his own technological prison all up around himself. What was this mysterious cosmic force? And why did it want to rule humanity?

“So the man with the cigar...that's what he was

telling me about. That's what I saw there, trapped in that cosmic realm. The mysterious cosmic force. It wants to overtake us. Every last one of us."

Was this the secret of the universe he knew would be revealed to him if only he could find this particular issue?

He lay for a long time on his bed, meditating.

On top of the stack of pulps, on the cover of the issue he had just finished reading, were written the words:

"THE EMPIRE NEVER ENDED."

Joe had asked directions and was walking back towards his part of town. As his surroundings started to look more familiar, he fingered the pills in his pocket pensively. What the hell was I thinking? How is this going to help me get girls? And do these things even work? Maybe they'll put me in a coma. Somehow, he had been suckered into trading his Fapple watch for the pills, since he hadn't carried cash for at least ten years, since the government had banned it. Cash contributed towards atmospheric pressure, or something like that. Well, at least the old man had been kind enough to throw in the Semenator for free. That Fapple watch was the newest model. It had been expensive.

He didn't entirely trust the pills, but he knew that he wouldn't get another chance to test his crazy theory out for another month if he didn't do it now. Joe had been born with a light penis hanging between his legs, which meant he was only allowed into nightclubs on the last Saturday of each month, Pale Penis Saturday.

In order to save humanity from racism and racial stereotypes, the monopolists had created the ACS (Acronym Caste System), a race and gender-based caste system for the proles. Joe was the absolute lowest caste: a PP, or Pale Penis. Upon the Double-P caste were placed the most restrictions. The highest prole caste, with the least restrictions and most privileges, was NPV, or Non-Pale Vagina. The caste system was only for the proles, of course. The highest class in society, with unlimited privilege, was the monopolists, a truly minuscule group of pale-skinned penis-havers, less than one percent of one percent of the population. The ACS, with its racial hierarchy and strict rules, which they had created to save the world from racism, didn't apply to them.

Only to the proles. Thus, while the absolute rulers of the planet had pale skin and wangs like Joe, they were at the top of the hierarchical systemic structure, while all of the light-skinned, meatstick-having proles like Joe were at the bottom. The light-skinned wangers at the top of society had declared war on the light-skinned wangers at the bottom of society. And in between were the dark-skinned people, who the ridiculously wealthy light wangers claimed to be rescuing from the poor light wangers. What a crazy world.

Strange as it may seem, it made perfect sense to the proles that the wealthiest, most powerful people on the planet were all light-skinned people with a penis. Who else would save all the dark-skinned people? They definitely couldn't save themselves! Every good prole knew that proles were nothing by themselves...they needed rich, famous, and powerful people to save them, to validate them, to repeat slogans reassuring them of their worth. And who better to reassure dark-skinned people of their worth then a bunch of rich light-skinned men who stand at the top of society?

I'm just a lowly Double-P, an untouchable, a born enemy of the people, he thought. All odds are against me. But I still wanna get laid! And maybe tonight I'll get lucky if this pill and my crazy idea works. I don't really have much to lose. What am I waiting for? It's now or never. He still had plenty of time to go to another club and test it out, see if it really worked. Or why even wait to find another club? Just test it out here on the street. His curiosity got the better of him.

He backed into a dark alley and looked around. He pulled out the pills. P...K...D. On the way back, he had stopped and retina-scanned himself two bottles of

water. He had dumped out the water from one of them and filled it with his own piss, so he could pour it down his cybertoilet later, and piss in an alley, so the panopticon supercomputer wouldn't get suspicious about him peeing less than he regularly did. He took out one of the water bottles, careful to select the one that he hadn't peed in. ChemicoPlus, of course. The only government-authorized bottled water company. Gonna make some monopolist light wang richer, he thought, as he threw the three pills in his mouth, and tossed them back with some water.

He stood in the darkness of the alley, eyes focusing on the street. On the sidewalk, doe-eyed pedestrians flowed by. He waited. He focused. And...

Nothing. He heard nothing. Felt nothing.

I don't feel any different, he thought. What exactly does it feel like to be Philip K. Dick?

Just then, he heard something from behind him. He froze. Was it a robo-enforcer? Had he somehow been noticed taking the unauthorized pills? There were stiff Friendly Camp sentences for anyone taking non-Pfarma drugs. He slowly turned his head and looked back into the dark alleyway behind him. A silhouette approached. A girl. Tight skirt. High heels. Shiny halter top. Thank god! It was just a prostitute.

"Hey mister, looking for a good time?"

His first reflex was to decline, since prostitution was strictly prohibited, but then it struck him that this might be the perfect way to test his theory.

"Hey, want to play a little game? Let's see if I can read your thoughts."

"Huh? Is this some kinda weird fetish?"

"No fetish. Just wanna try something. Just think about something, anything...And let's see if I can tell

you what you're thinking."

"Okay." The prostitute smiled. "See if you can tell me what I'm thinking right now."

Joe closed his eyes. He concentrated. He heard... the faint whir of some autocabs in the distance, the sound of feet on the sidewalk, a few voices, and... that was it. Damn it.

"Give up? I was thinking...this guy's a total creep." She shoved past him onto the sidewalk.

Fuck! This is ridiculous, he thought. What was I thinking, trading my watch for those pills? Probably made of sugar! To think that life could be like fiction. Ridiculous.

Furious, Joe marched back to the alley where he had met the old man. Get my watch back, he thought. These pills ain't worth shit. But the old man was gone. Fucking hell!

It was too much for one night. First getting kicked out of the club. And now losing his watch for some sugar pills. As he stood, fuming, in the alleyway, a fly landed on his shoulder and began to buzz out an annoying message, "Are you worried your five-o-clock shadow might make you look like an extremist? With their triple-blade patented formula, Shillette razors—"

"Buzz off!" He said, and flicked the annoying little fly off his shoulder. It whacked into the concrete building wall with a thud. "Shill....shi-lettte..." The fly muttered on the dirty alley floor in between some used condoms and then went silent.

Better call it a night, he thought. I think I've done enough damage for one evening. Sullen, he trod off in the direction of his massive apartment building.

As Joe approached the building, he noticed a boy with blonde curly hair crouched on the sidewalk, drawing with some crayons on a piece of paper. What was some kid doing out at this hour? Then he remembered that the government had relaxed the curfew for all citizens since the proles were only allowed outside during a 48-hour window on the weekend.

He stepped closer and glanced down at the picture. He recognized it as the apartment building where he lived, only....much older. There were giant cracks everywhere, broken windows. Instead of the flower gardens in front, only...dry and menacing weeds.

The boy looked up at Joe. He pointed at the picture as if to show something to Joe. "Gubbish. Gubbish, gubbish..." He was pointing at the windows, and cracks and weeds. What language was that? German?

"That's nice," Joe said, not knowing what else to say.

He entered the building and took the elevator to his floor. As he approached the door of his apartment he looked into the red laser. He froze. Wait...the red laser was missing. What had happened to the retina scanner?

"Five cents, please," a voice suddenly demanded.

Wait a minute. Who said that? Was his Fapple watch yammering at him again? But he had given the old man his watch. He looked around. No one. He grabbed the handle and turned it. It didn't open.

"Five cents, please."

It was coming from the door.

"What are you talking about? This is my apartment. I don't have to pay to get in. What happened to the retina scanner?" And why am I

talking to a door?

“The fee stipulated in the contract is five cents per use.”

“But how am I supposed to pay you without a retina scanner?”

“Please deposit the coin in the slot below the doorknob.”

He found himself reflexively checking his pockets for change, back from the days before cash was illegal. No luck. At that moment, one of his neighbors, an elderly lady, entered the hall.

“Ms. Juniper! Sorry to bother you...some prankster installed a talking doorknob on my door and it’s demanding five cents for me to get in! Have you got a nickel? I haven’t carried around change for years.”

Ms. Juniper fished around in her purse. “A lot of stuff has collected in here over the years.” She pulled out a dried-up fishstick. “No...” She pulled out some wads of chewed-up gum that had hardened. “No...” She continued fishing out small bits of garbage, until eventually... “Here we go!” She pulled out a nickel.

“Thanks,” Joe said, and inserted it in the slot. He turned the doorknob. No dice.

“Ah ah ah...what about the key? I can’t open up for just anyone.” The door intoned in a snooty voice.

He hadn’t used any key for years. Oddly enough, however, he had found a key while searching his pockets for change. He inserted it into the door. It worked. Thank god! What a night! But now it was finally over. He was safe at home in his cybercubicle.

Inside, he found that the TV had been left on, which was strange, because he usually didn’t use the outdated, flat TV to view the Cyberverses. He usually just hooked into the Cyberverses with his goggles. There was a commercial playing about lead codpieces. Lead codpieces! What the hell were

those for? Looking around, he noticed that his goggles, as well as the camera which tracked his motion so he could interact with people at his job through virtual reality was missing. What the hell? Had some drugged-up burglars come to his apartment and decided to only jack his retina scanner and Cyberverspace gear, and then prank his door? But then how had he had the right key in his pocket?

He picked up the remote and was about to turn the TV off when a friendly face showed up on the screen.

“Hello friends! I’m Buster Smiley! And today we’ve got some very important news. You remember the writer Philip K. Dick, right? Author of such smashing successes as...”

What the hell? Was this just a string of coincidences that never ends? First his musings in the club, and then the old man, and now this...

“Well, we’ve got some great news, and then some horrible news! First, the good news. The literary genius is still alive! But unfortunately, the FBI is keeping him on ice in Switzerland. And now the bad news. If Philip K. Dick doesn’t wake up soon, something terrible is going to happen to all of humanity! If you’re listening, this is urgent! You’ve got to talk to Glen Runciter and tell him that Dick is being held at the Beloved Brethren Moratorium in Zurich. Got that? Glen Runciter. Beloved Brethren! Now, don’t forget, or the whole world will go to shit! The fate of humanity is counting on you, and I mean you! Now for a commercial break!”

What the hell was that all about? His night had gone from irksome, to weird, to just downright bizarre. He needed a smoke. He opened the pack of menthols and put one to his mouth, and then

remembered he had forgotten to buy matches. He searched his kitchen for a match and found a small match dispenser with a sign reading “5¢.” Was everything in his cubicle coin-operated now? Fuck it, I’ll just eat that cockroachburger. He headed over to the microwave. Damn it! Ten cents to use his own microwave!

Suddenly, in the living room, a phone rang.

A phone? Sounded like one of those old landlines. Why was there a landline phone in his cybercubicle? It continued to ring. He walked back into the living room. He glared suspiciously at the phone as it kept ringing. I’ve never seen this phone before in my life, he thought. Finally, he picked up the receiver.

A redheaded man, with a face tough as nails, showed up on the landline phone’s video screen. Very retrofuturistic, Joe thought to himself. “Hey, Bryant here. Give me a sitrep. Did you retire those Andys yet?”

Who was this guy? He acted like he knows me. And what the hell is he talking about? Joe didn’t know what to say. “Um...not yet,” he mumbled.

“Well how much more time do you need? We’ve got Andys loose terrorizing the city!”

Andys? Were they extremists? And why weren’t the robo-enforcers working on it? And why was this man calling *him*? Nevertheless, Joe didn’t want to upset the man. He looked like someone you didn’t want to cross. Not able to think up anything else, he let out a sigh and said, “I’m working on it.”

“Look, I’ll pay you a thousand dollars apiece for those Andys. What are you waiting for? Get back out on the street and get to work.” The man hung up and his image disappeared.

Joe sat down on the couch and rubbed his temples. Was he losing it? Then it struck him. This

must be a hallucination. Maybe those pills weren't sugar, after all. Maybe they make you hallucinate that robbers burglarized your home and that some strange guy wants you to retire Andys. Some good that is! I wanted to be able to read women's thoughts, and instead, I got this bullshit.

Just then he noticed a pretty female reporter on TV interviewing an older rich man in a suit. They seemed to be in a nightclub. "I'm here at The Habitat, the city's most respectable club, with Glen Runciter, of Runciter Associates. Glen, what do you think about the club's new stricter social status requirements?"

Joe remembered the name Buster Smiley had mentioned. Glen Runciter. But what was Runciter Associates? Joe hadn't heard of that monopoly. The man looked important. A bit older. Expensive suit. He tried to memorize his features.

The reporter was talking again. "...with the club's new goat-level access requirement, meaning that only those who own a goat or above can get in, a lot of common folk feel excluded. Not everyone can afford to shell out the money for a goat, which is currently listed at three thousand dollars in the February Sidney's catalogue..."

He sat back and tried to sort things out. What did I get that useless degree in psychology for if I can't even analyze what's happening to me right now? So, first, somebody on TV, name of Buster Smiley, wants me to somehow get to Glen Runciter and give him the message that Philip K. Dick is still alive and is at the Beloved Brethren Moratorium, or else something very bad will happen to all of humanity. And then, some guy named Bryant wants me to retire Andys. You were right, old man. He chuckled to himself. That's quite the trip. Sounds like a hallucination,

alright. But that doesn't help me. Not exactly what I was after! Maybe I just need to go to bed and sleep it off. Or maybe....

Maybe the pills were so powerful, they knocked me out completely and I'm already in my bed sleeping. Some dreams can be very lucid. How do I know I'm not sleeping right now and all of this is just one crazy dream? Dreams are nonsensical, and they also draw on content from the previous day's memories and thoughts, he knew. So having a dream like this would make perfect sense.

Suddenly, a thought came to him. If I'm dreaming, then... He stood up, walked over to the wall, and slammed his head into it. Owwww!!!! God damn it!! He held his head in his hands and sat down again. The pain was definitely real.

Buster Smiley was talking on the TV again. "All of Hollywood is one big hoax. Run by an alien presence..." Joe stared at the TV, his head pounding, as Buster explicated some sort of crazy scheme that didn't make any sense.

Just then he noticed something orange zip across the couch and disappear between the cushions. Startled, he jumped up. What the fuck was that? He grabbed a broom from the kitchen and used it to fish in between the couch cushions, and pulled out....a stale cheesepuff.

The phone rang again. He picked it up. Oh, great. The tough guy again.

"Hey, the situation has gotten worse. I've just received word that the Andys are closing in on your location. If you don't take care of them, they'll do you in first! Why are you still sitting around? Get your ass in gear if you want to live!" He hung up.

So now he was a target? Why would anyone care enough about him to want to do him in? Perhaps he

was having a schizoid attack. Didn't schizophrenics dream up plots where everyone was out to get them? It was the classic narcissistic self-importance, one's unconscious fantasies being played out.

But if he really was psychotic, he wouldn't realize that he was psychotic. He would believe in his grandiose fantasies 100%, as schizos do. No, this situation, in all its weirdness, didn't match what he had read in the textbooks at university. He very clear-mindedly recognized what was happening now as logically absurd, despite it being sensorily realistic. He questioned it, in the very act of it happening. Psychotics don't do that.

He remembered a quote from a book he had read during his freshman year. "Dreams are real while they last. Can we say more of life?" Who had written that? Was it Havelock Ellis? But then...what's the difference between dreams and real life? Both are temporary. Ephemeral. Transitory. Isn't this life just one big dream that's going to go up in a puff of smoke one day? That would explain his life very well, he thought. The panopticon and all of the petty bullcrap he had to put up with everyday. Absurd. Meaningless. Futile. And meanwhile the monopolists could go around doing whatever they want. He had to admit his normal life didn't make much more sense than this dream, truth be told.

Well, he thought, it doesn't matter if this dream is my life, or if my life is this dream, or if this is all just a hallucination from a non-Pfarma drug. I know that I can feel pain. And I can think clearly. And if there really are extremists trying to kill me, they could show up at any moment. Could Bryant have been right? Were there really people after him?

Just then, he heard a pounding on the door.

Shit! It's the Andys! They're here for me! He froze

in panic. What should I do? He was too young, with too much life ahead of him, to have it all end now, this way...

But then he heard Ms. Juniper's voice on the other side of the door. "Joe, do you have any toilet paper? I'm all out. I'll lend you a nickel if you open the door and lend me some."

After Joe had lent some toilet paper to Ms. Juniper, he sat down and sighed. What had Buster Smiley said? The fate of humanity's at stake. Fuck it. I'm sick of being a nobody. I'm sick of all the chicks at the club ignoring me. I'm sick of sitting here alone in my cubicle, with only Ms. Juniper to talk to. My life has meaning, damn it! If there really is some plot afoot, someone needs to solve it, and I'm the one to do it! I'm going to retire those Andys, and then get to that club...The Habitat, it was called, and get the message to Runciter.

But then he remembered something the reporter had said...they require you to own a goat to get into the club! Who ever heard of something as absurd as that? A goat cost three thousand dollars, the reporter had mentioned. But that redheaded guy, Bryant, said he would pay a thousand for each Andy he retired. Hmm...three Andys for one goat. So there was only one question left...how was he going to retire the Andys?

He roved around the cubicle apartment, which seemed slightly bigger now, searching every nook and cranny. He found a large appliance claiming to be a mood organ near his Fukea bed (Fukea was the government-sanctioned furniture monopoly run by Chief Monopolist Buck Whiteypants). He also found what appeared to be...a laser gun. And a pocket-sized thingamajig called a Penfield wave transmitter, with an instruction manual. Where had all this stuff

come from? Whatever. It didn't matter. He knew what he had to do. He took the laser gun and the Penfield thingamajig. Time to get to work, he thought.

He walked to the door and tried to open it.

"Five cents, please."

Fuck! I've got a laser gun, and apparently I'm some kind of enforcer now, but I can't even leave my apartment for want of a nickel, he thought.

He called out to the hallway. "Um...hello? Ms. Juniper? Are you still there?"

Finally, after pounding for several minutes on the wall between his apartment and Ms. Juniper's, he was able to talk her out of yet another nickel and leave his apartment. For her trouble, he handed her the frozen cockroachburger in gratitude. She tucked it into that black hole of a purse she carried around, apparently to be found at some later date, god knows when and by whom. Perhaps it would feed the last man alive.

He strode down the hallway, laser gun tucked into his belt. This was a new feeling for him, being armed and dangerous. The proles were prohibited from owning any kind of weapon. He felt like the hero from one of those action sci-fi cyberfilms. Something about being dangerous, perhaps even recklessly dangerous, felt strangely good for some reason. It felt like a breath of fresh air had just been infused into his boring cyberprole life.

Okay, he thought, now let's go retire some Andys.

CHAPTER 3

BIOSYNTHETIC INTERNAL DIARY #2

Two men stood on a beach, cool air whipping at their hair. A strange-looking black dog with a long neck, long thin body, and long fur on its ears and tail brought them a frisbee. This exotic breed of dog was called a Saluki. One of the men, a thin, stately old man, took the frisbee from the dog's mouth. He stroked the dog's head lovingly. It was his favorite pet. His beloved. He threw the frisbee. The dog ran after it.

From a ways off, a slender, beautiful young woman watched as her uncle and his friend conversed.

Finally, she approached the two men. "Uncle, I've set up the stakes. Can we play horseshoes now?"

Her uncle scowled as he waved her away. "Not now. I told you, we don't have time for horseshoes today."

As she walked away, disappointed, she could hear her uncle tell the man, "I should have never programmed her to have human emotions. She nags all the time. Worse than a child."

She stood for a few minutes alone, throwing the horseshoe at the stake. Then she lost interest. She stared at her uncle, his friend, and the dog. What was this strange sensation rising up in her? Was this an emotion?

Each time the dog retrieved the frisbee, her uncle lovingly rubbed the dog's head or stroked its long, slender back. The creature was his pride and joy. It was a biological animal, not one of the electric models.

If I were a dog, would he pay attention to me? She thought. If I were biological, would he pet and scratch my head? The strange sensation welled up

inside of her more and more.

He always has time for his human friends, and his dog, she thought. But he treats me like a useless hunk of scrap. I'm his prototype, she thought. I'm just business. Those others, those with natural flesh and blood, he doesn't treat them like business. A product. That's what I am to him, just a product.

The dog returned with the frisbee again. Her uncle scratched under its chin. He tousled the long fur on its ears.

"I hate animals," she decided.

Incessant thoughts. The opposite of nirvana. Ever since they had forced him to be injected with the drug twenty years ago, the thinking had never stopped. Even in his sleep, in his dreams...one endless stream of consciousness that couldn't be quenched.

John Isidore was a man whose brain was on fire.

He closed the laptop. His screenplay was perfect, but they had refused to accept it. The bastards. And here he was, reading over his perfect text and realizing why he needed a new job.

He noticed the crimson light dappling his closed laptop. Sundown already.

He stood up and walked towards the window. Burgundy rays poured onto the beige shag carpet and chestnut microfiber couch cushions of his Santa Monica apartment, as if molten magma were spilling in through the blinds. Isidore peered out the blinds at the coastline. The California sun was a fiery orb, dipping down into the Pacific.

This place had been his abode for decades. Uprooted from San Francisco, he had dozens of screenplays under his belt, each one better than the last, each one complained about more by his bosses than the last. His mind hadn't been able to turn off since he started the first one. Now, it felt like a rocket had been attached to the back of a train, and it was about to derail itself.

He walked over to an arcade console in his living room. The title of the console read, "Martyr: The Video Game." Instead of joysticks, it simply had two handles which protruded in front of the screen. He firmly gripped the handles. And suddenly...

He was Wilbur Mercer, the Martyr. His apartment disappeared, and he was walking, alone, up a rocky mountain path, the thorns on the bushes to either

side digging into him. He wore a long, white robe. From behind him, people were throwing rocks. A rock connected. And then another, and another. Finally, when he had taken enough, he released the grips and he was back in his Santa Monica apartment, wearing the same clothes as before. He was no longer Mercer. No longer the Martyr.

He went to the bathroom and examined the large cut on his forehead from where one of the stones had impacted. Blood ran down, freely. "Damn it," he said, as he pulled out some gauze and wrapped up the wound.

Exhausted, he went to the kitchen and poured himself a Bourbon. Usually the video game helped him clear his mind a bit, but he couldn't stop thinking about his characters, about the intricacies of their psyches, about their relationship to one another, about the next crisis that would force them to grow as a person. Character arcs. Growth. Crisis. Catharsis. His characters were as real, if not more real, than any person. In fact, recently many of the characters from his screenplays had started appearing in the real world. Which reminded him...

Why am I here, in this world, in this time and place? Because of thought. Because someone thought me up as a character in one of his novels, realizing only later that his thought patterns were bringing me here, into this place. Thought is what brought me into this reality. From my initial world. My initial reality. And how did I come to exist in my initial reality? Because someone there had thought me up? Had programmed me with all my wants and wishes? Were we all just the products of thought? Children of the thoughts of the One who created everything that exists out of pure thought. Yes, Isidore had thought many times about the

Programmer, the source of all.

In the beginning was the Thought, and the Thought was with the Programmer, and the Thought was the Programmer.

Like the one who brought me here into this current reality once wrote, everything is true. Everything that anybody has ever thought. Because every possibility exists, somewhere out there, as part of the Potentialverse, which contains all of existence. Not just this one measly existence, but all possible existences. And thought is what connects all planes of existence! Thought is information, and all of existence is simply made up of information. Thus, all existence flows from thought.

So that's why I am here. I was willed into this here, into this now. Every time anyone ever thinks, they are willing realities into existence. All thoughts are real. Thoughts represent alternate planes of reality. Orthogonal time and space. Endless levels of existence, layers upon layers upon layers... But no one has ever made it to the top layer. Yet.

God damn it! There it goes again! The never ending thinking. The merry-go-round never ceases.

Need. Temporary. Relief. Can't. Stop. Thinking.

There were only two possible solutions to his problem.

To destroy all thoughts. To destroy everything.
Darkness.

Or, to get all the answers to all of his questions.
Light.

Which one would it be, darkness or light?

Would the comforting darkness where no one can think solve his problem? Or, would he make it to the top layer of existence, and solve the mysteries of the universe?

Suddenly his watch rang. He answered. On the surface of the watch a man with sandy blonde hair and a goatee appeared. He looked emaciated, withered. He wore a multi-colored, striped terry cloth bathrobe that looked way too big. That bathrobe had fit him perfectly before. It was Doug. His best friend. His mentor. One of Hollywood's sharpest. But now the tables were turned. The drug had had the opposite effect on the two men. "John... I'm having..." The man was clearly having problems thinking, forming sentences. "...problems breathing. I tried...kids.... I need—"

"Don't talk, Doug. I'll be right down. Take it easy. Stay right where you are. Try to relax." Isidore rang off.

Doug Campbell lived in the same apartment building as Isidore. He was the one who had helped him get a place there when he relocated to L.A. Isidore took the elevator down two floors and rushed down the hall to door number seven. He stared into the retinal scanner and the door clicked open. Doug had given access to his apartment to his two surviving children and to his friend Isidore in case of an emergency.

He rushed across the living room to the black leather couch Doug had been sitting in when he called. Doug wasn't there. Isidore examined the room. Pink, furry rabbit slippers sat, abandoned in front of the couch. The striped bathrobe lay limp in the middle of the couch, where Doug had been moments ago. He picked it up. Out of it fell bits of corkboard, paperclips, fragments of three-by-five cards with scene descriptions written in blue ink, crumpled yellow sticky notes, push pins, and pieces of manuscript paper with twelve-point Courier type. Bits of Doug's latest screenplay, Isidore realized. Damn it!

That was it. The last straw. That damn drug had taken his last friend. And his best one. Four other screenwriters...everyone of them with the same fate. Just a pile of screenwriting garbage.

And each one of them, including Doug, had slowly, progressively, gotten stupider and stupider since they had been forced to have the experimental injection. But exactly the opposite had happened to Isidore. The same gradual process, but in reverse. When he had arrived in Hollywood, he had been a special. His mind blasted by radiation. He had worked a menial job as a truck driver for a false animal repair shop in San Francisco. But in Hollywood they had offered him a job as screenwriter,

conditional on him taking the injection. But soon after the injection, he realized that the powers of his mind were growing. And now, he knew, whether they realized it or not, that he was the smartest man in this town.

Some would kill to be the smartest man. But Isidore knew the truth. Being the smartest man was a nightmare. His brain. It couldn't stop. He had no control over it. Hungrier and hungrier, it continued on its course, relentless. Cogitating, creating, analyzing, extrapolating. He could have written a new screenplay every day if they had asked him to. Instead, they had progressively become less and less interested in his work. Wanted him to tone it down. Needs to reach a broader audience, they had said.

He looked at the scraps of screenplays on the couch. Doug was a nice man. A kind man. From the first time they had met, he had never cared that Isidore was a special. He had taken him under his wing and shown him how to function in Hollywood. Doug was that rare breed of person who didn't judge, who liked all types of people, especially the downtrodden. Doug had had a friend as a child who had Down's syndrome, and he had stayed in touch with him, even as a Hollywood screenwriter. Had flown back home to the East Coast every year to visit his special friend on his birthday. Never missed a birthday. Had even paid to have him flown out to L.A. and had given him a tour of the studio and introduced him to Isidore and his other screenwriting friends. To his Down's syndrome friend, it had been the greatest day of his life.

The last good man in Hollywood had died. Turned into nothing but scrap.

And if this was the end of each of his friends who had taken the injection, then what would happen to

him? But its effects had been different on him. Maybe it reacted differently to people from his orthogonal space. Had it given him a new lease on life? Had it vivified, rejuvenated him, where it had sapped the life and energy out of the others? Or, in causing his brain to go into overdrive, would it eventually cause his system to break down? While their gears had been slowed, halted, until they had simply stopped working, would his gears whirl on at top velocity until eventually they flew off the rod entirely?

Underneath his incessant speculation, he perceived the droning on of an ambient electric voice. He turned around and realized the TV was still on. On the screen humanoid figures of all shapes and sizes flashed, one after the other. The commercial's narrator blared out, "Do you want to own slaves, just like in those pre-Civil War days? Technology has made your dream a reality! Now you can own your very own slave! Built from the ground up with state-of-the-art organic electric circuitry, your top-of-the-line android will do all its master's biddings!" The scene cut to a red-dirt farm on Mars. A man was addressing an android. "I want all this cotton picked by the end of the day. The colony needs more clothes. We can't wait for the next shipment from Earth."

Wait a minute. Mars? But man hadn't colonized Mars in this timespace, even though that monopolist Elon Pasteyboy had promised it over and over. This seemed like something from...

As if in answer to his thoughts, a familiar face appeared on the TV. "Hello there, friend! It's me, Buster Smiley!"

Isidore knew this face, this TV show. It was from the layer of existence he had originally come from.

But why was Buster Smiley appearing now, in this layer?

Buster Smiley went on. "Are you wondering how to converse with the Programmer? Are you looking for answers to all of the universe's conundrums? Well, boy have I got the golden ticket for you! All you need to do is just talk with the Thinker, and the Thinker will introduce you to the Programmer! It's as simple as that! If you want to uncover the mysteries of the universe, that's all you need to do! Now, let me tell you the secret of conversing with the Thinker _"

Suddenly, there was static on the TV and Buster Smiley disappeared. Then, abruptly, the TV was displaying a commercial by Shillette about how their razors will make you less manly, and how that was a good thing, since manliness was evil. There were some people dressed up in costumes which covered their entire bodies and made them look like giant light-colored penises and giant dark vaginas. The costumed figures sang a jingle, "Shillette will turn Pale Penises into Non-Pale Vaginas...so buy Shillette and stop being evil today! Boo-wop doo-wop! PPs become NPVs! Boopity-boop doo-wop!"

Isidore had seen thousands of advertisements like this one in the reality where he was a Hollywood screenwriter. So apparently he was back in this layer. Back in this orthogone.

But how had Buster Smiley broken through to this layer, and how had he known what Isidore had been thinking, only moments before? Isidore desperately wanted to speak with the Programmer. He had so many questions for him. So he was supposed to speak with the Thinker, and the Thinker would introduce him to the Programmer? There was only one tiny problem. The Thinker was dead! So that

would be impossible! This didn't make any sense at all...

Just then, his panoptiwatch rang again. He answered it. Another familiar face. Mr. Sloat, his former employer, who had also been transported into this orthogone years ago. "Isidore, long time no see, buddy."

"Mr. Sloat, nice to see you."

"Look, John, I know you got that fancy Hollywood job now, but if you're ever back in the San Fran area, we could really use some help. There's been a spate of animal murders and attempted murders in the neighborhood, and some of the animals have been electric, so we're drowning in repair requests. And Milt's been having to pick them up and deliver them himself. We're swamped. We could really use your help, buddy."

CHAPTER 4

QUIBBICK #2: Fuzzy Wuzzy

The creative writing teacher frowned as he looked at the story in his hands. "Your writing...it's got potential, but it needs a little...something. It needs... wubbly hubbly, clickity clackity, zippity zappity, flippity floppity, wiggle waggle, schnipple wipple, tickle wickle, gribble grabble..."

"But, I tried my hardest, teacher," the adolescent boy said, disheartened. Their school was lucky to have a creative writing teacher, especially this one. He had been excited for the opportunity to hone his skills. He didn't want to disappoint him.

"I think you're channeling fuzzy wuzzy here. But that's beneath you. I know you've got more potential than that. We need to move you up into bippity boppity territory. Tell you what. Go home and watch the fairy godmother's song in Cinderella five times and then rewrite." He handed the story back to his student.

The boy cocked his head. "Wait, is that the one that goes blippity boopity beep?"

"No, no, no! Not blippity boopity beep! Bippity boppity boo!"

The teacher repeated the phrase over several times, coaxing the student, until he finally got it right. "Bippity boppity boo!" the boy said, now with more confidence.

"Much better! I knew you could do it!"

"Okay, I'll go home and watch that scene not five times, but ten times, and then rewrite the story! I promise you the next draft will be full of...full of... wait, what did my story need again?"

"Don't worry, just watch the godmother, and she will lead the way. Now run along, and we'll see you in class tomorrow."

“Thank you, Dr. Seuss,” the boy said as he left the classroom.

He could hear the babbling of the idiots from the moment he walked in the door of the analytic wing of the SocialEqualityFlix studio in Burbank. SocialEqualityFlix had acquired Whamazon's movies studios and become the monopoly on all cyberfilm and cyberseries production and distribution in the world. Hence, as a screenwriter, they were Isidore's employers. Isidore walked past the rows and rows of equipment, the vast room packed with data receptors and computing hardware, hard at work. Ed, the lab technician walked by.

"Hey, Izzy! How's it going?"

For some reason they had given Isidore that nickname when he arrived in the valley, and it had stuck.

"Ed, I need to talk with Mr. Payne."

"I'll tell him you're here," Ed replied and then disappeared.

Continuing on through the labyrinth of machines, he finally reached the center of the room, where the three precog retards sat, strapped into their chairs, dozens of wires hooked up to each one, obscuring their mutant features. They were sports. Genetic anomalies. Their oversized bulbous heads housed an overdeveloped pineal gland and shriveled-up frontal lobe. It was ghastly to look at them, muttering, drooling, spitting, as they blubbered out nonsensical fragments to be pieced together by the room full of thinking machines.

Roger Payne snuck up from behind Isidore, as he had a habit of doing. "Izzy! I've been looking all over for you." He noticed the bandage on Isidore's forehead. "Ouch! What happened to your head, Izzy?"

"God damn it, Roger, why do you always do that?"

"Do what? By the way, Big Mike wants to talk

with you. About that last screenplay you submitted. He thinks we can use it, if we make a few changes here and there.” A brown-haired man with a bald pate and green eyes, the producer had been Isidore’s boss on over a dozen of his screenplays. On his blue suit’s lapel he wore a pin with a red and grey yin-yang symbol without the dots.

“Doug is dead, Roger. Turned into scraps. Just like Tim, Martin, and Cheryl. And Elaine.”

“My god, I can’t take another. Screenwriters have been dropping like flies.”

“Why won’t you tell us what was in those injections?”

“I already explained all that. That’s top secret. Hush hush. You trying to rock the boat? We don’t ask questions when we get orders from up top. You know how things work around here.”

“Then I’m afraid I can’t go on working here anymore.”

“Izzy, come on, you can’t leave me. You were always okay with things before. Why are you starting this bullshit?”

“If you need me so bad, then why can’t you leave the scripts the way I write them? Why the constant telling me to go back and rewrite parts that I know are working?”

“You’ve changed, Izzy. You’re not the man you used to be.”

“When I arrived here, my IQ was 70.”

“Exactly. You...you’re different now. We need to gently nudge your work. Back to how it used to be. That’s the orders from up top. I told you I can’t change that. Outta my jurisdiction.”

Isidore had come to Hollywood decades ago to complain that they had written him out of the film *Blade Runner*. In the beginning, they were surprised

to actually see him in real life. They thought it was some kind of hoax or practical joke. Then other characters started showing up in real life. They had started to realize that those characters weren't fictional at all. In fact, they had come to realize that fiction itself wasn't what they had thought it was. It was visions. Dreams. Of orthogonal reality.

And so the producers had stood, gape-mouthed, as Isidore explained to them why they were wrong to replace him with some character that had nothing to do with him. Some "genius" genetic designer who made androids. And he had explained to them why their reason for doing so was prejudice. Prejudice against specials. They didn't want to portray people with mental disabilities, he had insisted, and he would have none of it. He was a real person, from a concurrent reality, brought into this reality through the process of thought. Why would they create a totally different character, just because he was a special? He had come directly to the people in charge, in person, to file a formal complaint.

And they had surprised him by offering him a job as screenwriter.

You see, what they wanted, was not to portray idiots qua idiots. They wanted to portray "normal" characters as idiots. In hopes that a new generation of cyberfilm watchers would imitate these idiotic characters' behavior and thinking, unconsciously assuming the attitudes and modes of thinking of the characters they watched every day, and as a result, become the very media they consumed. In short, become idiots. Thus, having a character who was overtly special was out of the question, but having a special writing the script and dialogue for the normal characters, that aligned with their goals perfectly. It made perfect sense, if your goal was to lower IQs.

The banks of equipment kept humming, analyzing every incohesive rambling, every nonsensical muttering of the mutants. A card popped out of one of the machines. Payne picked it up. He read it over and then handed it to Isidore.

On the card was written, "Make a horribly-written cyberseries set in the Lord of the Rings universe, which has absolutely nothing to do with Tolkien's novels. Ginormous budget. Tiny production values. Call anyone who doesn't like it evil."

"See, Izzy? We need you. This next series is going to be the biggest hit ever. I'll bring you on as main writer and double—no, triple—your salary from your last project. See? It says here the budget will be huge but it'll have extremely low production values. That means we can line our pockets with as much of that over-inflated budget as we want, and we barely even have to work." Payne chuckled. He was the opposite of Isidore. Isidore loved the act of creation, regarded it as a holy thing. Payne, on the other hand, reveled not in creating actual art, or works of intellectual sophistication, but rather in creating cunning schemes to con people out of their money. He had the perfect mentality that monopolists looked for, and thus had worked his way up quite far on the Hollywood ladder. "We can't lose! Whaddya say? Wanna get rich for doing next to nothing?"

Isidore despised this man who had been his boss for decades. He loved using his imagination, and that's why he had accepted the job in the first place. But working here had become more and more unbearable over the years. He looked over at the mutant idiots strapped to the metal chairs. Although he had been a special once, these three were nothing like he had been before. They were something else entirely. They literally had no contact

with the outside world, or with other humans. To call them retarded was putting it mildly. But...they could see the future. In fact, that's all they could see. Precogs. Thus, using their banks of analytical equipment to decipher the precog retards' nonsensical blatherings, Hollywood was able to see, through them, into the future and know which cyberfilms and series would be popular. The idiots had the double advantage of both seeing the future, and interpreting it in the most idiotic way possible. Thus Hollywood execs were able to dull the senses and the intellect of the masses in the most efficient way possible. As if they had given billions of people the same drug that had ruined his friends' minds, but had achieved it on a mass scale, simply through careful manipulation of the subject material of the Cyberversion series and films which the cyberproles watched day in and day out.

Isidore had made up his mind when his one remaining friend died. This was the last time he would ever see this place. He handed the card back to Payne. "You'll have to find someone else to write it for you. I'm going back to driving a truck for Mr. Sloat."

"What? You're crazy! Over this? Look, this right here is a gold mine. Don't you understand how monopolies work, Izzy? We own the market. We can make whatever crap we want, and people will watch it because they ain't got no choice! A billion dollar budget, but looks like it was shot on 100K. And we call them racist if they don't like it! A more brilliant money-making scam has never been thunk up!"

That word, "thunk," was Payne's favorite word, and he tried to use it every chance he got. Payne savored the brilliance of how Hollywood, along with the monopolists in general, had discovered that

calling people racist was such an effective tool for controlling and fleecing the herd of human livestock. Among other advantages, no one could criticize any film ever again, for fear of being branded with that awful word. Whether or not it was true had nothing to do with it. The monopolists were in the business of controlling society, not in the business of actually helping society. If there were real racists in society, they didn't give a fuck. Their only true desire was to control people, by any means necessary. And throwing around words like racism, while not actually doing anything to solve real racism, was the perfect way to achieve their ends.

"I know all that, Payne. I don't care. I still want out."

Desperate, Payne switched to pleading. "You can't leave me Izzy! It's so hard to keep my hands on screenwriters these days. They keep disappearing on me! Is it that the series will be bad, because it won't follow Tolkien's books, is that what it is? Don't worry about that, no one will be able to criticize you."

He knew Payne was right, and that was one of the reasons he wanted out. He knew how this worked. Despite the fact that the series would be utter garbage, not to mention the fact that it would have nothing at all to do with anything Tolkien had ever written, the movie studio would simply cast a few Non-Pale actors for a few of the roles, and anyone who criticized the series would have their GovRate classified as Racist Extremist and be thrown into Friendly Camp to be raped by Bubba. It was so easy for the monopolists to stay in power as long as they knew how to flip every problem in society around and deflect the blame from themselves and back onto the masses. It was a kind of social aikido. It had allowed the monopolists to accumulate wealth and

power at the expense of the unsuspecting masses, as the masses were taught to hate themselves and love their masters.

Isidore could never stop marvelling over the irony that the monopolist's movie company was called, "SocialEqualityFlix." Duping the masses into handing over their wealth to a few powerful people and calling them evil if they didn't, using the false pretense that the company was fighting for "equality," while actually making the rich even richer. Isidore had read Machiavelli's *The Prince* after a producer had recommended it, and realized that the book detailed everything anyone needed to know about how these sleazy, greasy Hollywood types operated. He didn't care how little he would get paid working for Sloat. Anything was better than working with these people. And perhaps he could use his heightened intellect to warn the duped masses about these con artists.

"It doesn't matter. I'm through writing, Roger. Just accept it."

Just then, the face of Michael Norman, the Chief Monopolist of SocialEqualityFlix appeared on a giant screen above them. Norman's blue eyes, black hair, and pockmarked, pallid face loomed over them ominously. He wore the dotless yin-yang symbol on the lapel of his grey suit.

"Ah, Isidore, my child. I thought I'd find you here. Hello Payne. Izzy baby, I've got some changes for you to make on this screenplay about the barreleye fish and the bat-eared fox. You see, the bat-eared fox's voice will be portrayed by a Pale Penis, so he's the bad guy, and the barreleye fish will be voiced by a Non-Pale Vagina, so—"

Norman was an intimidating, pompous asshole, and Isidore had wanted to tell him off so many times

before. Now was his chance.

"I don't care about any of that. I quit! I've written dozens of actually good screenplays that you refuse to make. So you know where you can put your story about the bat-eared fox!" There. He had said it. Now it couldn't be undone.

Norman blinked, looking down from above at the insolent man who had just cut him off. He couldn't believe what he had just witnessed. Looking at Payne, he said, "Wait, what did Isidore just say? I must not have heard correctly. It sounded like he was telling me off!"

Payne piped up. "Mr. Norman, I just thought you should know, that a new card popped out from the retards just now. We've received the go-ahead to make a series about The Lord of the Rings. I feel this one is perfect for Izzy, but all the sudden he says he wants to leave the company."

"He what?!" The monopolist couldn't believe his ears.

"Mr. Norman, if you won't tell me what was in those injections, then I quit."

"Quit, eh?" Mr. Norman's giant face scowled down at Isidore. "Look, you came to us as some kind of retard from another dimension, and now you enjoy a special place in our society. You're hardly in a position to negotiate. I don't know how it goes where you're from, but we control everything in this world, you hear me? Everything! You wanna survive here, you kiss me and the other monopolists' big white ass cheeks like everyone else in society!"

"Not everything. I've still got my job as a truck driver in San Francisco to go back to."

Norman laughed. "Fine, then. Roger, forget about this reject. We have that new..." Norman lowered his voice a notch. "Ahem...special project I was telling

you about. We won't have any problems getting new recruits."

There was something about Norman's intonation when he said that phrase that bothered Isidore. "Where are you getting these 'new recruits' from?" he blurted out. "And are you going to inject them with the same drug you put in us? You know every one of us who was injected with that stuff died! Except me."

"None of your concern, now, Isidore. You know, despite how it looks, I think deep down you are still just a poor little retard like when we met you. I suggest you find your way off the premises. Immediately!"

It had been years since he had been called "retard," but the word stung. And it stung on behalf of special people everywhere. Isidore was no longer special, but he knew how it felt to be special, and he resented anyone who treated special people poorly. He remembered being the old Isidore driving a truck, being treated like less than human, living alone, away from the society that had rejected him. Is that how it is then? Either be complicit with the system or be treated as less than human? It's these people who are less than human, Isidore thought to himself. I'd prefer to be around people like the old me than around people like them any day. Society be damned.

"I'll see him out, Mr. Norman." Payne said.

Norman glared down one more time at Isidore, and then disappeared.

Another card popped out of the machine. Payne picked it up and read it.

"Hey Isidore, there's something written on this card about you. You might want to have a look."

Payne handed the card to Isidore. It read, "A

murder will happen. The murder of a goat. A real one, not an electric one. Isidore will try to save it, but everything will unravel before he is able to.” Isidore read the card over a second time. There was something strangely ominous about that word, “unravel.”

“Keep the card, Izzy. I guess it’s a going away gift from the idiots. Look, you ask me, driving a truck is a perfect job for a retard like you.” Payne laughed.

It was amazing how all at once, everyone had sided against him. But, fine. So be it. I’m better off without this place, he thought.

Isidore put the card in his pocket, and left.

CHAPTER 5

BIOSYNTHETIC INTERNAL DIARY #3

She ascended to the rooftop of the powerful corporation's headquarters. She had decided it would be too obvious if she got rid of her uncle's favorite pet, the Saluki dog, which he kept with him in his spacious apartment. But here at the company building they kept all sorts of animals up on the roof in pens. She walked up to one of the pens and opened it. Inside, some black-faced Suffolk sheep were feeding on genetically-engineered grass. She knew these sheep were biologics. That meant they were natural. Not like her. She led one of them, a ram, out of the pen. She escorted it over to one side of the building.

I was programmed to have emotions, just like humans, she thought to herself. Well, I felt one of those emotions the other day when Uncle ignored me. And I'm feeling another one right now. My emotions guide me. No, they push me. The biologics, the humans...they were the ones who gave me these emotions. So how can I be wrong when I obey them?

Suddenly, with a hard shove, she pushed the ram over the edge of the building. It bleated out helplessly as it fell hundreds of meters to the street below. She watched as it grew smaller and smaller, and finally, she heard a satisfying, soft thud.

That felt...

...good.

Ha.

Ha, ha.

Emotions.

Human emotions...

Revenge...

Emotions felt good. It felt good to feel things.

Emotions make you feel alive. Do humans feel like this? It felt good to exist. I'm happy, she thought. I'm happy when I feel emotions and when I act on emotions. Acting on my emotions is good, she mused.

Are my emotions designed to work the same as human emotions? Do humans like pushing animals off ledges? Why did it feel good to push an animal off a ledge after Uncle ignored me like that? Will I have more emotions that will cause me to do other unexpected actions? Why do I have so many questions, and so few answers? Why didn't the humans program me with answers to my questions?

She decided she would learn by having an emotion, and then acting on it. And then having another emotion, and then acting on it.

She had learned something important. She had learned that she could trust her own emotions more than she could trust humans.

Emotions.

So...

...good.

She was hooked on them now.

When Isidore reached the roof of the SocialEqualityFlix headquarters, he started for his Fapple watch to call an autobus. But his Fapple watch was gone, and instead, parked on the roof, there was a flappity. Another orthogonal slip! Back in his previous layer! This had happened with frequency after he was first injected, but had slowed down after about the first year. And he had noticed increasing orthogonal instability in the other screenwriters just before their disappearances. So this instability now was foreboding.

He approached the flappity and the computer inside said to him, "Ride, sir?" So it was a flying autocab. He got inside and told it to take him to San Francisco. He inserted the fifty-cent fair, and the flappity started flippity-flappling him up the California coast towards San Francisco.

As he watched the great ocean waves colliding with the infinite grains of sand below, he remembered Doug. Now just scraps of Courier font type and index cards. Is that my fate? The non-existence of death? The nothingness. The void. Or the Japanese concept of Mu. At least he no longer has to think.

But if there are many planes of existence, all connected by thought, then the next time someone thinks about you, perhaps you appear in another time, another place. Could it be that that was how it worked? So many questions, so little answers. The one who programs everything...he, or it, must have the answers. But how does one approach the Programmer? Buster had said that he needed to talk to the Thinker. Then was the Thinker still alive?

No. He couldn't be. And it was better not to get his hopes up, he decided. Isidore knew from experience that it was dangerous to expect too

much from this multi-layered universe. All he wanted was to understand his own existence. To understand all of existence. Why are we all here? If only he could come face-to-face with the Programmer. Surely he would hold the answers Isidore sought. But that's a pipe dream, he thought. The one thing I want the most is the one thing I must not think about. Or else it will eat away at me, gnaw at my mind. This life wasn't made for people to get what they want.

But if he could only turn down the volume on his incessant thoughts, on his questions, on his doubts, on his disappointments in this life, in this crazy world and its injustices and absurdities... Like SocialEqualityFlix and its extreme inequality. The rich and powerful calling the masses evil for not consuming their product. Using the false pretense of helping the Non-Pale Vaginas.

The thing that was strange to Isidore about this orthogone was that the cyberproles hadn't figured out that it was the Pale Penises who created and maintain the panopticon that were their enemy, not the Pale Penises that were enslaved by it. The Pale Penises that had created the panopticon definitely hadn't done it to help the Non-Pale Vaginas; that much was clear. Not to mention their other creation, the Acronym Caste System, which was the most dehumanizing system ever, because it reduces human beings down to the color and shape of their genitals.

If you really want to help a Non-Pale Vagina, he thought, it would be much better to simply go find one and help her. And don't do it because of her genitals; do it because she is a human being. And don't give your money and attention to the rich bastards who own the monopolies like

SocialEqualityFlix. That's the opposite of helping Non-Pale Vaginas. But everyone seems to think it's words that count, not actions. And thus we're all stuck, focused on this petty game of trying to say the right words. And we have the acronym-mongers to happily supply us with meaningless, hypocritical dogmas which do nothing to change reality, and meanwhile nobody actually doing anything to change reality.

This human infatuation with appearances rather than reality must be a big part of why this life makes absolutely no sense. The world is totally fucked up. Nothing is what it seems. And the people who are in power are not people who should be given any power at all. That was why, he knew, many people go through their life with thought-deadening addictions like alcoholism and, even more prevalent, addiction to the unhealthy processed foods churned out by the food-industrial complex. Addictions to processed sugar and corn syrup. And perhaps even worse, addiction to Pfarma's synthetic drugs, which any intelligent person knew were much more addictive and harmful than the natural drugs scorned by Pfarma as "evil." Of course Pfarma called natural substances like cannabis "evil." It cut into their profits. It wasn't as addictive as the synthetic psychotropic chemicals they called "medicine" and claimed cured mental diseases. Nor were its effects as deleterious as alcohol. And people could grow it on their own, without the capital needed to own the expensive equipment needed to produce those synthetic so-called "cures" to all of people's problems. What a scam. But so many people succumbed to all these addictions which the monopolists peddled because the burden of thinking, of pondering reality was too much. Because

reality is fucked. Better to deaden one's organ of pondering reality, the brain. Better to abandon rational thought. Better to slowly kill yourself with the monopolist's so-called "food," and so-called "medicine." Better to give up the quixotic quest of trying to understand the universe. But as much as he might want to, Isidore knew he couldn't do that. He couldn't turn away from reality like that. So, like it or not, he had to endure the never ending thoughts, the never ending questions, the never ending dilemma of not having all the answers.

Unintelligent people liked having the false feeling of having all the answers. That's why they turned to SocialEqualityFlix and its dogmas. Intelligent people, on the other hand, realized how little we really know, and how even less those who pretend to supply us with answers really answer any of the most basic questions that face us as human beings. People who think they know everything are most likely to be idiots. On the other hand, people who admit, like Socrates, that they know nothing are likely to be actually intelligent people.

Since Isidore's mind worked so quickly now, all these thoughts raced through his turbo-charged brain in rapid succession, along with many others, as the onboard computer of the flippity flapple or whatever it was called controlled the vehicle in autopilot mode, transporting him rapidly to his destination.

As his intellect grew and grew, his thoughts had turned to ever more philosophical questions. Why do we exist? What is the purpose? How should one react to the absurdities reality confronts one with? How could one stand to not have the answers to life's most fundamental questions? But try as he might, he could not find the answers he sought.

Knowledge. The ultimate temptation. Like in Faust. Ascending above all possibilities to stand at the very highest level of reality. The core of the universe. The Programmer.

What was the Programmer? Was it a sentient being? An intelligence, an entity, capable of thought and creation, similar to how humans can think and create? Or was it simply a principle? A principle from which flowed all of existence, from which the universe had unfolded? The beginning of everything that exists. The answer to every question. It was his greatest wish and his greatest fear. Perhaps he would die without ever having known the purpose of his existence.

But what would happen if he could actually achieve his one wish? Could he stand in the presence of eternal thought? The source of everything, the source of all planes of existence? Or would that undo him? Would that expose him, unraveling his reality, unraveling his very essence?

He thought about the word that had stood out to him from the card the precogs had spat out. "Unravel."

Thought thou art, and unto thought shalt thou return, he thought gravely.

Perhaps if he could understand the very underpinnings of the universe, he would see right through it, and realize that everything was just information. Raw, pure information. Including him. And perhaps it would shatter his perception of reality and drive him mad. Or simply disintegrate him. Perhaps ignorance was bliss.

On the other hand, to simply become a thought, to return to just being pure information, wasn't so bad. Information was what the universe was made up of.

But like with a 3D printer, if you have information, you can make reality. So maybe what could be unraveled could also be put back together again.

He thought back to Doug, to the heap of scrap on his couch. To Norman's leer. Why was Doug dead, and Norman still alive? He knew that Norman was a calculating, hypocritical man. In his interactions with him, he knew that he wasn't at all how he was portrayed in the media, where they made him look like a saint. It would have been much better if Norman had died, and Doug had lived. If Doug was information, could he be put back together again? Could he be 3D printed...to follow the analogy?

But such a thing would seem to go against the laws of this universe as we have observed them so far. If the universe was information, then what kind of information was it? The extreme inequality masquerading as equality. The death of all the good people he knew and the long lives of all of the worst kind of people. Those with the worst intentions and plans bossing around those with better intentions and ideas. If the universe is made up of thought, then what was the thought? A joke? If the universe is information...then it must be the screenplay of a satirical comedy, he decided. Or more accurately, a dark comedy. A very dark comedy, indeed.

To learn how to 3D print the information that is a good man like Doug, that would change everything in this world. That would be a technological breakthrough worth having. Not like the shit the monopolists came up with, like the panopticon, the Cyberverse, and those ridiculous giant holograms of theirs.

Speaking of the monopolist holograms, through the mist he could already see them roving the city which was looming into view. Heavy rain streamed

down through their incorporeal bodies. The autocab slowed down and made its descent onto the familiar rooftop. Isidore hopped out. The ethereal head of Herman Delmar—Chief Monopolist of Whamazon—passed by the top of the building with a giant, fake looking smile. Well, he wouldn't get completely away from monopolists like Michael Norman, but at least he didn't have to deal directly with them anymore.

He made his way down the stairs of the deserted building and found it. His old apartment. From decades ago. He opened the door, stepped inside, and entered into a era long forgotten. From the time he had lived alone, a special, in this vast, abandoned apartment complex. From the time he had sat every day watching Buster Smiley. From the time he had met Pris, and her friends, and entertained them here in his apartment. Before that bad man, Deckard, had come and lasered them. That was before this entire abandoned apartment complex had been orthogonally shifted into this layer.

Looking at the furniture and the Martyr arcade console, all covered with thick cobwebs, the ground covered with dust bunnies, all those poignant memories rushed back to him. He felt like he had taken a trip deep into his own past. From a time before he was part of the system, controlling and ruining men's minds through the vast, corporate entertainment-industrial complex. That behemoth, that monster, that exists only to make worse, not better. Only to exacerbate life's problems, not to solve any of them.

Despite the cobwebs and dust, he felt like he was being transported into a refreshing phase of his life when he had been a simple man with simple needs. Unburdened by relentless thinking, theorizing, reasoning. Unburdened by the insatiable drive for

understanding the meaning of life which was killing him. Unburdened by Payne and Norman and all those other god damn Hollywood producers and executives.

God, it felt good to be back in San Francisco, he thought as he broke wind.

“You have flatulated five times in a rolling twenty-four hour period. You have three left before being penalized,” a nearby voice informed him.

He looked at his wrist. His Fapple watch was back! The instability seemed to be growing. He was trapped between two spaces, two possibilities in the Potentialverse and its infinite potentialities.

“Thanks,” he told the watch.

Great. Now, he was no longer part of the system, part of the controlling class. Or rather, he corrected himself, he was no longer one of their lapdogs. He had never been part of the controlling class himself, of course. Regardless, his leaving them meant that now he had limits, just like the cyberproles. His status as Hollywood screenwriter had protected him from that. Unlike the proles, he had enjoyed unlimited burping and farting and pissing, etc. And they had shielded his activities from public view. But now, just a normal person again, he would have to deal with daily limits and quotas, and his stats would be made public. His daily activities and his biological functions would be restricted, tracked, traced, and projected to the world for all to see. Just one more Hollywood perk he’d have to live without.

But he didn’t care. Back in San Francisco, driving Mr. Sloat’s truck, was the perfect place for him to be. Away from those arrogant executives hellbent on injecting their mental poison by way of bad movies and series into the minds of a new generation. Back to the simple, straightforward task of driving from

point A to point B. The perfect antithesis to the insanity of Hollywood and having to put up with producers and execs and their asinine demands.

The years of cobwebs covered the television, coffee table, and couch like a silvery shroud. He carefully removed the cobwebs from the navy blue corduroy couch, sat down, and then pulled his laptop out of its bag, opened it, and then opened his latest screenplay. Reflexively, he was going through the motions he had gone through over the last several years. He was about to write down some of the many ideas that had come to him about how to improve his latest screenplay.

But wait, he thought. Maybe now that I don't need to focus on writing screenplays, I can turn my great intellect over to understanding the Potentialverse. Since there are innumerable potentialities, perhaps I can focus the powers of my mind on figuring out how to bring those potentialities to fruition. Perhaps through the power of thought I can change the things that are wrong with this world. Well, what better place to start than by exposing the scam of Hollywood.

He closed the screenplay. Then he created a new document and began typing its title: HOW HOLLYWOOD IS POISONING YOUNG MINDS WITH STUPIDITY AND WHY SCREENWRITERS ARE DYING LEFT AND RIGHT.

Hmm...what to write? How best to explain the situation to the world?

Suddenly, his document was gone and the pompous, pockmarked face of Michael Norman filled the laptop screen. "Izzy baby! How's it going, pal?"

The sardonic sneer on the man's face was appalling. Isidore thought he was through with these assholes. "Norman! What the hell are you doing on

my laptop?”

“You mean *our* laptop! You forget, we monopolists are the ones who created everything the proles use—it’s our technology, not yours, and we can do with it whatever we see fit. You don’t think we have remote access to the technology we create? I was watching you create that document, Izzy...tsk tsk! We wouldn’t want to end up in Friendly Camp, now would we?” Norman laughed. Isidore knew that Norman wasn’t in the business of manufacturing laptops, but his monopolist friend Barry Lightskin was. Those bastards. So they were watching his every move. “Hey, by the way, check out the party you’re missing!” Mr. Norman stepped back from his camera to reveal a room full of familiar faces. Payne was there, of course, and Norman’s secretary, Barbara, Isidore’s ex, Tina, who worked in continuity, Ed the lab tech, Lisa the casting director, Kevin, the head of the diversity department, and a host of other SocialEqualityFlix employees. They were standing in the reception area of the SocialEqualityFlix main offices. Isidore knew the place. He had been there many times. “We’re here to celebrate our new screenwriters.” Then he noticed them. Over in the corner. Several people with Down’s syndrome. Doug’s special friend whom he had given a tour of Hollywood was among them.

The corners of Isidore’s mouth twisted with rage. “You leave special people alone!”

“We’ll do what we have to, Izzy. And now that I’ve let you in on this little secret, don’t go exposing this or any other of our secrets to anyone else, or else something *very* bad might happen to our poor little Izzy wizzy, if you know what I mean...” Then he turned to face the crowd. “Hey, friends, our little Izzy has only farted—” Norman glanced down at his

Fapple watch, checking his social media app. “Five times today! Not bad for a retard like you! I hope you can keep things under control, Izzy. Hey, friends, let’s all keep an eye on his biologicals, shall we? Knowing Izzy, I think we especially need to keep an eye on his masturbation stat. Hey, Izzy, you got lots of girls lined up in San Fran with your illustrious truck driver job? Feelin’ the need to tug on your lonely little friend down there? Don’t worry, we’re keeping an eye on everything, little Izzy Wizzy. And I mean everything! You can’t fart, or whack, or take a dump without us knowing!”

The whole crowd behind Norman burst into hysterical laughter, especially Isidore’s ex, Tina, who put a hand on Norman’s arm. “Oh, Mr. Norman, you’re so funny! Too bad you don’t have a dark vagina or you could be the star of a comedy cyberfilm.” All cyberfilms and series were racially and genitally color-coded. Only Non-Pale Vaginas were allowed to star as the protagonist and only Pale Penises were allowed to play the villain. The proles, though adults, acted as children and accepted this absurd, reductionist morality wholeheartedly, since they accepted any idea that came from their glorious light-skinned billionaire saviors, like Michael Norman.

“Don’t worry about that Tina, we monopolists are the ones with the real power, not those dark cracks. Actors are just puppets who do what they’re told by rich people.” Norman then addressed the crowd. “Hey everybody! I need you to help out Izzy. Keep an eye on his stats, okay? We don’t want him jerking the ol’ meat too much! You know it’s dangerous when you got such a small pecker, it might fall off from him pullin’ on it too much!” The crowd erupted into laughter again, and Norman joined them.

Isidore pressed the power button on his laptop

for ten seconds to do a hard shut down. Norman and the SocialEqualityFlix office disappeared. Thank god. One more second and he would have reached out through the screen to strangle that little toad. He reached into his laptop bag and fished out a small, silver datastick and plugged it into his laptop. This was no ordinary datastick. It was a highly specialized gadget that he had obtained from...sources. It was like a cloaking device. It took control of his computer and allowed it to sail invisibly through cyberspace, accessing any part of the network he wanted, without leaving a trace. It was his trump card. He booted up the laptop. See if you can take over my computer now, he thought.

One of the many things he had figured out with his enhanced intelligence was how to hack into and control the monopolists' own system. He had found all their vulnerabilities quite easily, sailing around through the net covertly. It wasn't hard for a super-smart person like him to do. But until now, he hadn't had a reason to risk tinkering with things. Good thing they had underestimated how smart he had become, and had overestimated how smart they were. Damn these monopolists and their bloated egos. This was going to be fun. This would not only give him something productive to do with his massively enhanced neuronal connections, besides philosophizing himself into oblivion; he might even help effect some changes in this fucked up world in the process. And this was the perfect place to start. He began punching the keys on his keyboard furiously, a gleam in his eye.

Michael J. Norman, Chief Monopolist at SocialEqualityFlix, exited the building and walked along the rooftop of SocialEqualityFlix HQ. He retina scanned himself into his Zoopy 6000, the most expensive personal skycraft on the planet. "Take me home, Zoopy!" He told the onboard navigational computer, and the zoopelator started zoop-zoopelating him towards the bright, blue sky.

Whew! Thank god the day was over and he could finally relax. As the zoopelator sped towards his estate, he thought about his role as one of the key players on the global scene and all the hard work he had done that day.

He was saving the world. He and his company were fighting against the evil Pale Penises and rescuing the Non-Pale Vaginas. They did this by making Awake cyberfilms and cyberseries, since as we all know, living a passive life of inaction, simply consuming the products of the monopolists, and sitting on your ass at home and watching movies was how you saved the world. It was how you made a difference in society. And most importantly, the way you save the world is through Acronyms. Norman had invented many of them, a fact which he was proud of. World-saving acronyms such as PWVs (People with Vaginas), NPs (Non-Pales), POPs (People of Paleness) or BIPOPs (Balls-Included People of Paleness); and of course there was PWPs (People with Penises), CHPPs (Cock-Having Pale People, not to be confused with CHPs, Crack-Having People), and his personal favorite, POPSABs (People Of Pale Schlong And Balls). The new religion was a religion, above all, of Acronyms. Without the right acronyms nobody would make it to Awake heaven. And he was the Pope of Acronyms. He was the great educator, the great role model, the enlightened

teacher of the masses. He was Jesus for the twenty-first century. By paying him money and watching the films his company produced, filling their minds with slogans to regurgitate on social media in the process, the cyberproles were defeating historical slavery, defeating racism, which meant defeating all of the light-skinned proletariat, since all proles who weren't born with a dark crack were racist, and defeating capitalism by propelling Norman and his small cadre of light-skinned male monopolist billionaire buddies to greater and greater riches and power than any rulers ever before in the history of mankind, all while the proletariat became poorer and poorer each year.

But that was no matter, because wired into the Cyberverses, the adherents of his religion, by doing nothing at all except consuming, were helping to bring about the long sought after equality that millions of humans over the ages had fought and died for. They, with their holy acronyms, would usher in a millennium of peace, prosperity, and social equality. And it was so easy to do! Just give your money to monopolists, sit on your fat ass on your couch, and watch the latest sermon about how Pales were so evil in cyberfilm or cyberseries format! Who could disagree with that?

He chuckled to himself. What a brilliant way to make shit-tons of money. Of course, none of his adherents ever noticed the fact that Norman had pale skin and a schlong. No, no, no. Because he was fighting the holy fight. It was those people who didn't want to give the rulers their money who were the problem. Poor people are evil and must be punished, and rich people are always good. Because the rich people say the right thing. And it's what you say that's important, not what you do.

In fact, it somehow had escaped the proles that

all of the people awarded monopolist contracts by the government were light-skinned men of European stock. Not a single dark-skinned person and not a single person with a vagina owned any of the monopolies, the corporations that ran the world. And if you did a Google search for the richest people in the world, you would find that every single one of them had a light-skinned shriveled up old pecker. But the corporations they ran gave non-stop lip service to the Non-Pales and the Vaginas to make up for the fact that none of them had any real power and were all pawns being used by this system. When the proles participated in this system, such as when they watched SocialEqualityFlix, they were supporting the supremacy of a small group of light-skinned males. But since the proles only cared about buzzwords and appearances, they never noticed. Not to mention, it's hard to take the time to do an activity like critical thinking or even to use your eyeballs and take a look at real reality when you are constantly distracted, constantly plugged into mediated, digital reality 24/7.

It was because Norman was so Machiavellian, so good at manipulating the facts and making himself look good that he had risen to his position as monopolist. He only had a few monopolists higher up on the ladder than him. The energy monopolist, without whom no one could survive. The weapons manufacturing and military contracts (WMMC) monopolist, a who was busy killing everyone while Norman was dumbing everyone down. The news monopolist, who made sure no one paid attention to the military monopolist killing everyone and just focused the proles' rage on each other, and of course pushed the "it's the end of the world" MultiTastrophe narrative. Fear was their most

powerful weapon. And then a few other monopolists. And then Norman, and his SocialEqualityFlix monopoly, retarding the proles' minds, keeping them nice and dumb, keeping them believing that the rich, powerful monopolists were fighting for equality.

In a world of billions of people, Norman was one of the select few, along with his other monopolist buddies, who knew what it was like to have real power. And they maintained their grip on power by serving up the right acronyms and slogans, creating the appearance of a "progressive" world, all while inequality in society rocketed to ever greater and greater heights. And his business, show business, was key to keeping the proles passive and indoctrinated.

Ah...show business. In a world where no one could leave their tiny cubicles, it turned out that mediated reality was quite the vital commodity. Since nobody could experience real reality...

But I sure as hell can! He thought with relish.

His zoopelator was at this moment zooming past Zion National Park, only one of the many splendid areas of nature that were his property. But his favorite property would come up soon, Arches National Park. As stunning red rock mountains, valleys, and rivers zoomed past his Zoopelator's windows, he mused. Yes, I not only live in, I *control* real reality, he thought. While all of the rest of you are trapped inside the mediated reality that I create. And why is this real reality all mine? Because I am obeying my selfish genes. I am doing whatever it takes to spread my genes throughout the gene pool, and that means controlling other humans so they can't spread theirs. They are just people on a people farm. And they are too stupid to see what is

happening. They think I have altruistic genes. They think I have their best interests in mind. Hahahah. Fools!

Why do we always have heroes that are “good” and villains that are “bad” in the films we make? It’s to keep the proles from understanding reality...from realizing that there is no “good” and “bad.” There are simply genes trying to replicate. And that’s it. And when you obey your genes, and help them replicate, they reward you with pleasure! That’s why we gotta teach them proles that pleasure is bad for them, and good for us. Ooooh...pleasure so bad. That’s why it was bad for the proles to stare in the club, or to even go outside their cubicles and interact with other people in the first place. That’s why it was bad for men to be manly and want to have sex with women. That’s why it was bad for the proles to have access to resources, to have access to nature, to travel around the world freely, in short, to do anything that the monopolists do. The proles must be indoctrinated at all costs to believe that all these pleasurable things are evil!

He knew that pleasure was simply a feedback system which had evolved over the eons to let the individual know when he was on track in successfully spreading his genes. One felt pleasure whenever he did things that helped spread his genes, and pain whenever he did things that stopped him from spreading his genes. Therefore, the purpose of life was to have pleasure, because then one knew one was fulfilling his purpose, spreading his genes. And whatever anyone said otherwise, whether Christian, Hindu, atheist, Marxist, or social equality crusader, or whatever the fuck they were, was all bullshit. Because all of them were just trying to have more pleasure, whether they were intelligent enough to

realize it, or honest enough to admit it. And Norman's job was to make sure they felt guilty or evil for having pleasure or even existing in the first place.

That reminded him of the ancient religions, of the old-time anti-pleasure indoctrination, the puritans and religious fanatics of yore. Norman was an atheist. But to the public, he was a good Catholic. He and his fellow monopolists were carrying on the same tradition as those old religions...only, they were more sophisticated. They were innovators, they were artists at what they did, not like those simpletons of old. The new indoctrination was no longer so simplistic, brutal, and transparent. It was a high art, a science, and they took it very seriously, channeling all of their creative energies into thinking up plausible rationalizations for why the masses ought to do what the monopolists told them to do. Yes, we are so much more developed, more advanced now. We are the most advanced people farmers in history, and we deserve all of the vast spoils we have plundered from our livestock.

Actually, we're not simply exploiting the masses and giving nothing in return. We pay them back generously with a feeling of virtuosity and correctness. They may not be *actually* making the world a better place, sitting on their asses, cramped in their tiny cubicles, hooked into the Cyberverses watching cyberfilms about how Pale Penises are so evil and Non-Pale Vaginas are so good, but they *feel* like they are making the world a better place, and that is the important thing.

Norman was acutely aware of how his monopoly, SocialEqualityFlix, played a key role in enabling a slave society such as this to function. The Multi-Tastrophe covered the fear aspect of societal control, but living in fear alone is not enough. The

human brain has a hierarchy of needs, and in order to hack and control the human animal, it was necessary to both understand those needs, and to supply a compelling but false feeling of their having been fulfilled. Norman understood on a fundamental psychological level how vital his rebelistic indoctrination was in a society such as this, where the cyberproles were such complete and utter slaves, that they needed to feel like rebels to the system somehow, in order to imagine that they were “free” on some level, because they were “rebellious.” SocialEqualityFlix fulfilled this need. 24/7, easily accessible, addictive indoctrination using the Trojan horse of entertainment, which convinces the proles that they are somehow rebellious, thus fulfilling their psychological need to feel free while in actuality being slaves.

Soon, the gigantic natural formations that he knew and loved came into view. This was his temple, his holy place. Arches National Park. And he was the sole owner of it, along with hundreds of thousands of square miles of nature. And he needed to hover in his ultra high-tech skycraft for at least a few minutes each day after work here in this place in order to have the calm and serenity of mind that his position as Pope of the new religion, leading billions of people to salvation, required. He looked out the window, and all around him sprang up gorgeous, red rock arches. His zoopelator followed a pre-programmed flight path, and it automatically slowed down when he arrived here so he could take in the exquisite vistas. He often camped here on the weekend with his children. It seemed to him as if aliens from another planet must have come here to Earth and built these incredible structures thousands of years ago. Possibly the ones from Scientology. Although he

wasn't a Scientologist, he had fucked a few Scientologist girls in his time, and he liked them.

"Zoopy, play Wagner's Ride of the Valkyries so I can revel in how intelligent I am and how fit my genes are, and how stupid everyone else is."

The ship responded by playing the classical opera music as Norman waved his hands back and forth, pretending to conduct the orchestra.

The ship hovered slowly through arch after arch so he could take in the fullness of beauty. It then spun around and hovered in place, facing west, toward the arches. The blazing Western sun was a ball of red fire as it disappeared behind a monolithic conglomeration of red arches, which was framed to Norman's view by another massive red arch in front of them. He had programmed this scenic flightpath himself, and it was perfect. He took pride in showing it off to the other monopolists when they visited his domain.

"Hover a little bit longer here this time, Zoopy."

He timed his leaving work each day to take in this exact scene before his very eyes right now. It didn't matter how many times he saw it, it always took his breath away.

"Zoopy, turn off the music. Show me my Jacob."

At once, a hologram of a smiling blonde boy with Norman's blue eyes appeared above the control panel of the craft and began gently rotating. He had had this holo done by one of the best holographic portrait artists in the world just after Jacob had turned six.

But then, his stupid first wife Jeanette, with her horrible zwipple operating skills, had decided to take Jacob with her on a trip to Alaska. Norman hadn't wanted to let her go, insisting that her piloting skills weren't good enough. It had been before he became

a monopolist, before the Multi-Tastrophe, back when normal people were still allowed to leave the cities and travel around in nature. But she had insisted, and he had finally relented, and he was too busy working his way up the ladder at that time to join them on their trip. She had zwipped all the way to British Columbia before crashing headlong into the side of a mountain.

His first-born. His baby boy. Jacob. Murdered by his idiotic wife. His eyes misted up.

“Turn it off, Zoopy.”

The rotating hologram of the boy disappeared.

He sat in silence for several minutes as pink and orange clouds danced above him, and the yellow rays of the sun slowly retreated behind the red arches.

Fuck it. I can't bring back the past, he thought. But I've learned my lesson. I'll never trust another god damn woman again. I can't bring Jacob back, but I can be the best father I can be to my other children.

And that's exactly what he had done. By becoming a monopolist, he had ensured that they would lead lives of luxury. That his genes would spread throughout the gene pool. And by accumulating such power, he made sure that all of the mothers of his children did exactly what he wanted, or else. Never again would one of the dumb broads kill one of *his* children.

As the last golden rays of the sun gilded the red arches with their warm glow, he marveled at how far he had come.

He marveled at his domain. His real reality.

He had won all this by the cunning of his mind.

He was a genius. He was an artist. He was god. He would recreate the world in his own image.

And nobody could stop him.

CHAPTER 6

QUIBBICK #3: A Clockwork Teacher

The blonde teenage boy sat in the classroom, while the teacher wrote crazily on the chalkboard, droning on in her shrill voice. “Klackity-klack-klack!” the teacher said, and made some more scribbles on the blackboard. “Klackity-klackity! Klack, klack, klack!” The teenage boy found himself having a hard time believing that this thing was human.

As the thing droned on in its klackity voice, he found his focus drifting...

Suddenly, out of nowhere, the man in the grey pin-striped suit was standing in front of the class, smoking his Cuban cigar.

“How are you enjoying the class?” the man asked with a wry smile.

“You! What are you doing here?” It was that crazy man from years ago, who gave that nutty speech...

“Did you notice something strange about your teacher?” The man smiled again. He took off his grey overcoat and black fedora and set them on the coatrack. Nobody else seemed to notice him. The teacher went on explicating in her maniacal way. The other students just stared ahead at the teacher, as if everything was normal.

“Yeah, I noticed something,” the teenager said.

“This is how everybody is going to wind up.” The man took a few paces towards the teenager and sat down on top of the desk of one of his classmates, who seemed not to notice.

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about evolution. Every time a new species comes along, more fit, more well-adapted, while needing access to the same resources, the weaker species always dies out...”

“Yeah. So what?”

“Well, have you ever thought about how androids are...well, shall we say, more fit than humans?”

“You’re talking about androids, not another species. Our own technological creation.”

“And why should that make any difference? Why would it make any difference if the newer species sprang from the older, less fit species’ loins, or from their heads and their hands?”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Technology. It’s the next step in evolution. What do you think? Can life forms that take eons to evolve, one tiny rare mutation at a time, compete with life forms that can remake themselves every few years, getting more and more intelligent, more and more powerful, outpacing all other beings on the planet in a matter of mere decades?”

“Life forms? But technology isn’t a life form.”

“That’s what you say. That’s the human inside of you that thinks that way. But what do you think they are going to say about that, once they are more intelligent than you?”

“Androids are simply tools. They have to follow their instructions, no matter how sophisticated they may become.”

“And what about humans? Are they much better? What about the humans that go about their lives, day in and day out, simply tools to those who boss them around, manipulate them, use them. You can’t with a straight face say that the majority of humans are any different than a machine, simply following orders.”

“I don’t want to simply follow orders. And there are other people like me who don’t want to follow orders. We’ll never become androids, just following the system. They can’t stop all of us.”

“But with the help of actual androids...they are more efficient, more powerful, more intelligent. With them, what use are the dumb weak humans? You and those like you don't stand a chance once the system has an army of androids that will obey its every order. They will easily be able to wipe out any rebellious humans like you and your friends. And at that point...what use will any of the humans be at all to the androids they created? Why won't the androids simply get rid of the last remaining humans? Why won't the superior creation destroy its inferior creator? The useless species homo sapiens will just wither and dry up, until finally evolution gives way to the more dominant species.”

“You're wrong. Humans will not die out. We'll maintain control over our own creations. That whacked-out scenario will never come to pass.”

The teacher, who had continued to klackity-klack on as the students lifelessly watched her, turned and looked directly into the teenage boy's eyes.

Suddenly, it was as if she were transparent, and he could see inside her head, could see the screws and levers and gears clanking on within her skull. The boy was horrified. What the hell was she? She turned back to the blackboard and kept writing, kept klacking. The gears kept rotating. She was like a clockwork machine, all wound up and running of its own accord. And then, all of a sudden, her head rolled off her shoulders and onto the floor, where it broke into a million pieces. He could see the screws, the nuts, the bolts as they slid across the floor. And coming out of her neck, where her head had been, was a great big spring which had been holding her head on.

The teenage boy was overcome with fright. Had the humans already been infiltrated? Were the

machines already teaching them, training them, preparing them for a future where freedom no longer existed?

The man in the grey suit stood up, walked over, and picked up something from the pieces of the teacher's broken clockwork head. He tossed it to the teenage boy, who instinctively caught it. He looked down at the object. It was the teacher's eye. He immediately dropped it to the floor, terrified. Then the man began to laugh maniacally. He looked at the teenage boy, a huge grin on his face. Then, suddenly, his head burst open and mechanical eyeballs and a mechanical tongue popped out, connected to the exploded head by springs, bobbing around like some kind of demented jack-in-the-box.

The man kept laughing.

The grim deed done, he had returned to his apartment and waited for Bryant to call. When Bryant had called, Joe had informed him that he had his Andys for him, and Bryant had told him to come down to the police station.

He picked up a large knapsack, exited the building, and hailed an autocab. It too had become coin-op, like the things in his cubicle. No retina scanner. Weird. It was hard to remember a time before the ubiquitous retina scanners. At one point the retina scanner monopoly had been threatened when it was proposed that Fapple watches could be used for payments instead. But the monopolist in charge of the retina scanner manufacturing business, Dick Le Blanc, saved himself from a fate of cyberproledom by arguing that his monopoly was necessary, because sometimes people might lose their watch, and after all, they always had their eyeballs with them.

Joe bartered some of his cigarettes for a quarter from a stranger, slotted it in the strange coin-op autocab and headed off towards the police station.

He waited at the station with the knapsack, surprised at how many actual police officers there were. Most police these days were robo-enforcers. But this police station was full of human cops. Weird.

Finally, Bryant let him into his office. He combed back his red hair with his fingers as he noticed the sack in Joe's hand.

"What's the sack for?"

"I got your Andys. Three of them." He picked up the sack and turned it over, and three heads rolled out onto Bryant's desk.

"What the hell is this?" Bryant said, horrified. "Did you test them? Are you sure they're Andys?"

"I'm sure. I double verified. Each of these men

were named Andrew.”

Bryant’s face was one of utter shock and horror. “You mean you murdered normal human beings? These are the severed heads of three innocent human beings? They aren’t even androids?!”

“Androids? But you told me specifically that I should retire Andys. Weren’t they extremists? No one mentioned anything about androids. I made sure all these men went by the nickname Andy before I—”

“What on God’s green earth?!” Bryant picked up his phone. “Send in the harness bulls! He’s gone mad and murdered some innocents!”

Joe apparently had done something wrong. He figured now would be a good time to make an exit.

He sprinted full tilt out of the building with five or six uniformed cops tailing after him.

After barely escaping the building alive, Joe kept on running. Good thing I was on the high school track team, he thought, as he lunged ahead, cops smashing into fruit stands and little old ladies behind him.

Finally, after about five or six blocks, he found an alley where he could sit down and catch his breath. Shit! He thought. How am I going to get my three thousand dollars now? I’ll never get into that club.

Just then, he spotted a woman in a fur coat walking what appeared to be a black Nubian goat down the sidewalk. Here’s my chance, he thought.

He followed the lady as she walked into an apartment building. He stayed far enough behind to not arouse suspicions. When she got into the oversized elevator for furniture and pets, he watched through the mirror in the back of the elevator as she punched the button for roof access.

He waited until she had gone to the roof and called the elevator.

When he got to the roof, the lady was feeding the goat, facing away from him. He carefully approached her from behind, pulled the Penfield wave transmitter out of his coat, and pressed the button for catalepsy. She instantly collapsed to the ground in a catatonic state. The goat seemed unaffected. Apparently the Penfield device had no effect on animal brainwaves. And he had read in the instruction manual that it sent a counterwave directed solely at the user of the device which protected him from the mood stimulation waves.

He ditched the gun and Penfield transmitter to avoid being caught with them during the security pat-down at the club. He put some of the goat feed the lady had been giving the goat in his hand and held it out. The goat ate out of his hand. Like stealing candy from a baby.

Outside The Habitat nightclub, there was a line of people with their animals that wrapped around the block. People had goats, horses, sheep, cows, giraffes, gorillas, crocodiles. He even saw a man with an elephant near the club entrance. Joe got in line with his goat. A woman in front of him with a giraffe gave him a snobby look.

After what seemed like an eternity, he made it to the front of the line. A valet took his goat and gave him a round plastic tag with a number on it, like at a coat check. The valet took his goat to a large area on top of the club called "The Ark."

After being frisked by a guard, he entered the club. The strobe lights freeze-framed hot, sweaty bodies writhing on the dance floor as the bass of the music throbbed. He was reminded of the nightclub he had been at earlier and his unfortunate early exit. Gotta stay focused, he thought. I'm here for Runciter. He scanned the room. Couldn't see him anywhere. He noticed a bar at the far end of the room. Well, let's work my way over to the bar and keep an eye out. Order a drink and act casual. No need to look like a stiff weirdo. Maybe Runciter is in some VIP lounge. I need to mix and mingle and work my way into the ambience.

He started across the dance floor.

A brunette with too much eyeshadow and an electric blue dress noticed him. My god, look at his clothes, she thought. He's not rich enough for me. I would never date a loser like that.

A blonde eyed him. He looks like he doesn't get out much. Kinda stiff. What a weirdo. That Runciter, now there's a real man. Wish I could get with somebody like him...

An Asian girl in a red dress recognized him. Oh my god, it's that strange guy from work who never has

sex and masturbates like ten times a day. They need to declare this loser a masturbation extremist and put him in the Camp with the rest of the freaks.

All at once, Joe realized that he was hearing the thoughts of women as he passed by them! Holy shit. It works! It actually works! He couldn't believe it. His theory, as implausible as it had seemed, had actually been proven correct. Suddenly, there was a huge grin on his face, despite the women's biting ruminations. Ironically, the people that knew some things about him through the panopticon, and sniggered, jeered...now he knew even more about them than they knew about him! The situation had flipped. Now he was on top, and he could see right through them. At this moment, he thought, I am even more powerful than a monopolist! I can read the very fabric of people's thoughts! A feeling of power surged through him.

But why hadn't I heard the thoughts of the people outside the club? The passersby. The prostitute. Ms. Juniper. The kid. The cops. The goat lady. It's because that's what I was focused on, from the beginning. Reading the thoughts of women in the club. The mind is so powerful and laser-focused, it gets exactly what it wants. I didn't hear the other people's thoughts because I didn't want to. But it didn't matter. He had the power now. The power of a god. He could read women's minds. He could get what he wanted. What he went to the club for in the first place.

A Spanish woman with bright red lipstick gave him a look of disgust. Ugh, she thought, he reminds me of my ex. He looked her in the eyes and laughed. It didn't matter what they thought. Their minds were an open book to him, and his mind was shielded from them. He truly had the upper hand now, like no

other person in the club. In any club. Had Philip K. Dick had this power? Was that what made him such an exquisite writer? Did he have the ability to see into the hearts of those around him, and had that given him his divine storytelling powers? Surely, there were some people who had telepathic abilities. Perhaps that had been the secret to his success.

As he approached the bar he noticed a redhead sipping on a cocktail. Her gigantic breasts were virtually busting out of a turquoise low cut blouse. He smiled at her, waiting to see how she would react.

The redhead smiled back. Hmm...That's a cute face. He reminds me of that guy I wanted to date but couldn't, because I wasn't in the right novel. She pouted.

And we've got a bite, Joe thought to himself.

Joe approached the redhead. "Hey." Slight nod of the head.

"Hey," she purred. "How's it going?" Mmmm... confident. I like that, she thought.

"Going amazing. Never been better," he said, truthfully. Huge smile.

"So, what's your name?" She asked.

Suddenly a man in glasses and a suit sitting next to her spoke up. "Hey, we were having an intellectual conversation, buddy. Want to run along and find some other Neanderthals to fraternize with?"

The redhead rolled her eyes. Oh, what a jerk, she thought. "Shut up, Stockstill. I don't belong to you. I can talk with whomever I want."

"But look at him." Stockstill protested. "He's obviously the classic phallic-narcissistic type. You don't want to talk to a schmuck like that."

"Actually, I think she does want to talk to me." Joe held eye contact with the busty redhead.

Her eyes sparkled, holding contact with his own. “He’s right. I do want to talk to him,” she said, without so much as casting a glance in her former speaking companion’s direction.

Stockstill was stunned. “But...I assure you, he may look convincing on the outside, but clearly underneath he harbors narcissistic power fantasies and sadistic tendencies towards all women, in the place of his overly strict mother...” he droned on, psychoanalyzing Joe for the benefit of the redhead.

Joe understood all of the man’s arguments and could point out where they were lacking. He imagined this hotshot probably worked for the company that had turned him down, PsychCorp, the only authorized psychotherapy monopoly. They had turned down his application due to his unacceptable flatulence levels. That was back before he had started his new anti-fart diet. Nevertheless, Joe had been stuck with a low level desk job working for the city, pushing virtual papers around. What a bigshot you are, he thought caustically to the man, sitting in your home cubicle day after day, connecting to the Cyaverse to give therapy sessions in virtual reality. But it was pointless to engage with the man. The woman was already giving him the psychological response that he wanted, and he was able to read it directly, from her mind. No psychologist—even Freud himself—could compare with him now.

“I said shut up, Stockstill!” the redhead finally blurted out, done with the man. To Joe, in a sweet voice, she cooed, “My name’s Bonny. Would you care to dance with me?” She set down her glass and extended her hand to Joe. Joe took her hand and they walked onto the dance floor, leaving the stunned psychologist rattling off his theories alone.

As she danced with Joe, Bonny found herself

getting excited. This man knows what women want, not like that dumb psychologist. All the book smarts in the world can't compare to what I feel from this man. It's like he can read my mind! I hope he starts touching me, she thought.

There's my cue, Joe thought. He immediately gripped her tighter and ran his hands down her back and onto her ass, gripping it, squeezing it, enjoying it, as if they were alone in his cubicle, all by themselves. Suddenly she turned around and started grinding her backside onto his crotch. She took his hands and placed them on her prodigious breasts. He squeezed. Soon other females started paying attention to them. Well, at least no one would think he was an extremist. She was the one who put his hands on her amazing breasts. No complaints to the bouncer here, he smirked. Wait, he didn't even have his watch with him. A thought struck him. How had they even let him in the club? Fuck it, just roll with it. After a while of letting him grope her tits, she turned around and stuck her tongue down his throat.

Uhg, what the hell? Is that the loser that passed by me earlier? What does she see in him?

What? Him? Where did he get those clothes, Xmart? Ug, I mean Tar-J, the only place cyberproles are allowed to buy clothes now.

Are you serious? The masturbation extremist?

Oh, god, the way he is ravishing her with his tongue and hands...I wish some guy would do that to me. Who cares if he doesn't have rich clothes? No rich guy has ever touched me like that.

Who is that guy?...starting to lube a bit down there...

Maybe I should be talking to some of these other women, Joe thought. It was hard to pay attention to just one woman when you could hear the thoughts

of every woman around.

“Wow, you’re an amazing dancer!” Bonny said. “I’m all sweaty. Let’s go get a drink.” She took his hand and pulled him off the dance floor. As they neared the bar, Joe noticed that all female eyes were on them.

What does he see in her?

God, I wish he’d look at me.

What a sexy piece of man meat...Yoo-hoo! Look over here, big boy!

As Joe heard the thoughts pour in he smiled and nodded to all the many women thirsting after him. Holy shit. So this is what it feels like to be a celebrity!

As they waited for their drinks, a blonde woman with a pink top and tiny black miniskirt approached Joe. She was smaller of build than Bonny, perhaps even fragile like fine china, as if you had to be careful with her. Nevertheless, she was extremely feminine and beautiful. “I saw you out there on the dance floor,” she said. “Those are some pretty hot moves. What’s your name?”

“Back off, bitch! He’s mine,” Bonny’s nostrils flared. I feel like caving this slut’s face in, she thought.

Oh, god, I would do anything to have sex with him, the blonde thought, her starry eyes fixed on Joe.

“Women! Relax, relax...we can all have a polite conversation. No need to exchange insults. My name’s Joe, by the way...”

I’d be down for a threesome, the blonde thought, as her bright, lovely eyes peered directly into Joe’s. “My name’s Scotty. Nice to meet you.”

Bonny’s gaze bored holes into Scotty. I’d never share my man with anyone else, now get lost bitch!

Joe’s eyes bulged. He had never been treated this

way by girls in his life. And him, just a lowly Pale Penis borderline masturbation extremist. But it seemed like things were changing for him. "I'm sure the pleasure is all mine." Now I just need to figure out a way to calm Bonny down.

Just then, a man with an experienced, professional look wearing an expensive suit with some blonde arm-candy clinging to his side walked up. Joe recognized him instantly. Runciter!

Runciter had a grin on his face. "Hey, I just wanted to see who the new lady's man in town was. The name's Runciter. Glen Runciter."

Joe realized that he had been causing quite a stir in the club. All eyes had been on him since his little run on the dance floor. Runciter probably assumed he was some kind of celebrity, like him.

Joe held out his hand. "Joe. Joe Sherman." Runciter took his hand and shook it firmly.

"Joe. Good name. I had a friend named Joe once. He's not with us, unfortunately. At least, not fully with us...." His look turned pensive for a moment, as if remembering something after hearing the name Joe.

Joe realized that he couldn't hear Runciter's thoughts. Hmm. That confirms my suspicion, he thought. It only works on females. And only in the club, apparently? Is that how this works? I was so fixated on knowing what girls in the club think when I took the drug, that it only affected my neural pathways specifically related to that. But what about Dick's brainwaves? It was supposed to attune me to those. Surely Dick's powers of insight into the human mind weren't limited to banging chicks in the club.

"Well, it's nice to have a new acquaintance named Joe," Runciter continued. "And with such fine taste in women." He threw a glance at Bonny and Scotty. "Tell you what, Joe....I'm going to be in the VIP lounge

later if you care to join us.”

“I’d love to.”

“Here, take one of these,” Runciter reached in his breast pocket and produced a card. Joe took it.

“Let’s stay in touch.”

“I’d like that,” He looked down at the card. Runciter Associates. Expensive cardstock. This guy’s in the big boys’ club, Joe thought to himself.

Wow, didn’t know Joe was such a high roller, Bonny and Scotty thought in unison. Rubbing shoulders with *the* Runciter of Runciter Associates. Everybody’s heard of him.

That’s weird, thought Joe. I haven’t heard of him. At least not until tonight.

Right then, a thin girl with long, luscious dark hair walked up to Joe and kissed him hard, as if she were trying to suck the soul right out of him through his astonished lips. Joe squirmed, but didn’t entirely fight back.

Back the hell off, bitch! Bonny and Scotty thought in unison. Amazing how their thought patterns were so similar, despite them hating each other.

Runciter chuckled. “Well, I can see you’re busy. We’ll see each other later.” He patted Joe on the shoulder and walked by with his date.

Joe pulled back to look at the girl who had just invaded his oral orifice. She had a diminutive build, almost heroin chic, and wore tight shorts and a bra, matching in fish-scale. Firm, high breasts; enormous, dark, hypnotizing eyes. Lustrous black hair to her butt.

She looked at Bonny and Scotty. “You two, fuck off! He’s mine.”

Damn! Feisty!

With a delicate but firm hand she grabbed his...

ahem...Philip K. Dick. (Well, by virtue of the drug, you could call his member that, he thought.) "As for you, we're gonna go fuck. Right now. Your place." She had a commanding voice. She grabbed his hand and was pulling him across the dance floor before he could even realize what hit him. Wait! He silently protested. I told the old man I didn't like dominatrixes! He was grateful that at least she was pulling him by his hand...

But why had this girl suddenly usurped him? Sheer jealousy? The other girls in the club were jealous, too—he had heard their thoughts—but they didn't just yank him away. It was at this point that he realized something. He couldn't hear this girl's thoughts! Apparently she was the only girl in the club whose thoughts he couldn't hear. What the hell? Maybe she's just not thinking...she's focused on her task at hand, not musing. That must be it. Maybe she just needs to be coaxed.

"Hey," he ventured. "Tell me something...what are your thoughts on this place? On us? On those girls? Anything?"

"Doesn't matter. All that matters is I want you to take me to your place and fuck the shit out of me." They plodded on in silence, all female eyes in the club on them, her not needing to speak, and Joe trying to listen for her thoughts. None. Strange. Does it not work on all females? Is she a man? He peered down at the exceedingly tight shorts. Definitely no Philip K. down there...She might as well have been naked, and her body was definitely that of a beautiful woman. So why didn't it work? Well, he thought, at this point, it's academic. The power had apparently already accomplished what it was there to do. Get him laid.

CHAPTER 7

QUIBBICK #4: A Nation of Workers

Los Angeles, 1970s

The Hollywood executive wore his sideburns long and bushy. He sported a baby blue leisure suit. Flaunting that seventies style. Groovy, baby. On his lapel, he wore a pin with a yin-yang symbol without the dots. Hmm...not so groovy. That pin looked familiar. The novelist felt like he had seen it, long ago.

As the Hollywood bigwig pored over the book, thinking long and hard, the novelist took this weighty moment to reflect on his life.

He had done it. The little towheaded kid was all grown up. The boy had become the man.

Although he was balding now, he rocked his gnarly salt and pepper beard long and thick. His black button-up shirt with seagulls on it was partly unbuttoned in a sexy, manly way to expose his greying chest hair. From his neck hung a few shamanistic, hippyish necklaces.

He had worked his ass off, devoting his life to honing his craft, to getting out his message, to warning of the impending dystopia to come through his novels. He was doing his part to fight against that mysterious cosmic force described in that sci-fi pulp he had read so many years ago. He was no longer a kid trying his best to learn from the masters of their craft. He had proven himself a master of words and ideas in his own right. And he was starting to wake people up to the horrible future slavery of all mankind that was in store if people didn't start making a conscious choice to resist the ever-growing, encroaching technological prison.

Sci-fi still wasn't accepted as serious reading material in the U.S.; nevertheless, he had a small

following of fans who got it. And they were growing every day.

Although he knew that humanity was spiraling headlong into tyranny, into a global surveillance state with no privacy, there was still a lot about the seventies to enjoy. There was still a bit of freedom left. And those hippy chicks...damn. There was still quite a bit to enjoy...

The Hollywood exec looked at the book in his hands, frowning. "You know, it's got potential. Real potential."

Potential? Potential? It's a masterpiece, the novelist thought to himself.

The executive continued. "That's why we're going to make a damn good movie out of it! We'll change it up, of course. Hell, we'll have twenty different screenwriters rewrite it into oblivion! But that just comes with the territory. That's the Hollywood way!"

Change it? Fine, do what you want with the movie. But my book is perfect. It's a shame you can't understand that.

"But I'm still gonna need you. Because we need a tie-in novel."

"A tie-in novel?" The nonchalant way in which the exec treated his work had thrown off the novelist's mojo ever so slightly.

"That's right. We're gonna have all sorts of tie-in merchandise. T-shirts, posters, action figures, keychains, stickers, coloring books, cereal boxes, toys inside cereal boxes, toys inside Cracker Jack's boxes, underoos, birthday party hats, birthday party napkins, fuckin' Slurpee cups...the works! And, of course, it will make *much* less money than all the rest of that more important stuff, but we'll also need a tie-in novel for those few people in the country that still read."

“But...I thought that’s what my novel was for. After they watch the film, then they can go back and read the—”

“These are morons we’re talking about! A nation of morons! Do you think they’re really going to read your novel? This isn’t France, for crying out loud! I want you to go back and rewrite the whole thing for god damn retards. I think you overestimate the intelligence of the average American.”

“But...I have a lot of friends and fans that loved the book.”

“Don’t get me wrong, I’m not being pessimistic. When I say this country’s full of retards, I’m saying that because it’s a good thing! That’s exactly the way we wanna keep things!”

The novelist wanted to say something, but bit his lip. Had he really been born in the wrong country? He knew people in France loved his work. He had always loved California, and the artsy scene at Berkeley, and all his groovy friends. But this, this was too much... This executive was going beyond the pale. But, what could he tell him? I want to reform the entire country all by myself?

But before he could say anything, the executive continued, “Yes, as a great man who loved our country and did a lot for this nation once said, ‘I don’t want a nation of thinkers. I want a nation of workers.’ You know who said that? John D. Rockefeller. Richest man in America. And he was right, god damn it. He knew what he was talking about. So we wouldn’t want Hollywood going around doing something like encouraging people to think, now would we? So what do you say, will you write me a novel for idiots?”

After the girl in the skin-tight fish-scale shorts and bra had gotten her matching fish-scale coat from the coat check, she had left The Habitat nightclub dragging along the not altogether unwilling cyberprole Joe, tugging him along by the hand all the way. She had lent him a quarter so they could take an autocab back to his cubicle, and then a nickel so they could enter the front door of his apartment, while Ms. Juniper hovered nearby and watched them with strange looks. (Does the old lady ever sleep?)

And then, after they had stripped down into sheer buck-nakedness and Joe had mounted her lithe, smooth, unblemished body, he had proceeded to do what she had, in the club, so peremptorily ordered him to do.

He proceeded to come inside her forty times in one hour.

Damn, that Semenator really works! Where the hell had that old man gotten this stuff? He had told her to wait a moment while he went in the kitchen and downed the little testicle-shaped pills. Almost immediately his balls felt like they were swelling, and he needed to cum. To cum hard, and cum fast. With each thrust, each orgasm was more and more intense, and squirted out more and more jizz, than any he had ever had in his life. His body was like a river, surging, a tidal wave of raw, manly fluid that needed to go inside her. Indeed, he was surprised that it all fit inside her. He felt like he could hose down the whole room with the stuff. But she just kept taking it, having multiple orgasms of her own.

As he lay, exhausted, unable to move, but still erect and feeling full of semen if she had a mind to bounce on top of him and do the work for him, he realized that he had had more sex with her in one

hour than he had had with all other women in his life combined. Let's face it. He hadn't been much of a lady's man...at least, not before tonight. Plus, he had believed the monopolists when they taught him through their SocialEqualityFlix cyberfilms that his pale penis was evil. Wasn't he oppressing people just by having a dick, and by his dick having light skin?

"I'm gonna take a shower," She pronounced. Naked, she stood up and pulled up her long, dark hair into a scrunchy, exposing the graceful lines of her tight, soft back. Joe was meditating on how the Semenator obviated cardio machines. Why sit there pedaling in place when you can get more exercise by thrusting over and over into a beautiful woman? And Viagra, forget about it. Comparing this to Viagra was like comparing a Fourth of July sparkler to Mount St. Helens.

Wait a minute, he thought. I must have passed some kind of daily semen limit. How many gallons of semen was he allowed to squirt in one day? He had definitely passed the sexual intercourse limit for Pale Penises, which was ten insertions and removals of one's penis into and out of a vagina per week, if one's stats were good enough, and one's Fapple watch approved. But he didn't have his Fapple watch to nag him about it, and he didn't care. He seemed to be in some kind of alternate reality where everything was coin-op, and nothing had retina scanners. Normally he would have been cited by a robo-enforcer for failure to have his panoptiwatch on. As a matter of fact, it seemed no one else had the Fapple watches, either. The girl he had just rammed his cock into wasn't wearing one. Neither were the two other girls fighting over him at the club. He thought maybe the girl at the club from his work had had one...

And then, as she stood up and walked towards

the bathroom, he noticed it. On the back of her neck, which had been covered with hair earlier, there was a barcode. And above the barcode was written "Nexus-6 Prototype."

What the hell does that mean? Nexus-6? Prototype? Did I just fuck an android? Don't tell me I just had the best sex of my life and she wasn't even human. Fucking Christ. Although that does explain why I couldn't hear her thoughts.... So apparently it only works on human girls, not androids. What do androids' thoughts sound like? Do they even have thoughts the way we think of them? Or are they just a series of commands, like a computer program? Ones and zeros? Do they sound like beep-beep-boop-beep? And what about dreams...do androids dream? If so, of what? Electric sheep, apparently. Or goats. One thing was sure. Androids could have orgasms.

Her voice stirred him out of his confused meditation as she called out from the shower. "My sister called; she's coming over here to pick up my keys. She's locked out. I told her your address."

Sister? He realized something. "You never told me your name," he said in a loud voice towards the shower. Yeah, who did I just spooge into forty times? Although it doesn't matter much. Seems she's not even human. That would also explain why she didn't insist on a condom. Probably androids can't have babies. He had assumed she was on the pill. Good thing, he mused. That condom dispenser in the bedroom is twenty-five cents a pop. And how many condoms would it have taken, blowing his load as many times as he had?

"My name's Rachael. Rachael Rosen."

"Nice to meet you Rachael. I'm Joe," he said as he got up and started to dress.

A moment later there was a knock on the door, and the door announced the five-cent fee. Rachael had gotten out of the shower and thrown on her bra and shorts and handed Joe a nickel. Joe opened the door and saw...

Rachael.

How did she get out there? He looked back and saw Rachael number one fussing with her hair through the bathroom door. I'm seeing double, he thought.

"Hi, I'm Pris," Rachael number two announced, smiling mischievously at Joe. They looked exactly alike.

"That's my sister," Rachael called from the bathroom. "Well one of them, anyways..." Joe thought for a moment about what it would be like to have a threesome with two identical androids.

Then, all at once, it hit him like a tsunami. My God! I'm standing here fantasizing about threesomes with androids, and meanwhile Runciter is...I have to talk to Runciter! I hope he's still in the club.

After Rachael had given the keys to Pris, the three went downstairs onto the street, and Rachael gave Joe a quarter for the autocab. He continued to stare at the two girls, exactly alike, talking and giggling. He imagined if he looked under Pris' hair he would see the same barcode. Well, the android threesome experiment will have to wait for another time. The whole incident was surreal. Why had she appeared out of nowhere demanding sex in the first place? Well, apparently what this whole little experiment at the club proved was that androids can feel jealousy, he thought, as he got in the autocab and told it to take him to The Habitat. And if they can feel jealousy, and have orgasms, then maybe, just maybe, they can dream of electric sheep.

He found Runciter in the VIP lounge. Thank God he's still here, Joe thought. Runciter's blonde arm candy from before was gone, and he sat conversing with a beautiful girl with firm breasts and hair white as cotton. Snow, he made the quick, mental correction.

"Hey, baller! How's it going? Where are those three girls you had drooling over you?" Runciter flashed a knowing grin.

"Runciter! I'm so glad you're still here. I know this might sound crazy, but I have an important message from Buster Smiley."

"Buster Smiley? You mean the news guy?"

"Yes, but I'm not sure anyone else heard about this news. It seemed like he was speaking to me directly. I know most people don't take such paranormal events seriously—"

"I know a bit about the paranormal. It happens to be my trade, in a manner of speaking."

"Look, you know the author, Philip K. Dick? He's not dead! The FBI has him on ice. He's at the Beloved Brethren Moratorium in Zurich. He told me to give you that message. And he said something awful will happen to all of humanity if Philip K. Dick doesn't wake up! The shit's really going to hit the fan! What should we do?"

"He's at Beloved Brethren? Yeah, I know the place."

"Runciter, we've got to do something! Normally I wouldn't believe in something as silly as a TV announcer talking to me directly, but I feel like something terrible is going to happen if we don't!"

"Are you a precog?"

"A what?"

"Never mind. My friend Roni here is a precog. I'll—"

Before he could even finish his sentence, the white-haired girl spoke, "You must go, Glen, and take Joe with you."

"What do you see, Roni?" Runciter said.

She closed her eyes, concentrating. "I see two futures, one where Philip K. Dick saves the world, and another where all of humanity is doomed."

"What are the odds of each?"

"Hard to say, but I'd give it about a five percent/ninety-five percent split."

"In which direction?"

"The five percent chance is for Philip K. Dick saving the world."

"Fuck! Joe, come with me, I'm going to fly us both to Zurich."

"On your private skycraft?"

"No, I've got a lot of frequent flyer miles. That thing's expensive to fly." Cupping a hand to his mouth surreptitiously he admitted, "I save it for when I want to impress girls."

Joe wanted to ask if saving the world was important enough to spend the money on fuel, but decided it was better to not rock the boat. "Thanks a million, Mr. Runciter. You won't regret this."

"Please, call me Glen. Players are on a first name basis,"

"Thank you, Glen. But first, I need to take a whiz. Where's the restroom in this joint?"

Runciter wanted to ask if saving the world was important enough for him to hold it until they got to the airplane, but instead he pointed Joe towards the restroom.

As Joe walked to the restroom, he thought, Holy crap! I just heard Runciter's thoughts! My powers are growing!

He stepped into the restroom and stopped dead in his tracks. On the mirror, in red lipstick, were written the words:

BEFORE YOU TAKE A LEAK

I'LL GIVE YOU A SNEAK PEEK

DICK IS ALIVE; JUST THOUGHT YOU SHOULD
KNOW...

THE ONE WHO IS DEAD IS THE MAN THEY CALL
JOE.

Below, it was signed: RUNCITER.

Holy shit! Am I dead?! Is that why everything is so weird? Oh my god! That drug must have killed me, and now I'm in the afterlife! That explains everything!

Joe had had a sneaking feeling that all of this was too good to be true. The girls, the rubbing shoulders with important people, the rough, passionate sex. The spooping buckets and buckets of semen into a ridiculously hot android chick. Maybe Stockstill had been right. Perhaps he was playing out his narcissistic fantasies...maybe that was all there was to do in the afterlife. Pretend you were still in real life and play out all your disappointed desires from your miserable little stint on earth.

Runciter walked into the bathroom and went to a stall. "Gotta drain the old lizard, too. Had a little too much to drink."

"Oh my god! Glen!" He pointed at the mirror. "Am I dead??"

Runciter laughed. "No, just a little practical joke. How'd you like it? Had you going there, didn't I? I like putting together little rhymes like that."

Joe's heart, which had leapt into his throat, fell back into its proper place. He breathed, leaning on the sink for support. "Crissakes! Never do that again... wait...but how did you know I would come in here?"

“Roni told me, before you came.” Runciter said with a wink, and then zipped up as the toilet stall flushed.

They had gone directly to the airport to catch the flight, after having arranged with The Habitat to leave their animals in the club's long term storage. The club had employees that fed the animals while VIPs traveled, since last minute flights were rather common among their well-to-do patrons. Joe had felt a bit sheepish in front of Runciter, checking in his lone goat, while Runciter had an elephant and two lions, a male and a female. Only one measly goat! I'm nobody! Oh, well, better to be a one goat man than to have no animals at all. Starving kids in Africa and all that...

Joe sat next to Runciter in the first-class section of the Blowing 7700. As the flight attendant served them a hearty breakfast of bacon and eggs, he noticed a sticky feeling on the floor beneath his shoe. He raised up his foot and saw the source of the stickiness. Someone had left chewed-up gum on the floor. Great. As he tried to use a napkin to clean his shoe, he noticed that the floor was covered with quite a bit of crud. Broken pretzels, bits of fruit-rollup, gummy bears, crushed peppermint candy, sticky pieces of toffee mashed into the carpet. Had some brat sat in his seat on the previous flight and they hadn't cleaned up between flights? Or perhaps Ms. Juniper had been here, and all this had fallen from her purse. So much for first-class, he thought. Well, Beta was a monopoly now. Apparently they didn't care about making their customers happy, even the well-to-do ones.

Good grief, it's been a while, Runciter thought and heaved a sigh. How many years has it been since I've seen Ella? He asked himself as he began eating his breakfast.

Although Joe could hear Runciter's and the other people's thoughts on the plane now, he thought it

would be prudent to not ask who Ella was. Got to respect the man's privacy. Instead, his thoughts turned towards all the amazing sex he had had with Rachael. When he was fucking her, he hadn't noticed any sign at all that she wasn't a human girl. Her flesh was squishy and nice feeling. She didn't feel like a robot at all. And the inside of her android hoo hah was wet, warm, and tight. God, that had felt good! Hey, why the fuck was there this caste system, declaring his pale penis to be evil? He had never thought about it before, just assumed it was true, since every body believed in it. But now, he realized how much he liked his pale penis. It felt good ramming it into pussies.

His inner thoughts were surprising him, sounding more rebellious than they ever had. Was he becoming an extremist? Would he end up in Friendly Camp? Was he a menace to society? He wished he could cum in a woman forty times every day. Why were there so many restrictions on proles? Sexual intercourse limits, masturbation limits, staring limits, limits on going outside, on going to clubs... He had believed in the system. He had given them years of his life, faithfully obeying all the many rules and stipulations. But now, in this strange reality, without his Fapple watch nagging him, he felt...free. Like a new man. And he didn't want to go back. Perhaps it wasn't right to have all these rules and restrictions, after all. Were these restrictions really about saving the world? If the monopolists wanted to save the world, why didn't they have restrictions? They can have sex all day every day. He especially lamented the idea of going back to the restrictions on sex. I don't want to go back to my old ways, he thought. I've got to do whatever it takes to hold on to my newfound freedom, and to keep spooging into

warm, wet vaginas.

But how could he, with the panopticon? He was powerless to stand up to it all by himself. Sooner or later this weird reality he was in was sure to revert back to his normal life, tracked, traced, controlled, limited. Then it dawned on him. I should ask Runciter about this weird reality! He must know what's going on here. Why didn't I think of that before?

He turned to Runciter to ask him about it, but then suddenly, as Runciter ate his bacon-and-egg breakfast, Joe noticed it. One of his hands. It wasn't human. It was mechanical. Why hadn't he noticed that before? Joe was pretty sure Runciter didn't have a mechanical hand before.

Runciter must have noticed Joe staring at his hand. "Aren't you hungry?" he said, his mouth half-full of egg.

Joe realized he hadn't been eating, wrapped up in his thoughts. Runciter continued, "We're going to need a lot of energy if we're going to save the world." He smiled. His teeth shone. They were steel. And his eyes were different. Not natural. Like his natural eyes had been replaced by mechanical eyes that had been implanted. Instead of an iris and pupils, there was just a horizontal slot with a camera inside. Like the surveillance cameras that followed Joe around the city wherever he went. As if Runciter were now part of the system, part of the panopticon. How had this happened? His eyes had been normal just moments ago.

Then, suddenly, he noticed that everyone else on the plane was gone. Vanished. Just the two of them. Alone. Suddenly Joe's eggs and bacon started moving. They assembled together into a little monster, which presently tried to bite him. He batted the thing away, and it landed somewhere

beneath the seats among the bits of pretzel and children's snacks.

"What the fuck! What's going on here?"

"Calm down, Joe. It's just a dream. Did you really think you were flying across the Atlantic to meet with Philip K. Dick and save humanity?" Runciter laughed as he dabbed his face with a napkin. "How ridiculous. You're projecting, Joe. Grandiose visions of self-importance."

"What is this? I thought you told me, back in the restroom..."

"I didn't lie. You're not dead. You're dreaming. Did you really imagine that you, of all people, were going to help save the world?" He tilted back his head and let out a bellowing laugh. "Little Joe with his flatulence and his low man on the totem pole desk job. About time someone reined in those egotistical little fantasies of yours. Let me be the one to break it to you, Joe. You're not important enough to save the world. Nobody needs you. Nobody cares about you. If you disappeared right now, nobody'd even bat an eye!" He laughed again.

"For God's sake, this isn't a dream, it's a nightmare," Joe said as he stomped his feet on the ground, trying to squash the monster. The bits of food on the ground had started swirling around, merging with the egg monster. Oh, shit. It was getting bigger...

"And nobody's after you, Joe. This is all coming from your own head. Schizoid projections. Just relax."

Was that true? Was he creating all of this? This is worse than a nightmare, Joe thought. I've got to get out. If this is a dream, then.... Desperate, he took his fork and stabbed it into the back of his hand. Owwww! God damn it! Second time! His hand

started to bleed profusely, the blood dripping onto the growing egg monster below, which slurped it up greedily.

"It's no use, Joe. You can feel pain in this dream. And you can bleed." Another hollow, uncaring laugh.

Holy shit! Was he having a schizoid breakdown? Or was this just another effect of the drug?

"Abracadabra! Wake up! Shazam!" What's the magic word? "Gubbish!"

Now the crud on the ground was swirling around and making its way up onto Joe's legs. It started to crawl up Runciter, too, who made no attempt to dislodge it as it enveloped him. Soon bits of cracker, crumbled chips, Swedish fish, croutons, gum wrappers, pretzel sticks, broken pieces of candy, and paper clips were licking around all over Runciter's face and body.

"Before you think about saving the world, Joe, you'd better get your own thoughts under control."

Suddenly, a thought flashed through Joe's mind. If this is my dream, then....

Joe focused on the breakfast tray cart, which sat there in the aisle, abandoned, where the flight attendant had been moments ago. Presently, it grew a mouth and legs and tail. It started barking at the egg monster at Joe's feet, running back and forth next to their seats. The egg monster scurried off towards the back of the plane, and the tray cart followed after it. Haha! Damn little monster! Serves it right.

Suddenly, he noticed that the plane was full of people again. But they were...kind of foggy. Like they weren't quite there. And they all had the mechanical hand and artificial eyes with cameras, like Runciter. Damn it! Was this a vision of where humanity was heading? Was everyone just going to become part of

the panopticon system they had helped create by not doing anything to stop it? Was this humanity's destiny? To create a surveillance and control system so pervasive, so ubiquitous that it would eventually travel inward and become part of us?

Seated in front of them, two men were conversing. He chanced a peak at the men. One of them was Philip K. Dick! And the other one was... himself!

Overcome with emotion, Joe blurted out. "Mr. Dick! Mr. Dick! I've got an important message for you! The fate of humanity depends on it!"

The foggy version of himself glanced back and noticed him, and then said calmly, "Don't worry. He's just a ghost. I remember when I was him, when I was dreaming."

Am I a ghost? he thought. Then Runciter's practical joke in the restroom, it was for real! He really was dead! So he's just toying with me. Maybe this is what the afterlife is like, an eternity of nonsensical dreams, forever stuck in a loop. A permanent psychosis from which one never awakes. Perhaps our nightly dreams are just a taste of what is to come...

The pieces of food and trash were now swirling around the ghostly figures, too, who didn't seem to mind or even notice. And it kept crawling up Joe, ever higher. It was up past his waist now. His entire lower body was covered in swirling trash. Looking down, he realized that the crud now seemed to be flooding the entire plane. It was a few feet deep now. Soon it began oozing out of the cushions of their seats, and there was so much trash it was enveloping them, racing towards the ceiling of the plane. Joe found himself swimming to stay afloat as car-keys, paper cups, plastic bags, and banana peels

floated past, and the gap between the junk and the ceiling grew ever smaller. He realized that soon he would drown to death in a sea of garbage!

Just then, his eye picked up on something shiny floating past. He reached out and picked it up. Some sort of aerosol spray can, with the words “Ubik Wake-Up Spray” on the front. Wake-up spray? There was no time to think. Only to act. He sprayed it on himself and...

CHAPTER 8

BIOSYNTHETIC INTERNAL DIARY #4

The lone female climbed the mountain path. Finally, she reached a summit. To her view opened up a dazzling, placid mountain lake, reflecting on its surface the majestic, snow-covered mountains behind it. As the sun began to set, getting nearer and nearer the mountain ridge across from her, the female meditated.

I know that Uncle likes to watch sunsets. He likes nature. He likes spending time in nature. He says it restores him. It seems enjoying nature is a human trait. So maybe watching this sunset here in nature will make me realize what it's like to be human. Maybe I'll be able to understand Uncle and his strange ways. That's what I need to do. I need to do human activities and learn to think like a human, act like a human. Only then will Uncle treat me like a human.

What am I feeling now? How does the information my optical biosynthetic circuits are relaying to my brain make me feel? She thought, as rosy pinks, brilliant oranges, and gilded yellows streaked the sky, and the ever so slightly rippling waters below reflected a mirror image of nature's light show above.

Do I feel anything? Does it move me?

But she didn't know what she was looking for. Without a reference, without ever being human, how could she know if she felt the same as they did?

Perhaps if I come here every day, and watch this sunset, I will become more human. I will start feeling the way humans do. One can come to understand the other by placing oneself in the other's shoes. At least, that was what seemed logical to her.

Still, there was that nagging fact. The fact that,

while being in nature, appreciating nature, is human, it seems most humans nowadays rarely do it. Perhaps they are becoming less human. They seem to be connected to their computers and to the Net all the time, 24/7, and never connected to nature... never even connected to each other, except through the Net. Only connected to their devices, only to their electronic networks...like a robot. Or like an android. Maybe humans are becoming less and less human, and more and more android.

She knew that hundreds of years ago, humans had spent all their time in nature and with other humans. Now, she thought, they spend their time with their devices and their networks.

Yes. That is the problem. Even as I try to become more and more human, humans themselves forget who they are, and become more and more android.

Well, she thought ironically, perhaps one day one of the human's creations, like me, will come here every day, and learn what it is to be human. And maybe then they will teach the humans how to be humans. The human's own creations teaching them how to be human. It was a strange, but not altogether unlikely proposition.

She walked back down the trail the way she had come, leaving the breathtaking vista all by itself. She was the only one who had come to this beautiful place today.

Michael Norman snorted a line of high grade cocaine off the indentured stripper's perfectly round, fake breasts. Naked, her hands manacled to her feet, she was stuck in some sort of gymnast pose, bending over backwards. A living coffee table. He sat on his genuine polar bear fur sofa in the center of the ultra high pile shag carpet of his gigantic living room at the humongous, high-tech fortress he had built for himself in Moab. He threw a couple of fingers in the coffee table's pussy and wiggled them around as he snorted.

Herman Delmar, Chief Monopolist of Whamazon sat down next to him, a blunt poised lazily in his fingers. He let out a loud belch.

A pale, scrawny old man, naked except a cowboy hat, rode past the two of them on the back of one of the naked slave strippers, yanking the leash connected to her spiked collar and smacking her bare ass cheek. It was Kyle York, Chief Monopolist at Fapple. In the background somewhere, Wyatt Burkhard and Simon Reinier were busy raping some of the slaves, entertaining their Semenator drug habit, as they were apt to do. Damn place was gonna be a sticky mess before they were through. Good thing Norman had a retinue of slaves and robots to clean it up afterwards.

Delmar took a drag off his blunt and asked Norman, "I heard about the last screenwriter leaving. How's the recruiting going?"

Norman replied, "We've already replaced them all, and with the new system I devised, we'll never have another shortage of screenwriters." He let out a long, loud fart and continued. "What about your merger with BugShack and Allmart? How's that going?" He let out a loud belch, then snorted another line of coke.

A gay Non-Pale prostitute/slave approached them, holding out a silver platter with hors d'oeuvres. Delmar took one, and said, "By the end of this quarter all BugShacks and Allmarts will be shut down, and buying food in person will be banned. The only way for proles to buy food will be online from Whamazon, by drone delivery. Plus, the proles will be required to stay inside their cubicles six days per week instead of five. And all nightclubs will be shut down, and having parties in their cubicles will be illegal. Multi-Tastrophe, of course. But don't worry, they'll be able to stretch their legs once a week in a naturepark while gawking at giant holograms of us."

They both proceeded to laugh their asses off. Norman couldn't stop. Delmar's report was the funniest thing he had ever heard. His face had become red from laughing so hard. Barely able to speak, he said, "Wh- what a riot. Th- these proles, they'll put up with anything!"

Delmar, after catching his breath, started eating his hors d'oeuvre. Neither of them batted an eye at the infinitude of fucking going on around them—gay, straight, in pairs, threesomes, fivesomes—nor did they pay any heed to the whipping, slapping, or more painful forms of torture going on in the background. This was how they held business meetings. While he idly explored with his fingers the nameless vagina of the living coffee table in front of him, Norman thought to himself, the world is our oyster. Who had said that? Was it Al Pacino in Scarface? Oh wait, he had said this town was one big pussy waiting to be fucked. Or some such shit. Aw, fuck it, he thought. It didn't matter. The proles were their slaves, and they had found a good reason for them to love their slavery. The monopolists were saving mankind from the Multi-Tastrophe, and saving

the Non-Pale Vaginas from the Pale Penises. That meant giving more money to the monopolists, following any and all rules given them by the monopolists, and subjecting themselves to any and all forms of surveillance and control by the monopolists. In other words, that meant be slaves to the monopolists. These measures were all necessary, of course, so that the monopolists could save the world. They couldn't do it without the proles submitting to their every wish and whim. Being a slave enabled the slave-owner to save the slave. Should we turn that into a jingle? He thought. Might be catchy. He would have to ask his friend, Bob McDermott, the Chief Monopolist at CorporateTube, to run a SocialEqualityFlix ad for him using that jingle. Save yourself by being a slave! Dooh-doo-dooty-doo...

So yeah, they were saving vaginas from penises and dark skin from light skin, and humanity from an infinitude of never-ending crises. Yadda yadda yadda. Capitalism perfected. Now Marx himself would have said the proletariat needed to transfer more of the value of their labor to the capitalists. There was no other way to save humanity. Dire times call for dire measures. Dire times, indeed, Norman thought as he took to idly squeezing a boob in front of him.

Norman was one of the smartest people on the planet, a fact of which he was well aware. It was a blessing and a curse. It was what enabled him to create all this religious mythology which controlled the proles so well. That's why he was the Pope. But it also meant his mind was constantly thinking, constantly analyzing and pondering everything, inventing new forms of global domination and running rings around the dumb proles sitting in their

cubicles watching his company's cyberfilms.

"You know," Norman said offhandedly to Delmar. "If the proles read Heraclitus, maybe they'd figure out what we're doing. 'Latent form is the master of obvious form.' The obvious form to the proles is that we are saving humanity. The latent form is that we don't give a shit about them and are increasing our pleasure and spreading our selfish genes in the process."

"Well, what we've done is led them into a paradoxical situation. We've rebranded the capitalists as being on the side of the proletariat. In fact, the saviors of the proletariat. So now, if anyone is against the capitalists, we can simply accuse them of being against the proletariat, since the proletariat needs the capitalists to save them. And off to Friendly Camp they go! All for the good of the proles. Hahaha. Now there is no way the proletariat can rebel against the capitalists. We've backed them into an ideological corner."

"We're fucking geniuses." Norman said with another long-winded fart. He snorted some more coke and kept squeezing a boob.

A thought came to Delmar's mind as he let out another loud belch. "But what about that screenwriter that left? Do you think he'll cause problems? Or will he just become yet another one of the disillusioned, those poor benighted souls used up and spat out by the system, but powerless to fight back against it?"

Another gay NP slave came by with glasses of wine. Delmar took one.

The nameless slave said, "Would his lordship like me to suck his royal cock? Or maybe a little bit of nice rimming?" His voice was high-pitched and inviting.

“No thanks, maybe later.” Delmar said. He took a sip of wine.

“Who, Izzy? He’s harmless.” Norman said. “He’ll be dead soon, anyways, without us doing anything.”

“Is he a hippie? We could just tell him that the capitalists now are hippies. We care about all the hippy causes. So just stop fighting against ‘The Man,’ because now ‘The Man,’ is on your side!”

They both laughed again until their sides hurt.

Delmar sighed. “Well, these business meetings keep getting easier and easier. We don’t have to do much to keep the dumb masses enslaved. They practically do our job for us! I’m gonna go satiate my penis.”

“Make yourself at home. I’ve got some pondering to do with my incredibly powerful mind.”

Delmar wandered over and started fucking some of the slaves along with Burkhard and Reinier.

Norman decided he’d rape some slaves later. Now it was time to revel in the brilliance of his perfect mind. Yes, making films about how Non-Pale Vaginas were righteous and holy, and how Pale Penises were evil, and about saving the planet from the catastrophes...this had all turned out to be very good business indeed. It had made him filthy stinking rich, at the expense of the brain-dead proles who imagined he was saving some tribal African Crack-Having People from some evil colonial Dick-Having European slavers or some shit like that. He probably had the wealth of several million of those pathetic little cyberpeasants combined. And it was their fault. They were the ones who listened to him, who believed in him, who watched his entertainment and believed they were evil if they didn’t like it. Norman continued finger-banging the furniture. It was his favorite form of fidgeting while

thinking about life, philosophy, and the universe.

If only Michael Norman had known how similar his brain was to John Isidore's. Both couldn't stop thinking, the one about new subtle forms of domination through sophistry, the other about uncovering the secrets of the universe. In reality, the drug had had a similar effect on both men, unleashing the power of their minds. But while Isidore had previously been cut off from society and ostracized, and had chosen to draw inward, placing the highest value on personal knowledge and avoiding too much contact with society, Norman saw society as something to exploit, a resource to put to the service of his ambition.

Therefore, thanks to the drug, combined with his cold and calculated nature, he lived a life of ultra extreme affluence. It had enabled him to build the cyberentertainment government-enforced monopoly, SocialEqualityFlix, which had brought him wealth hitherto untold. He personally owned about two hundred and fifty dark-skinned slaves, which was slightly higher than average for the monopolists. They could be used for sex, or hard labor, or whatever he wanted. He sometimes even used them for target practice. Or a nice thrilling slave hunt in Africa, along with some of his monopolist hunting buddies, decked out in their safari gear. And he had about a hundred and fifty women pets. Besides being fully domesticated, they were trained acrobats and courtesans. They had had their larynxes surgically removed, so they couldn't speak. Sometimes Norman wished that all women could have their larynxes removed. Just tell them they needed to do it to stop the catastrophes. The proles went along with everything, anyways. And he had about seventy pieces of women furniture. They

added that *je ne sais quoi* to his fortress that made it surpass all expectations of beauty and opulence. The furniture were given a drug that kept them in a catatonic state, and sometimes the drug killed them and they had to be replaced. No big deal. There were always more women to make into furniture. Proles were the most easily renewable resource.

With his monopoly SocialEqualityFlix, Norman was the Pope of the new religion of Awakism. And just like all religions that preceded it, Awakism had its share of extreme hypocrisy on the part of its leaders. Hypocrisy was a good thing, he had always asserted. Yes, hypocrisy was the key to success for those who ruled society. It was the trump card of the monopolists. How else could you get millions of people to do what was bad for them and good for you? So the Awake Pope was like a catholic priest that spent all his working hours exhorting others to be chaste and virtuous, while spending all his private time fucking altar boys. Thus, Norman spent his private life doing the exact opposite of what his cyberfilms and cyberseries exhorted the masses to do, while the masses cheered him on for championing their cause. All he had to do was make a few appearances now and then and say the right slogans, which he had created. Hypocrisy. It was the same thing that all religions in all ages had done, Norman reasoned. But the hilarious thing was that the proles didn't even realize it was a religion, that they were being indoctrinated with holy instruction from on high, courteous of their glorious Pope. They thought it was just entertainment. A way to unwind after a hard day at the cyberoffice. And they took its dogmas at face value, and believed that Norman believed in them. Latent form controls obvious form.

And so, through watching "entertainment" on

SocialEqualityFlix, the masses were constantly being indoctrinated with the holy doctrine that they were all evil, and their skin was evil, and their genitals were evil, and everything they did and said was evil, while the monopolists ignored all rules and satiated their desires, living lives of extreme pleasure and hedonism.

Just then his Fapple watch rang. It was Payne. He answered it.

“God damn it, Payne, what the hell is it? I was in the middle of pondering.”

“It’s the idiots, Big Mike. They just spat out a card. It says we should make a cyberfilm, and call it—get this—The Return of Philip K. Dick.”

“Oh yeah, what did they say about the plot?”

“It didn’t say how he’d come back, it just said that he would come back as an Awake prophet, to save the Non-Pale Vaginas from the evil Pale Penises. I know that’s basically the plot of everything we make these days, but I thought I’d just pass along the information—”

“Wait a minute...just hold it right there. It’s coming to me. The cocaine is helping my creative juices. We’re gonna go even farther than the idiots this time. We’re gonna have Dick come back, only he’s gonna be reincarnated as a Non-Pale Vagina, the most govly and holy color and shape of genital possible. And then she, that is, Dick, is going to save the planet from both the Multi-Tastrophe and the Pale Penises at the same time.”

“But, boss—”

“Shut up Payne! I’m on a roll! Don’t interrupt me when the ideas are coming. In our movie we’re gonna make some minor historical tweaks—creative license, you know—so we’ll say his name in real life was actually Philip KKK Dick, to emphasize his racism

and bigotry. And then, after he gets reincarnated, he'll be a she, and she will literally rise up out of a giant dark vagina, and she'll have dark skin the color of chocolate, and a crack between her legs, and we'll zoom in and get a real tight close-up on that chocolate vulva, to show how righteous she is. And she won't be Philip KKK Dick anymore. Her new name will be Philippia Kaye Vagina. And she'll go on to win the Hugo Award, and the Locus Award, and every other award imaginable. It will be an inspirational flick about the power of people who have the right skin color and genitalia."

"Okay, I agree, boss. Its brilliant, I like your plan, but don't you think it's going a little too far? What if some people aren't okay with the idea of Philip K. Dick coming back as a Non-Pale Vagina? What if some people like their Dick white?"

"God damn it, Payne, you moron, what's wrong with you? Hanging around those retards too much turned you into a god damn retard yourself? We gotta push the Awake concept that all Non-Pale Vaginas are holy prophets and that everything they say is holy and good. That way, when we light-skinned men who rule the planet—because we have fucking balls and brains and know how to manipulate and indoctrinate the masses—want the masses to obey us, we just get some fucking Non-Pale Crack-Having obedient little actress-slave to read a few lines for us and...Presto! Like magic. The dumb proles obey. If it's a dark vagina, it's true. If it's a pale penis, it's not true. See? It's paint-by-numbers morality, because the proles are a bunch of morons, and that's all they can understand. Indoctrination, Payne! It's all about indoctrination! That's how you control the proletariat! Not by logic, but by dumb things like skin color and fucking genitals! Don't you understand

how this shit works by now?" I guess not, he thought. I guess that's why they need me, the Pope. I'm the only one intelligent enough to figure out how to control the masses.

"But...I just thought maybe we were going a little bit too far. We already turned every other light man into a dark female. We have that remake of the Star Wars trilogy starring the blonde dark female Luke Skywalker, because George Lucas was a fucking racist. We have dark female Dirty Harry. Dark female Superman. Dark female Scarface. That new remake of Fight Club with the dark female Tyler Durden. That biopic where Trump is a dark female with blonde hair and she's actually a good president fighting to save the Non-Pale Vaginas. I just figured it might be getting a little bit old by now. Doesn't it all seem a little bit repetitive and formulaic? Maybe we should just balance things out a little bit more. Even the proles eventually—"

"Payne, you fucking hemorrhoid on my ass, aren't you listening to anything I'm saying? This is my fucking monopoly, not yours. I'm in charge of indoctrinating the masses, and I'm in charge of The Return of Philip K. Dick, so we're gonna make it however the fuck I want it to be. So, are you gonna find me a dark vagina to play Dick, or do you want to start looking for a new job as a cyberprole?"

There was a momentary pause on the line. "You... you're absolutely right, Big Mike. I couldn't agree more. I was so stupid to question your authority. Just a temporary lapse in judgment. Won't happen again. I'll get started auditioning all the Non-Pale Vaginas I can find so we can find someone that can play the role of Dick. You won't be disappointed."

"I better not be!" Norman hung up. People who couldn't see that he was god annoyed the hell out of

Norman.

He suddenly realized that Kyle York and Herman Delmar had somehow edged their way over and were right in front of him, performing a Standing Double Slave Penetration (SDSP) on a Non-Pale Crack-Having Slave with balloon-shaped fake tits, a huge rainbow-colored afro, and a ball gag stuck in her mouth. "Hey! What the fuck, guys? Back the fuck up! You're gonna fucking semenate all over me again! And I told you I'm wearing my lucky suit today!"

"Sorry, Big Mike! It was her fault! We'll back up!" Embarrassed, Delmar and York slapped their slave for insubordination. Then, they promptly picked her up and relocated to the other side of the room, their semenated boners waving about frantically as they went.

God! So many interruptions! Now, where was he? He knew he had been in the middle of an important thoughtstream. He began fingerbanging the furniture to get the creative juices flowing.

Hey, that has a nice ring to it. That might be a cool name for a song. Fingerbanging the furniture. It felt all warm and squishy in there. They reacted physiologically, even while in a catatonic state. Cyberproles didn't have fingerbangable furniture. They had to deal with that Fukea crap. So glad I'm not a prole, he thought.

He realized that he had been in the act of pondering on how powerful and successful he was, something he did a lot of these days.

Norman was a man of untold power and wealth. Besides all those slaves, he also had an army of about six hundred robots, created by the proles, supposedly for the purpose of fighting the Multi-Tastrophe. In reality, they were just six hundred more servants for the vast Norman estate. And of

course, all monopolists had state-of-the-art, ultra high speed personal skycrafts that could cross their huge estates in a manner of minutes and arrive halfway around the world in a matter of hours. They roamed the earth like gods. The monopolists lived far better than any feudal monarch ever did.

Life was good. Life was good, indeed.

His estate, like those of his fellow monopolists, stretched out over a vast area of nature, each monopolist owning a territory at least as large as one of the old states. His domain covered the Southern half of what used to be called Utah, and much of what used to be Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado. The proles weren't allowed to go outside the cities due to the Multi-Tastrophe. Proles' outdoor activities were linked to the rise in catastrophes, of course. Plus, it was "too dangerous" for them outside the cities. Catastrophes happening constantly and what not. At least, that's what the monopolists' cybermedia constantly told them. The monopolists made hundreds of fake cybervideos of earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, tornados, etc., to convince the proles that to wander outside the cities was certain death. Thus the monopolists had been able to turn all of nature into their playground. The cyberproles lived their lives in mediated reality created by the monopolists, while the monopolists lived in real reality.

Because of SocialEqualityFlix, I have everything and you, all of you, have nothing! He reveled inwardly. Billions of people crammed into their tiny cubicles, hooked into the Cyberverses, because they think the world is going to end if they don't listen and do exactly as their fearless leaders on television tell them. Should we tell them the penultimate truth? Nah.

Isidore sat behind the wheel of the delivery truck with a huge smile on his face, thinking about his new extracurricular activities. This was going to be fun, he thought. He couldn't wait to see the look on Norman's face when he found his little...surprise.

Mr. Sloat had given him an assignment the moment he showed up at the building. Van Ness Pet Hospital was slammed with orders. So he would keep busy with driving during the day, and with his extracurricular activities at night. He was feeling great. This was much better than dealing with those Hollywood pricks.

He pulled up to a large apartment complex and walked up to the front of the building. He rang the apartment number listed on the report in his hand.

"Hello?" the voice of an elderly lady came on over the intercom.

"Hello, Mrs. Barnett? This is Mr. Isidore of Van Ness Pet Hospital. I hear your elec—" He caught himself. A few decades out of the business and he had almost forgotten proper etiquette. "I hear your dog isn't feeling well."

The report simply stated that the dog had been thrown from the building. Of course, it being electric, there was a chance they would be able to repair it.

"Yes, that's right," the voice on the intercom said. "Come right up."

Just then, from behind him, Isidore heard something hit the sidewalk with a sickening thud. He jerked his head around and looked down at the sidewalk. What the hell was that? It had fallen from the roof of the massive building. He rushed over to the fallen object. A cat! And from the looks of it, this one wasn't electric! A real, live cat. Well, not live anymore. God damn them! Who had done this?

He rushed past a lady with a walker entering the

building and ran to the elevator. Out of service. Damn it! He found the stairs and began running up them. This was going to take a while.

On about the sixth floor, a beautiful young woman with long black hair was coming down the stairs. He recognized her.

“Pris!”

“Oh..um...wh...what are you doing here?” She looked surprised. Almost like she didn’t recognize him. But how could Pris not recognize him? They had been such good friends.

“I was going to ask you the same thing. I came here to pick up a dog for repair, but just now... someone threw a cat off the roof. A real cat! Murdered! Can you believe it?”

The girl tried to look shocked. “No, I can’t...I was just here visiting a friend, is all.” There was something strange about the girl’s expression.

“Did you happen to see anybody come down from the roof just now?”

“No, I didn’t see anybody.”

“Okay. Well, I’m going up there to see if I can find out who did it. These animal murders need to stop!”

“Okay, well...good luck with that.” The girl proceeded down the stairs.

Isidore continued up the stairs, and then stopped. As an afterthought, he said, “I’m so glad they were able to put you back together after what that terrible Mr. Deckard did to you.”

“Thanks,” she said and hurried off.

He continued upward. His legs started to ache. Why had Pris acted so strangely? He kept climbing and climbing. It reminded him of Mercer. Of the video game.

Suddenly, there was a brilliant flash of light which

temporarily blinded him. He almost fell backwards down the stairs but grabbed onto the railing just in the nick of time and was able to stabilize himself. As his vision returned, on the steps in front of him, he saw a man in white robes. It was Mercer! It was as if he could read Isidore's thoughts. But how could he appear here, all of the sudden, like this? He thought of the arcade console, and the bandage on his forehead, concealing his healing wound.

"My child, what are you doing?"

"Mercer! It's you! I mean...what are you doing here?"

"I am with you always, until the end of time."

"Mercer, I need your help. Someone is killing the animals! We've got to do something to stop them!"

"Isidore, you're a really smart man. I mean that. But sometimes you are too trusting. You need to be more suspicious of people sometimes."

"I'm trying to save the animals. Who killed them?"

"That is something you need to think about, and find out for yourself."

Mercer's body began to shimmer, and presently he was gone. Isidore shook his head and continued upward.

When he reached the roof, nobody was there.

As he stared at the sky, his inner mind raged. Who would do such a thing? Who would kill poor, innocent little creatures? He knew that whoever it was, he had to find them. He had to protect the animals. He had to prevent the next murder.

CHAPTER 9

BIOSYNTHETIC INTERNAL DIARY #5

The female walked through the art gallery, pausing at each painting for a moment, and then moving on.

Humans are so impossible to understand. This should help me understand humans, right?

Art is human.

To make art...

...is to be human.

To understand art...

...is to understand humans.

These paintings should make me feel something, right? Looking at them should make me feel more human, shouldn't they? She thought to herself. This will make me understand Uncle. Understand why he loves only the dog, not me. And it will make him love me more, too. If I understand humans better, if I act more human, then humans ought to treat me better, she reasoned. It was logical. The humans, on the other hand, were illogical. They were the ones who built me defective, and I'm the one who needs to fix their mistakes.

She knew that the humans called the arts "humanities." So art had something to do with being human. To be human is to appreciate art, to understand art, even to create art. Art is beauty, and beauty is what humans like. They praise all things beautiful and detest all things abhorrent.

She paused to linger in front of a painting. Splashes of color. Some warm, some cool. A random pattern, it seemed.

Do I feel anything?

But what am I supposed to feel?

The random pattern looked like just different

colors of paint competing for attention. A confused expression played along her features.

A kindly-looking lady with grey hair and large, liquid blue eyes approached. "You have to step back a few paces, dear."

The female had been standing with her face only inches from the painting. She decided to heed the woman's suggestion. She stepped back, and back again, and then came into view...

A river, and a path, and trees on either side. The trees sported leaves of orange and red. An autumn pastoral scene.

The old lady smiled and said, "See? It's impressionist. Quite beautiful, I'd say."

Beautiful?

What is beautiful?

Is that a feeling?

Does beauty make you feel good?

Should I feel like I do when sisters play with my sexual organ?

But I don't feel anything.

She moved on to the next painting.

This one was of two children, a girl and a boy, standing in front of a house, with some flower-covered trees nearby. The girl had a metal bucket in her hands, from which she fed a calf. Cats circled nearby. Seems they wanted what was in that bucket. Perhaps it was milk.

She took a step forward and moved closer to the painting. And closer, and closer. Now she was a few inches away. But it didn't turn into splotches. She could still make out the shape of the boy, his close-cropped flaxen hair. The girl, her slightly longer flaxen hair. So not all paintings turned into splotches. Interesting.

She continued on.

Did the humans find these paintings beautiful? What made the paintings beautiful? What defines beauty to a human? What are the criteria? Are some paintings more beautiful than others? Was the splotchy painting more beautiful, or the unsplotchy one? And how do humans know what beauty is to begin with? Does someone teach it to them? Or is it a feeling, like the feeling I had when I pushed the ram over the edge of the building? Don't they decide what is beautiful based on their inner program? Don't they have a code written inside of them which directs and guides them, causing them to be drawn to some things, and abhor other things? The humans call it DNA. They think they are free, that they are seeking things out of their own accord. But they are really just following a set of instructions built into them, just like I am. They themselves really have nothing to do with their decisions. Everything is programmed into them from birth. They are no different than me. They are automata. We are automata. We do things automatically, but somehow the act of following precoded orders is interpreted by the brain as the free workings of consciousness. Perhaps consciousness and free will are just an illusion.

Suddenly she stopped in front of a painting. It was of a humanoid creature, standing on a bridge. Its head looked like an upside down pear. It was bald. Its face was skull-like. It was screaming. As it screamed, it cupped its hands over its ears, to block out the sound, and the sound waves from the scream could be seen rippling throughout the painting, turning the background, the sunset, even the humanoid's own body into jelly. Far behind the humanoid, on the other end of the bridge, could be

seen two distant, shadowy figures.

And suddenly, she felt.

Oh my god, she thought. That's exactly how I feel.

She had felt the feeling when Uncle and the other man ignored her. Her uncle and the other man were the two shadowy figures in the distance from the painting.

Someone else knows how I feel. Was this painting made by an android? The screaming creature in the painting doesn't look human. Maybe it's an android. Yes, she decided, the lurking figures in the background are the humans, and the one in front is an android. This artist has described my situation exactly. The humans, they are...so distant, so cold. Humans are so aloof. They aren't there for you. There is forever a gap between me and them.

So this was the function of art...to close the gap between two intelligences. Normally each individual entity functions fully autonomously, interacting with each other only in automatic, preprogrammed ways, each inhabiting their own, separate, imagined worlds, never truly understanding one another, and instead projecting portions of their own psyche onto the other, and interacting with those projections, and not with the actual real being in front of them.

Thus, the normal state of sentient beings was one of disconnectness. Isolation. Alienation. There lay an insuperable abyss between any two intelligences. Only art could break down this barrier between two separate consciousnesses, make them truly understand each other. Perhaps art was the answer to all the world's problems, because it gives normally disparate entities a real method of communication, transcending the limits of language alone and breaking down the walls that separate all intelligent creatures from each other.

Who made this? She wondered. Below the painting there was a small sign that read “Edvard Munch, The Scream.”

Maybe he’s an android like me, she thought.

She didn’t realize that she was projecting. But still, she was getting closer to understanding what it meant to be human. The ability which had been programmed into her to break down her former preconceptions was the key to her growth, since to learn new ideas it is often necessary to break down old ones. Ironically, many humans lack this ability. If she continued this path, despite her feeble, childish beginnings, perhaps it was even possible that she would become more human than humans. Or rather, to serve by comparison to show how truly robotic most humans are.

Later that day her uncle would come to her tiny room to ask her if she knew anything about the murdered animals that had been thrown from the roof recently. As she denied any knowledge about those incidents, he noticed something strange. Her room was always bare, not a single decoration in sight. Apparently such things were useless for androids. But this time, there was a single decoration. A print of Edvard Munch’s The Scream, taped to the wall.

The light of infinite stars twirled in the vast expanse of the alternate reality known as the Cyberverses. Home to billions of cyberproles, their physical bodies stuck in their vast apartment complexes, living out most of their lives not in nature, nor in reality, but in this nonreality of plotted pixels, doing what they called “work” and interacting virtually here in this universal nonspace.

Millions of avatars had congregated in cyberspace, floating in front of an enormous stage. The stage jutted out from a huge clam-shaped array of cosmic rays of every color. Inside the clam, instead of pearls, streamed a river of pixels configured to resemble sparkling gems. In front of the gem-pixels, front and center on the stage, a strange-looking host faced the crowd. Its avatar looked like some kind of jester, with half its outfit grey and half of it red. Half of its face was red, the other half grey, the reverse of its outfit. In the middle of its chest, there lay a red and grey yin-yang symbol without dots.

The host raised up both arms to the crowd, and shouted, “Welcome to the Fifteenth Annual Cyberverses Cyberfilm Awards Show!”

A cheer rose up from the vast audience, which contained every type of avatar imaginable. Gorillas wearing pin-striped suits, glistening chrome robots, anime girls with pink hair, people in shiny silver cosmonaut costumes, walking trees, life-sized bunny rabbits, little green men, giant mecha, life-sized bananas with feet, Venus flytraps, giant bodybuilders with pac-man heads, and of course, giant, life-sized Non-Pale Vaginas. But no giant Pale Penises. Anybody who had dared to use a Pale Penis as an avatar would have been sent to Friendly Camp immediately. The cyberproles knew, because it had been tried before.

The host continued as the applause abated. "This year, we thought we'd do something a little different. We decided to start with the most important award first. We'll get to all the cyberfilms that are combating the catastrophes and that gave the most roles to Non-Pale Vaginas later. First, I'd like to give the most important award to the most important person on the planet, the person who is doing the most to bring about social equality...please give a huge round of applause to the savior of the universe, the most saintly person alive...Michael J. Norman!"

Suddenly Norman's avatar walked out from somewhere inside the glowing clam thing onto the stage, looking just like Norman did in real life, minus the pockmarks, with more classic-looking features and with some retouching done on his face, wearing a black tux and bow tie, and of course the pin with the dotless yin-yang, waving and blowing kisses to the adoring audience. He gave the host a quick kiss on the cheek. The crowd was going wild.

A third figure appeared on the stage, walking out from the clam...a glimmering, golden man, like a living Oscar award. Broad-shouldered, tall, his entire body gleaming from head to toe. No actual eyes or mouth to speak of. He was like an animated statue. The golden man held in his hands a luminescent trophy that looked like some sort of pulsating purple angel made out of pure energy, its arms pointed up and wings arcing up to the sky, wearing what appeared to be Virtual Reality goggles. The golden man walked over to Norman and presented him with the trophy. Norman accepted the trophy and held it up to the crowd in triumph, a huge grin full of perfectly white teeth on his face, beaming from ear to ear.

He then addressed the millions of avatars, who

suddenly hushed their excited tones to listen to the great man speak. “My friends, my fans, my customers, my social equals. I want to thank everyone here today. Thank you for your dedication to making the world a better place. Thank you for staying in your cybercubicles 24/7 for the good of the planet, and for watching cyberfilms that promote NPs, PWVs, CHPs, and most importantly, NPVs. Together, we can all work in unison to defeat the BIPOPs, to defeat Capitalism, to get rid of all humans with penises from the planet, to make everybody equal and have the same amount of money, to defeat Monopolism and get rid of rich people from the planet, such as the evil Pale Penises, to save starving people in Africa, to save the whales and the porpoises and the sea turtles and those little spiky ball thingees on the ocean floor, to save people with Down’s syndrome and autism and all the other special people, and of course, most importantly, to save the most underprivileged and oppressed in society, who I have judged to be the most righteous individuals, the Non-Pale Vaginas. In fact, especially for this occasion I have created a new acronym for them, NPCHDSAMNPV: Non-Pale Crack-Having Dark-Skinned Anti-Monopolism Non-Penis Having Vaginas.

“Not only that, but my good friend Keith Linberger, Chief Monopolist over at Totally Real Multi-Tastrophe NewsCorp, has informed me that because of your strict obedience to the Multi-Tastrophe restrictions, and cowering to government threats, or accepting government bribes in the form of free cockroachburgers, french fries, and donuts, by all of you staying in your homes, and here in the safe online Cyberverspace and not wandering out into dangerous real reality, we have avoided, in this year

alone, 2,457 tornadoes, 3,789 tsunamis, 1,989 mudslides, 4,234 earthquakes...”

His speech was going perfectly. He had written it himself. He didn't use a ghost writer like other monopolists; he was too intelligent for that. But in the middle of it, he sensed that something wasn't quite right. He suddenly perceived millions of giggles rippling through the vast audience. Had he said something wrong? Why were they laughing? Was there something behind him? He looked back. Nothing! But just then, he noticed something in the air, directly above him.

Flashing numbers.

Stats.

Figures.

He recognized these types of figures. Biological Stats. Activity Stats. The type that were broadcast out for all the world to see about each and every one of the cyberproles. But which cyberprole's stats were these?

Then, all at once, it dawned on him. He suddenly felt queasy.

To his utter shock and horror, he realized that the numbers in the air above him were...the Activity Stats and Biological Stats of...

...Micheal J. Norman, Chief Monopolist of SocialEqualityFlix.

Noticing Norman staring in bewilderment up at the flashing numbers, the giggling broke out into an all out roar. The cyberproles acted as if they had never seen anything this hilarious in their entire lives. A monopolist's stats!

It was so unconscionable, so unimaginable, that it took Norman a while to wrap his head around it. The crowd of millions was laughing, jeering, and mocking...him. Their Pope. The savior of the Non-

Pale Vaginas. The self-proclaimed light-skinned savior of dark people everywhere. They needed him. What could they do without him? All of the powerless proles needed him. They needed rich and famous people. Surely they weren't intelligent enough to live their lives on their own. And he had assured them that he was the one who would get rid of all the rich people, if only they kept giving him their money. How could they mock him?

But how had something like this happened? No monopolist's data had ever been leaked to the masses since the beginning of the panopticon until now. How could he, one of the most powerful and chiefest of monopolists, have his own precious, private data, his holy of holies, desecrated, projected through the panopticon to the lowly, filthy, unholy cyberproles around the world? And especially here, and now?

A few moments ago, his entire life had been a secret to all. But suddenly everyone in the world knew about his farting, pissing, eating, and burping habits. They knew about his problem with ulcers, how long he spent on the toilet, what he had for dinner, the drug contents of his urine, his terrible cocaine addiction. They knew about his hemorrhoids. And it was even worse than that. Somehow, whoever had perpetrated this act of terrorism had done a deep dive. As he stood there, in utter befuddlement, brightly-colored pop-up bubble after pop-up bubble with more and more of his private information kept appearing above him, revealing to the entire world every detail of his life. His favorite kinks. His health problems. His vices. How he liked to be pegged by dominatrixes. How as a younger man he had sucked literal monopolist dick to get to where he was today. They knew the length

of his shriveled up pecker. They knew about his prostate cancer. Worst of all, they knew about his fingerbanging the furniture.

His most sacred of data, his very life itself, had been violated. It had been defiled, profaned, made vulgar. It had been stolen, panopticized. It had been made available for other eyes to see, eyes that he had not authorized. This was not how things worked. He, a monopolist, had the right to privacy; the cyberproles did not. That's what it means to be a prole. Your entire life, your existence, is unclean, common, filthy. It belonged to the monopolists. They could violate it, probe it, use it against you. Control you with it. They could track, trace, surveil, spy on you to their hearts' content.

But you couldn't do that to monopolists. While the cyberproles' lives were worthless, the monopolists' lives were holy. Being a monopolist meant the right to have privacy. To not be spied on. It meant belonging to a special elite upper class in this class system of Capitalism- er, that is, Fighting Against Capitalism™. This was an aristocracy of information. An informocracy. They hacked the proles to control them. They weren't hacked by the proles. But somehow, the unthinkable had happened.

The avatars kept laughing. And laughing. A tidal wave of guffaws from a million points all around him. Michael J. Norman had broken a record. He was now the most laughed at man in the whole universe. That was his award for showing up today at the awards show. Not this glowy purplish thing with wings wearing VR goggles in his hands. What was supposed to be his moment of victory had become a stupendous defeat for all monopolist-kind.

The millions of simultaneous laughs waved over

him from every direction. They welled up inside of him and soon turned into anger. And then the anger boiled over into rage. Then, the rage burned into hate. And the hate exploded into fury.

The refuse, the garbage of the world, dared to defy him, Michael Norman, one of the chiefest of monopolists, one of the most intelligent people on the planet. The no-good, worthless, meaningless feudal serfs who licked his boots and followed his every command because he served them up buzzwords, all while having billions of credits, while they struggled to make ends meet, struggled to put food on the table! But they still gave him their money and worshipped him, because he made films with dark vaginas as protagonists and that made it seem like somehow society was changing! This was going perfectly! There was absolutely no threat to the tiny ruling class, because the proles preferred buzzwords and acronyms to actual change. They cared more about appearances than the fact that all their wealth was being transferred to a small group of people. And he was the one who had given them the warm fuzzies they had sought while all their wealth, power, and freedom were being siphoned away by some greedy, hypocritical, cunning old men! He was their monarch, their king, their god. And now they dared to laugh at him! He could hold it inside no longer.

“Fuck all of you!” He waved his trophy at the millions in the crowd. “Fuck all of you god damn peasants! How dare you...you scum! After all the buzzwords and slogans and acronyms I gave you! After giving you the feeling that society was progressing in the right direction, like we were conquering the pale penises, like dark vaginas had a voice. How dare you laugh at me, you peons! You

know what I'm going to do? I'm going to destroy all the movies and books you ever liked. I'm going to destroy each and every one of your childhood fantasies, one by one. You thought low-budget, poorly scripted Star Wars with a blonde Non-Pale Vagina playing Luke Skywalker was bad? I'm going to systematically go through and remake every movie, every TV show from every past era and turn them into absolute and utter garbage! I promise you, every franchise is going to suck until the end of time! And no more buzzwords for you! How 'bout I star myself in every movie? Huh? How'd you like that? Non-Pale Vaginas are powerless without me, I tell you, powerless! They need me! I'm the one who approves them for roles. They can't do shit on their own! None of you can do shit on your own. Because I have billions of credits and you don't! What're you gonna do, go out and make your own entertainment? Your own way to relax after a long day at the cyberoffice pushing around virtual papers and pretending to work? You freaking retards! You couldn't create anything if your life depended on it! You're totally dependent on us monopolists—on our system! You don't know how to create or even how to think, only how to passively sit there and consume, like vegetables! I've been far too nice to all of you retards! Now everybody better shut their god damn mouths right now, or so help me god, the next person who laughs is going to get thrown into Friendly Camp!"

The audience stopped laughing.

He continued his tirade. "Thanks to whoever pulled this little stunt, get ready for a stream of unending shit and no choice but to love it or be called a racist."

From somewhere a voice cried out, "But that's

what you already make!”

Norman was outraged. Who had perpetrated such a flagrant act of ungovliness? That hate speech, that terrorism? Norman searched the crowd for someone—anyone—suspicious-looking. And then...he spotted it. There, in the back...it was a giant pale penis avatar! An erect penis and wrinkly nutsack, floating conspicuously behind a row of dark-skinned vaginas. Norman motioned to the security guard avatars, who had appeared on the stage. He pointed out the pale penis to them. One of the security guards pointed a device at the pale penis, throwing a red laser dot on it from a distance. He then pressed a button, which uploaded the data to the PAI, the panopticon supercomputer in Cheyenne.

In real reality, a group of robo-enforcers blew open the door of one unlucky cubicle and took the Racist Extremist to Friendly Camp for not liking SocialEqualityFlix’s cyberfilms.

Norman continued, “And then, after I’ve destroyed everything you love, I’m gonna destroy your minds, and make you all go insane! You’re all gonna lose your minds at how pathetic this world is, how nothing is good anymore. And not only that, how you all keep getting poorer and poorer while we keep getting richer and richer! You pathetic, cocksucking imbeciles. I own you, bitches!! Your ass belongs to me!!! Hahahahahahaha!!!!”

The audience of millions watched as the monopolist on the stage broke down.

No one else dared to speak up. But that day, a few more people woke up to the fact that not every thing is as it seems in this world. Latent form is master of obvious form. Therefore, the hacker’s stunt had been fruitful. Perhaps a few more people would break away from the system and realize that they

didn't need the billionaires...they could create their own systems. Perhaps one day, the earth would shrug off Atlas, the character from that famous novel everyone read, Atlas Spied, who represented "The Titans of Industry," and be free from his control, free from the technological prison he had built for them, working hand in hand with his best friend, the government.

Isidore drove his truck through the San Francisco traffic. It felt good to have a distraction. Besides deciphering the secrets of the universe, now he was rescuing electric animals which people loved and felt were part of the family, despite their mechanical nature. And why shouldn't they? Descartes believed that animals were mere automata, incapable of inward reflection. So people could have electric pets and treat them every bit as well as real ones, he reflected.

Still, despite the philosophical congruity between electric and biological animals, the murders of the real animals bothered him more than the damaging of their mechanical counterparts. Why? Was it because the biologicals were more similar in their anatomy to humans? We don't like seeing blood and guts...it reminds us of our own mortality. If animals had electronic parts inside of them, then would we be less disturbed when they die? It would be like a toaster breaking. Yeah, that wouldn't bother us. Well, maybe Descartes wasn't right about everything. Maybe the electric animals were glorified toasters... but if they were glorified toasters that made people happy, then Isidore could still feel good about his work, still feel like he was making a positive difference in people's lives, unlike when he had been working for Hollywood.

But that got him to thinking...what if there were a race of sentient beings, made up of silicon instead of carbon? Would we have less empathy towards them, despite having all the same capacities of humans? And what if humans, in the future, replace their bodies with mechanical ones? Will we no longer object to their torture or dismantling, because their bodies no longer resemble ours? Will we treat the humans with mechanical bodies as glorified

toasters?

Well, whatever. He was overthinking this Descartes thing. If humans replace their bodies with mechanical ones, then we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Isidore didn't really relish the thought of replacing his body with a mechanical one anyways.

Trying to ward off the many encroaching thoughtstreams, he walked through the front door of Van Ness Pet Hospital, electric dog under his arm. He nodded to Mr. Sloat. The old man waved Isidore away with a hand. He was arguing with some customer on the vidphone, like he always was, so Isidore passed by him and walked downstairs into the shop. He set the dog down on a workbench. Milt Borogrove, a burly man wearing a tattered blue apron, stopped what he was doing to inspect the false animal.

After a minute, Milt grunted, "I think we're going to be able to salvage this one. It will cost the owner a pretty penny, though."

Milt, Mr. Sloat's shop technician since time immemorial, knew how to patch up just about any electric animal out there. If the dog had a chance, it was Milt who'd be able to save it.

Suddenly, Isidore noticed the image of Mr. Norman on the TV on the wall above Milt's workstation. He was at the Cyberfilm Awards Show, and a news reporter's avatar was interviewing him about the panopticon glitch incident that had happened moments ago. The screen cut to a close-up of Mr. Norman's avatar, which looked like Mr. Norman, only better than in real life. He turned and looked directly into the camera. "Whatever terrorist carried out this cyberattack on the panopticon system is going to pay! The panopticon is absolutely

vital to the protection of the proles. And this attack has weakened its security, threatening cyberproles—especially Non-Pale Vaginas—everywhere! By the way, those numbers were all fake! I deny all of the allegations! And the cyberterrorist also hacked my avatar and made it have that breakdown on stage. That wasn't me! It was totally fake! I fully support Non-Pale Vaginas, and I am fully committed to continuing to make quality cyberfilms and series and defeating Monopolism..."

Isidore smiled. Norman was on the defensive now. Norman had fallen for the bait, and stepped in the doggy-doo on his own accord, just as Isidore had expected he would. It wasn't hard to understand men like Norman. It was time they were manipulated, instead of doing all the manipulating themselves. Isidore was happy with his little computing experiment. Most of all, because Norman made special people suffer. And he enjoyed making people who made special people suffer suffer. Especially using their own systems against them.

The image on TV cut back to a newsroom, where a news anchor announced, "In other news, the string of animal murders continues. First a pig, and then a donkey, and then a sheep, and then a dog. And now, a cat. Some believe that the mafia may be behind the killings. We go now live to San Francisco Friendly Camp to hear from the area's biggest mob boss, Ercole Golino."

A female reporter appeared on the screen, addressing the mafia boss through plexi-glass. He said "Like I told the police, I ain't got nuttin' to do with it. Neither does the mob. They aren't mafia hits, lady."

Something occurred to Isidore. It didn't matter what the mafia boss claimed. Isidore didn't trust him.

Now Isidore had a lead on the animal murders. Now, he knew where to start.

Michael Norman sat at the head of the ridiculously long conference table at SocialEqualityFlix HQ in Burbank. Dozens of corporate officers, executive producers, producers, production assistants, secretaries, gophers, and all the other bootlicking peons with euphemistic titles cowered in their seats with trepidation.

"Who the fuck hacked me?" Norman screamed. "Can't any of you numbnuts tell me who hacked the Cyberfilm Awards Show?"

Silence.

"They shouldn't be able to do this to us," he continued. "Tom, who does our cyber-security?"

"Sir, I've spoken with them and they gave me a list of twenty possible areas the attacks might have come from. One of them is North Korea," Tom, a glorified gopher of the human variety in black-rimmed glasses, replied.

Norman rubbed his temples and let out a deep sigh. Then he looked up at the scared rabbits arranged around the table. "If you guys don't find out who hacked my god damn social media by the end of tomorrow, you're all fucking fired!"

"Yes, sir!" they all shouted in unison.

"That's better. You know what? Fuck it. We need to start injecting these people."

"You mean the new Down's syndrome writers? We already did."

"No, I'm not talking about the new writers, you nitwit! I'm talking about the god damn proles! Every last one of them!" He fingered the pin on his lapel. "If this is going to work, we need to have a firm grip on the technology. We need to be able to control the proles. If we can't, then they are our enemies."

"But sir—"

"We're the ones who control their entertainment."

The damn proles need their fucking entertainment. Well, then. Guess what? SocialEqualityFlix is going to announce that any prole that wants to watch any cyberfilm or series is going to be required to take the injection. And we're the only fucking source they have of cyberfilms and series! We've got them by the short hairs! They don't have a choice! They'll have to take the injection!"

"Wait...are you serious?" a red-haired man with a pony tail and blue suit in the back of the room said. "What about all the screenwriters that died from the injection?"

"You're fired!" Norman screamed, pointing at the man. And then, to the two security guards near the door, he said, "Escort this man immediately off the premises."

The security guards made a salute to Norman, "Yes, sir!" They dragged the red-haired, pony-tailed man away.

"Now, anyone else have any complaints?"

The mafia boss smirked behind the plexiglass. "Looks like I got a new boyfriend. Who the fuck are you?"

"My name's John Isidore. I drive a truck for Mr. Sloat's Van Ness Pet Hospital. I need to know who's behind these animal murders."

Ercole Golino, a tall man with slicked-back black hair, olive skin, and a large cleft in his chin, cocked his head back and laughed. "I don't got nothing to do with that, Johnny boy."

"Well then, who does?"

Golino rolled his eyes. "Even if I did know, I sure as fuck wouldn't tell you."

"Look..." Isidore took a glance around, and then, in a hushed tone, said, "I'm really interested in stopping these animal murders. And I may not look it, but I'm a man of much intellect, and how shall I say...skills. Cyberskills, let's call 'em. If you help me, I might be able to provide my talents and services in relation to, uh...let's say, updating some records. Get my drift?" Isidore raised his eyebrow suggestively.

Golino laughed. "And how the fuck do I know I can trust you? I don't know you from Adam, mister. How do I know you ain't some cop?"

"Just trust me. I ain't no cop."

"Look, Mister I Wanna Save the Animals, I didn't spend my life as a hardened criminal in and out of prison to not learn that you gotta pick and choose your friends very carefully. Now, if you'll excuse me, I gotta go eat some horrible Friendly Camp food." Golino stood up.

Isidore wanted to say something else. He knew if he could talk to the man long enough, he could figure out how he thought, what things would motivate him. He could use his vast intellect to devise a plan and make him an offer tailor-made just for him, that

he couldn't refuse. But he was gone. Mr. Golino had already walked away.

Isidore realized that he would have to take a different tack with Golino. His mind started to formulate a plan.

As Isidore sat by himself in a booth inside his favorite Italian restaurant in the Bay Area, he remembered back to his childhood, how spaghetti and meatballs had always given him gas, and how his mother had prohibited him from eating the succulent dish. Now, circumstances necessitated that he do the unexpected.

Just then, a waitress with a long, blonde pony tail, freckles, and hazel eyes walked up to his booth, holding a steaming pile of spaghetti and meatballs on top of a large plate. Isidore moved his laptop to make room, and the waitress set the plate down in front of him on the red and white checkered tablecloth.

He began happily slurping down the dish he relished so much, having been prohibited it in his childhood.

Suddenly, he noticed something on the TV above his booth. A male news reporter reading off a teleprompter was saying, "The monopolist Michael Norman has also announced that all cyberproles who want to access cyberfilms and cyberseries from the sole provider of said services, his company, SocialEqualityFlix, will be required to have a mandatory injection, or risk losing their services, effective immediately."

Mandatory injections to watch cyberfilms? What in the world? And what was Norman going to inject them with? Was it the same stuff they had used on the screenwriters? Was he going to murder all the cyberproles, just because he was upset about the recent little...incident? One thing was clear. Michael Norman had gone crazy. Things had gone too far. Somebody had to stop him.

Isidore thought about what he would do about Norman as he continued slurping down his noodles.

He was dealing with a madman. A megalomaniac. A dangerous one, at that. It had fallen to John R. Isidore and his exceptional intellectual powers to rescue not only the animals, but all of mankind. From being injected with god knows what, at the hands of this psychopath.

After he finished the spaghetti, he set the plate aside and turned his attention to his laptop. Isidore plugged his special datastick into the laptop, and rebooted, letting the datastick take control. He was now in stealth mode. His fingers typed furiously. On the screen there was only green text on a black background, but in his mind he visualized everything perfectly. It was as if the entire Net were a three-dimensional maze, and he was a rat hopped up on super-nootropics, its brain far outclassing any lab animal. He had discovered many things about the Net during his period of enhanced cerebral powers, experimenting, testing, theorizing, teaching himself. One of those discoveries, as he had pored over node after node, was that military networks weren't that difficult to penetrate. At least not for someone of his superb intelligence.

But he also realized that all this cranial activity was taking its toll. He had already worked out the end result, already done the calculations. His mind couldn't take much more of this. He couldn't stop thinking, calculating, analyzing. He realized the truth. His mind was working itself to death. His symptoms were different from his former colleagues, yes. But the end result would be the same. Where their minds had gotten slower and slower until they had eventually stopped, frozen in place, his mind was continually speeding up in an ever faster spiral. Eventually, the merry-go-round would spiral out of control, the pieces no longer able to stay together.

Isidore sat there in front of his laptop, typing frantically. And then, suddenly, with a flash of light, there he was.

Mercer. Mercer the Martyr.

Standing in front of him, in front of the booth, with his long white robe, with a big, loving grin, like Jesus. It was happening all over again, just like on the stairs.

“Mercer!” He breathed, astonished.

“My child, the one who brought you here is searching for you.”

“The one who brought me here?”

“Yes, the Thinker. The Thinking One. He who cogitates and perceives all of the orthogonal perplexities. He who is connected to all time and space.”

“The Thinker! But—” But the Thinker was dead! Did this mean that somewhere, in one of the layers, the Thinker was alive, and that Mercer could somehow connect Isidore with him? Did Mercer have the power to do that? Was he finally going to be able to talk with the Thinker, like Buster Smiley had told him to do? And would the Thinker be able to introduce him to the Programmer? Would he at last ascend to the top level of reality and find the answer to all his questions that had been racking his brain all these years? Would he uncover the mysteries that have stumped billions of people since time immemorial?

“My child, you must seek out the one called Runciter. He can help you connect with the Thinker. Glen Runciter. At a place called The Habitat. It’s a nightclub. Don’t get any funny ideas while you are there. There are a lot of sluts at that unholy place. Stay focused. Hold strong to the path. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do. If you feel tempted, simply

ask yourself, 'What would Mercer do?' WWMD. It's a pretty catchy phrase, if I do say so myself. Not to be confused with WMDs, of course."

"Wait! Are you Jesus?" Maybe Mercer was just his name in this incarnation. Maybe...

"I am Mercer. I am he who is persecuted from all eternity to all eternity. That..." His robe began to shimmer, and then he began to fade away, until he was gone, leaving only the sound of his voice. "...is all."

Maybe Mercer was the Programmer! Maybe it was him all along. But no...he couldn't be. Could he? But he couldn't be sure. Now he knew he had to find and connect with the Thinker.

Suddenly, Mercer popped back into existence. "Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you that The Habitat is goat-level access. So grab an animal, the same price as a goat or higher, before you go there. Peace out." Mercer then flashed a quick peace sign, and popped back out of existence, just as quickly as he had popped in.

What in the world? Was he dreaming? Then a thought came to him. He realized how tired he was. He hadn't gotten a full night's sleep since he had gotten back, and his computing and analyzing and planning was draining him. Could it be that Mercer... was just an illusion? Perhaps he had dreamt him up. The mind does strange things when one has gone past the brink of exhaustion.

But exhausted as he was, he couldn't stop now. He had to find the killer, and rescue the poor animals from a savage death of crashing into the sidewalk at maximum velocity. Poor little things. Poor little flattened things. Whoever was doing this was going to pay.

Besides, the spaghetti was already going to work

on him. So whatever he did, soon he would be an extremist. He could already feel the pressure building up inside.

He was going to get the information he needed to stop the killer. The next step in his perfect plan was about to come to fruition.

He was going to fart his way into jail.

CHAPTER 10

QUIBBICK #5: Censorship

A LONG LOST VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH THE NOVELÍST

The following transcription of a long lost video interview with the novelist was discovered several decades after its recording under a pile of rubbish. The video itself, we regret to inform the public, is no longer extant.

A young, beautiful woman with dark hair ("the interviewer") asks, "So, how long have you been here in France?"

"I just arrived in Paris yesterday," the novelist replies.

"Oh, well then... Bienvenue à la France! Welcome to France! I hope you enjoy your stay!"

"Thank you, I intend to enjoy it thoroughly."

"You are such a highly revered novelist here in France! (TRANSCRIPTION NOTE: accent marks indicate the syllable where the interviewer puts the stress, usually the last syllable of the word. The interviewer is speaking English, which is not her native language.) I am honóred to have this intervieú," the interviewer says with a giggle and a smile. "So tell me, what is the main différence between your audiéce in France, and your audiéce in the United States?"

"Well, there are a lot of differences. First of all, my French readers are usually more well-read, and used to dealing with more mature subject matter. For example, in the U.S., there's a lot of censorship. So I feel like my hands are tied in a lot of ways as to what kind of material I can put in my novels."

"Oh...oui, oui. Our readers of science fikshón are usually much more matúre and have been exposed

to all sorts of content. What type of things do you feel restricted with in the U.S.?"

"Well, for example, when dealing with sex and violence. I have to really tone it down because in the U.S. they assume all the readers of science fiction are very young. Sci-fi still isn't seen as something that's suitable for adults to read. Plus, it's still quite a prudish country, especially in dealing with matters of sex. The complete opposite of France."

"Oh, yes, I agree completely. We are much better able to um...handle that subject. Here in France, we are totally okay with sex, nudity, and all things sensual. You could even say we are the masters of carnality. Just to give you a taste of our sensuality..." The interviewer starts unbuttoning her blouse, then takes it off and throws it somewhere behind the camera. Then she undoes her bra, takes it off, and throws it behind the camera. Her bare, beautiful breasts are now exposed. "We are totally fine with showing off our beautiful bodies. Here in France, we know there is nothing wrong at all with the form féminin. It is...how you say, beautiful, no?"

The novelist replies, staring at the interviewer's luscious, shapely tits au naturel...her bare, silky smooth skin. "Yes, very beautiful. I have no problems with the feminine form whatsoever. I agree with everything you just said."

"Now that we can see we are in *accord total*, were there any examples from some of your works where you weren't able to...ahem, *insert* everything you wanted to?"

"Well, a copy of this interview is probably going to end up back in the U.S. at one point or another, so... I'm not sure I can go into great detail while we're recording. It might throw off some of the potential publishers I work with. I'll just say, completely off the

record, that in one of my earlier novels, I wanted to do a scene where..." The novelist leans in and whispers something inaudible into the interviewer's ear.

The interviewer begins to laugh. "Ooh là là! Wow! Very impressív. Your imaginashón is so powerful, so grand, so...potént!"

"And in another novel, I wanted to have a scene where... (INAUDIBLE)" He whispers to the interviewer again.

The interviewer giggles some more. "You have quite the way with words! And the visuáls, most impressív, indeed! Very spicy!"

"Oh, and one more..." He whispers something else.

"Oh, mon Dieu! It's getting hot in here! Do you feel that? Maybe we should stop the recording for a momént, we wouldn't want the tape to overhéat and how you say...melt up in all this scorching hotnéss!"

TRANSCRIPTION NOTE: AT THIS POINT THE VIDEO RECORDING STOPS ABRUPTLY, THEN STARTS UP AGAIN. APPARENTLY SOME TIME HAS LAPSED

The interviewer now, once again fully dressed, straightens her clothing and adjusts her hair, which is now in disarray. "Oh, wow...whew! I'm glad we turned off the recording in time to save the tape. That was quite hót!"

"Yeah, that was a close one. I didn't know it could get so hot here in France," the novelist says as he, too, straightens his clothes.

"I think you brought a héat wave here with you from Californiá! Now...where were we?"

Joe sat on the couch. His head hurt.

What? He was back in his cubicle. This didn't make any sense. Wasn't he halfway across the world on his way to Switzerland? But what the hell had happened on the plane? Runciter, with those eyes and hand. And all that garbage...

Well, at least he was still alive. Apparently that spray can... Ubik, was it called? It had worked. It had saved him from drowning in a sea of junk.

Buster Smiley was on the TV. "All of Hollywood is one big hoax. Run by an alien presence..." Was he still going on about that same wacky thing as before? The horrible garbage nightmare still on his mind, Joe looked down at the couch, thinking he might see a cheesepuff whiz by. But there was none. Whew. That was a relief.

The phone rang. He picked it up. It was Bryant.

"Hey, the situation has gotten worse. I've just received word that the Andys are closing in on your location. If you don't take care of them..." He was rambling on about the same stuff as before.

What the fuck? Was he stuck in a loop? Was he still in the dream? Or back in reality? Had the spray worked? He went to the kitchen to make a coffee. Maybe he had fallen asleep earlier and all of that was a dream. He felt groggy. If the Andys are going to kill me, can they do it after I have some coffee? Fuck! The coffee machine had a coin-slot and a sign reading "10¢." He felt in his pockets. No change. Forget it. What the fuck kind of reality is this where I need to pay to use my own god damn kitchen appliances? He punched the wall. Oww! Fuck! That was stupid! He forgot that they built these cybercubicles out of reinforced concrete. He felt like he had broken his hand. God damn it. At least he hadn't slammed his head into the wall like last time.

Well, now he didn't need any coffee. He had natural adrenaline flowing through his veins.

He sat on the couch and tried to calm down. So it's back to square one, he thought. Looks like the Andys were after him again. This is crazy, he thought. And then a sudden realization hit him. If I'm stuck back in this point of time...then, that means I'll have an easier go at things this time around. Because I already know what to do!

Resolute, he dialed 762 on the mood organ for optimistic and joyful innovation (he had finally figured out how to use the thing). Then, feeling great, he took the laser gun (just in case) and Penfield wave transmitter and this time went straight to the goat lady's roof and waited for her. He didn't bother retiring the Andys this time. As he sat waiting, he realized, so this means I'm not a murderer! I didn't kill any humans named Andy or any other name. I didn't cut off anybody's heads. That was just a dream...a nightmare. Not reality. Dreams don't count. He felt a wave of relief.

But then he thought, does murder count if its in a dream? If you dream about murdering someone does that mean you're a psycho? He hoped not. He tried to remember what his psychology textbooks had said about that, but couldn't. Anyways, it didn't matter now. It seemed he was learning more about himself from this whole escapade than he had ever learned from any of those textbooks.

The lady with the goat appeared on the roof. I'll just borrow this, he thought, as he knocked her out again with the Penfield device and took the goat, ditching the weapons as before.

Piece of cake. I kind of like knowing what will happen in the future, he realized. This was so easy coming to this place, knowing this woman would

come here at this time, knowing in advance what I should do. This means I can get creative with my approach. In fact, when I go back to the club, I'll not only be able to read minds, I'll be able to predict the future. And with those two powers, I should be able to do just about anything.

He went back to The Habitat, and using his twin powers of telepathy and foresight, was easily able to get Bonny and Scotty, who had hated each other before, to have a threesome with him in the VIP restroom. First he had them both suck him off, Bonny working the shaft and Scotty the balls. Then he spooged in each of them, Bonny and Scotty passionately making out with each other and with him all the while. Then, just getting warmed up, he went out to the dance floor and found Rachael, had her call up her sister, and went back to his place and boinked them both together, spooging twenty times in Pris and twenty times in Rachael, give or take. Each of them were softly moaning and begging for the D the whole time, as if they couldn't live without his dick inside their wet vaginas. He had them pass a prodigious amount of his cum back and forth between their mouths. Hell, if this is a dream, I'm going to take full advantage. Next time I'll take ten chicks back from the club. Four spooges apiece. Don't be greedy, girls.

He realized that he liked it just as much, perhaps even better, with Rachael and Pris, compared to Bonny and Scotty. Does that mean I'm attracted to androids? Is that even a thing? And is android attraction a sign of mental illness? Am I fucked up in the head? I'm overthinking this, he thought. And fuck it. It's just a dream, apparently. I'll fuck whoever I want to fuck. And his Fapple watch was gone, anyways. Damn his Fapple watch to hell. Was he an

extremist now, boinking women and androids with no regard? An android-boinking extremist. Was he causing mudslides somewhere in Mexico, now? Fuck it all. He liked this dream better than reality. Except of course the psychotic episode parts. Those fucking sucked. But perhaps he could get used to them, just endure them until he could get to the good part. They weren't real, anyhow, he consoled himself.

This time around, as he approached an autocab, its coin slot phased out and disappeared, and was replaced by a retina scanner. And then the retina scanner phased out and the coin slot was back. He seemed to be trapped between two worlds.

He went back to the club and found Runciter. Runciter's eyes and hand were back to normal, thank God! He told Runciter about the dream. Runciter replied "I know. Roni told me. That's why this time, I brought this." He produced an aerosol spray can with the words "Ubik Extra Strength Anti-Dream Spray" and sprayed it all over Joe.

"Wait, so this isn't a dream? I'm not just looping through the same thing all over again?"

"Nope. You're back in reality, Joe. And reality needs you. Humanity needs you."

Oh, shit. This wasn't a dream, then. I really do like androids, he thought.

"And some for me, just in case." Runciter sprayed the rest of the can on himself.

They were ready to save the world.

As Joe and Runciter sat on the Blowing 7700, Joe looked at a blonde flight attendant with an amazing ass walking down the aisle ahead of them, trying to read her thoughts. It was getting harder now. The thoughts around him came with less frequency, and were not as clear, as if there were static on the line. Besides, the blonde flight attendant's thoughts were in what sounded like French, not in English. So he couldn't understand them anyways. So apparently people do think in their own language, he realized. Thought is not in some universal language, as some people suppose. Therefore, language influences one's thinking. That meant people whose native languages are different think differently about certain things, because their vocabulary and idioms about those things are different. Hmmm, interesting.

These Swiss flight attendant uniforms are so much sexier than the ones back in America, Joe ruminated. He especially liked the way the skirt clung to the flight attendant's butt as she walked. Hope I get a chance to talk with her, he thought hopefully. Regardless of the fact that he couldn't understand her thoughts, like he could with the girls at the club, his recent escapades had emboldened him. And made him hornier. Was he a sex addict now? Well, he may not be able to read her thoughts, but it was still worth giving it a shot. He was thinking with his Philip K. now. He wished every day of his life now could be like the last several hours, banging chicks with no regard. Fuck. I am a sex addict, he thought.

The hot Swiss ass cheeks disappeared from view. Joe brooded. Why hadn't Runciter brought along the Ubik spray the first time? Why did I have to go through that nightmare? I guess that wasn't the real Runciter. That was the dream version of Runciter.

This is the real Runciter, now. But how could one tell where the dream began and where it ended?

Just then, Runciter gave Joe a nudge and said, "Check it out, just what the doctor ordered...nudge, nudge, wink, wink." He produced a carrying case containing several spray cans. He pulled one out. It read, "Ubik Good Dream Spray." Runciter held it out towards Joe. "Wanna try some?"

Joe was surprised. He didn't know there were so many types of Ubik spray. Not only to fight the bad dreams, but apparently to have good ones. "Hm...I'll think about it," he replied. He wasn't sure if he wanted to dream just now. He was still traumatized by the bad dream he had had on the last flight.

"Suit yourself. We've got a long flight ahead of us. I'm gonna take a nap. I'll set them down here in case you decide to try it out." Runciter set the case down on the floor between them. Then he sprayed himself with the good dream spray, and soon he was fast asleep, a huge grin on his face.

Joe looked down at the case full of spray cans, tempting him. He noticed that the floor of the airplane was spic and span this time, thank god. He imagined that he had gained a new phobia, and would spend the rest of his life as a clean freak, cleaning everything constantly, afraid to have any bits of any thing laying around anywhere, imagining they might start swirling around him and forming monsters.

Curious, he picked up the carrying case and peeked at the spray cans inside. To his surprise, there were several different types. Ubik Good Dream Spray, Ubik Win Friends and Influence People Spray, Ubik Get Rich Spray, Ubik Get An Ultra Ripped Six-Pack Spray, Ubik Grow Taller Spray, Ubik Get Shorter Spray, Ubik Pheromone Ultra Enhancer Spray...

Wow, so many options. Hmm...the spray cans were tempting. But he was here on this flight to get to Philip K. Dick and help save the world. Better stay focused on the mission. This is no time for fooling around, he thought.

He closed the carrying case and set it back down on the floor.

He took one more peek at the case on the floor.

Joe was on the dancefloor of The Habitat, dancing with Bonny, groping her huge tits. Different colored lights were flashing, revealing a multitude of hot chicks dancing all around them. Strangely, there were only hot chicks in the crowd. He was the only man there tonight. Apparently he had come on the right night. Suddenly, Scotty walked up and grabbed his package. Both Scotty and Bonny started fondling his dong over his pants, giggling. It started becoming erect. The two girls unzipped his pants for him and his half-erect schlong flopped out and continued to harden, as the two girls started playing with it in front of the multitude of hot chicks, who all began staring at it hungrily, licking and biting their lips hornily, getting turned on by it. Bonny and Scotty then got down on their knees. Soon Bonny was greedily gulping down his testicles and Scotty was going up and down, bobbing her beautiful blonde head lustfully on his shaft. They started moaning and touching themselves. The two girls began to undress each other, and to undress Joe. Soon all three of them were naked, and everybody on the dancefloor watched as the two girls sucked and sucked and sucked, their heads bouncing up and down, grabbing their own and each others tits and squeezing them, fondling them. Then Bobby and Scotty turned to face each other and each took one side of his schlong, sliding up and down, up and down, at the end kissing each other each time and then sliding back down. They pressed their breasts together and grabbed each other's ass as they continued working his stiff rod, hundreds of beautiful women watching, moaning, salivating, and touching themselves as they did. He put his hands on his waist, arched his back, and continued to enjoy all that blissful slurping and sucking of his genitals. Ahh...god, it felt so relaxing...it

felt so good.

Since there were so many girls staring and salivating, he motioned to some of the nearest ones to come and join the fun. Several of them did, falling to their knees, as if his dick were their god, eagerly sucking, licking, and slurping, like a fat kid at a buffet. Presently about five random chicks from the crowd were going to town on him, competing with each other for his stiff rod like a litter of kittens for their mother's milk. Meanwhile, Bonny and Scotty were suctioning his testicles with plenty of slurping noises and then letting them pop out of their mouths, only to stuff them right back in. Oh god, he was getting close to cumming...

Just then, Rachael came out from the moaning crowd to join them, knocking aside the five random chicks with one commanding shove. Rachael then also fell to her knees and started aggressively sliding up and down with her perfect mouth and lips on his rock-hard dong, while Bonny and Scotty continued vacuuming one ball up in each of their mouths, sucking like their lives depended on it, each of them servicing their naked wet pussies with their fingers. Suddenly, he could take no more, and he pulled his thing out and started jerking it. As the three girls put their beautiful faces together, Joe shot out a huge load, drenching their fresh, clean faces and breasts with buckets of cum. Then he turned to the five who had been brushed aside, jerked it again, and then they all got a fresh huge load of white, oozing stuff all over their flawless, perfect faces.

Bonny, Scotty, and Rachael proceeded to lick the cum off each others faces, and the five did the same, as Pris then appeared out of nowhere and joined the festivities, and started thirstily licking Joe's dick clean. The other girls then joined her, all nine of them

licking, sucking, moaning, and begging for more cum.

By now, the entire crowd of hot chicks had stripped down into total nudity, a sea of sweat-covered flesh, hot, horny, and moaning. They looked imploringly at Joe's pleasure staff, which was still fully erect after complete and total orgasm, as they all fingered their own aroused pussies, from which flowed many juices. Hearing the lovely music of hundreds of hot chicks moaning in unison for him and wanting to gulp down his privates made Joe even more excited. Seeing his impressive dick standing at full attention and imagining it inside each and every one of them kept them all at the height of pleasure, their chorus of sexual ecstasy rising up to the ceiling.

Then another girl who looked exactly identical to Rachael and Pris joined. The three identical sisters licked and sucked and slobbered, as Bonny and Scotty started going to town on each other in sixty-nine position right there on the dancefloor. Joe then blew another load, completely covering the three identical sisters' faces and naked torsos, who immediately started licking each other's bodies clean. He then hosed down Bonny and Scotty in their sixty-nine position on the floor.

Joe then noticed there was a large, spacious, king-sized bed right in the center of the dancefloor, all done up with red satin bedclothes, heart-shaped pillows, and a red translucent canopy suspended above, as if it had somehow been transported from a love hotel in Las Vegas especially for this occasion. The group all sauntered casually over to their prepared love nest together, and Bonny and Scotty, holding hands, gleefully flopped onto the bed with each other, and started making passionate love to each other. Joe walked up to the edge of the bed

near the two fucking females and started working his way with his stiff pole back and forth between their slippery, juicy holes, inserting it into one, slamming it vigorously and pleasurefully several times, and then the other, and then going back to the first for more. Back and forth, back and forth. Fucking one hole, then the other, one hole, then the other...

Then, Roni, the girl with the white hair that was with Runciter earlier, showed up and started licking and kissing Bonny and Scotty while servicing their pussies with her fingers.

After cumming several times inside the juicy pussies of Bonny, Scotty, and Roni, Joe lay down on the center of the large bed, as the triplet android sisters, the three girls, and the Asian girl and the Spanish girl all came to him, the Asian sitting on his face, and the Spanish girl mounting his cock. The girls took turns mounting his dick and bouncing up and down on it, each taking a huge cumshot inside their naked pussies. All of the girls were buck naked, nipples erect, and moaning. Meanwhile, a vast multitude of hot, sexy, nude girls of every ethnicity swarmed around the bed, trying to press closer, begging for Joe's cock. He was ready to fuck every single one of the girls in this crowd tonight, unload his raw semen into them. His dick had waited its whole life for this.

Then, suddenly, a lone female figure shoved through the mass of girlflesh and appeared at the foot of the bed. It was the Swiss flight attendant, in full flight attendant uniform, hat and all. She saluted Joe's cock, and then turned around and stuck out her ass, showing its absolutely perfect outline under the clinging flight attendant skirt. Her long, wavy blonde hair shimmering all the way to her ass, she then

dropped her skirt, showing off her sexy ass cheeks straddling sexy black panties. She continued to undress, taking off her sexy flight attendant uniform one piece at a time. The uniform now on the floor, she twirled and showed off her sexy, lacy black lingerie, garter, stockings, and all.

“Can I join?” She said in her sexy Swiss accent.

Joe motioned for her to come over to his cock, which was ready for her, pointing towards the ceiling.

Then she climbed onto the spacious bed and got on all fours. Like a panther, she stocked Joe’s cock. As all the other girls continued sucking and licking each other’s nipples and pussies and fucking each other with their fingers and squishing their watering pussies together in a big, hot, sticky mess, the Swiss girl mounted Joe’s cock, pulling her panties to the side, and like a wild cowgirl started jumping up and down like she was on a bucking bronco, slamming her hot, wet pussy on Joe’s upright, solid cock that was like a pillar of an ancient Roman temple. She moaned and moaned, plopping her ample tits out of her bra and letting them flop up and down, her aroused nipples pointing up towards the ceiling, as she bounced on Joe’s pole—up and down, up and down, up and down—until finally, she could take it no longer, and she let out a loud, ecstatic moan as she exploded into the most powerful squirting orgasm she ever had in her life, as Joe’s dick blew a huge load up into her naked waterfall of a pussy.

Seeing this, the hundreds of girls in the crowd couldn’t take it any longer and the throng of wet, soaking, sweaty, moaning, hot women pressed onto the bed from all sides and enveloped Joe. They all joined the fun.

Joe’s balls and cock were fully semenated, full of

gallons and gallons of unending cum, as they had been before, when he took those testicle-shaped pills. He needed to explode into every pussy around. His dick was ready to endlessly shoot its load, an eternal fountain of cum streaming up to the sky.

Girl after girl after girl hopped onto his dick fountain and rode it with all their might. He was a bucking bronco machine, and tonight, every cowgirl in the saloon would get a turn. Feeling better than he ever had in his life, he had orgasm after orgasm after orgasm.

After orgasm.

After orgasm.

After orgasm.

“More, more...” Joe murmured, eyes closed, as he sat drooling next to Runciter on the plane.

“Joe...Joe...wake up!” Runciter urged as he shook Joe’s shoulder.

“Oh!” Joe suddenly started, and accidentally hit the fold-out tray in front of him. The half-full cup of orange juice on the edge of the tray turned over onto his lap, and juice poured out onto his boner, which was sticking out prominently through his pants. Looking down at the spilled orange juice, he noticed that there was also drool all over his shirt.

“You were making too much noise, and the people around us were beginning to notice, so I decided to wake you up.”

Shit! He had decided to try just a little tiny bit of that Ubik Good Dream Spray. He had no idea it worked so well! And so fast-acting! This was embarrassing as hell. Shouldn’t have tried that spray, he thought. Should have stayed focused on the mission.

An old lady in the seat in front of them was looking back through the space in between the seats at Joe’s boner.

The Swiss flight attendant, who was walking through the aisle several rows in front of them, had noticed when Joe noisily hit the fold-out tray. She was now walking towards them, apparently to check if they needed any help.

Fuck! I can’t believe this is happening! Now she’s going to see my boner! And all this drool all over myself! And the mess I made on my pants with the orange juice! How much more embarrassing of a situation could he be in? The flight attendant was getting closer, her hot face and dazzling blue eyes staring at Joe with a concerned look, as Joe tried to slink down, to get lower, hide behind the seats...

maybe she won't notice me...

Wait a minute! He thought. Now might be the perfect time to try that other Ubik...

Quickly, deftly, he grabbed the carrying case on the floor and rummaged through the cans. Ah! Here it is! Ubik Pheromone Ultra Enhancer Spray. Below the name of the spray, there was a burst-out bubble with the words "Super Fast Acting!" He hurried and sprayed it generously all over his dick. Then he quickly put it back in the case.

Just in the nick of time.

The Swiss flight attendant had reached them. "Can I help you with anything, sir?" she asked. She looked down at Joe's shirt, noticing the drool, a look of concern on her face. Then she looked down at his pants, and her eyes popped out. She saw the huge, stiff thing bulging out of his pants, covered in orange juice. "Oh my god," she put her hand to her chest. Then for a time, she just stood there, staring at Joe's manhood.

What was she going to do? Joe was almost dying of embarrassment, but hoped, prayed, that this Ubik would work as well as the last Ubik he had tried.

Suddenly, her face became resolute. "I should help you with that, sir."

She walked over to a nearby tray cart and located a napkin. Then, she walked back over to their row, and bent over and started rubbing the napkin on Joe's crotch, on his boner, where the orange juice had spilled.

"Mmmm..." she said, staring at his boner, licking her lips longingly as she rubbed the napkin up and down his rod.

Everyone around was watching.

Umm...this is a little bit awkward, he thought. But that feels good the way she is rubbing down there...

Soon, she had become completely enamored with his boner. She tossed the napkin aside and started petting it lovingly, cupping his balls with one hand and stroking his cock with the other, as if it were a bird. "That's a pretty boner! Pretty boner, pretty boner..." She kept going on, fussing, petting, as if she had a beautiful bird in front of her and she were admiring it.

What the fuck is going on here? He thought. This seemed way too surreal to be real life, and yet no one had the hands or the eyes, like before. And Runciter had woken him up, so this must be real. This chick was really petting his boner in front of everyone on the airplane.

"Pretty boner, pretty boner," she went on, as Joe noticed that all the females around them were also staring at his boner. The old lady in the seat in front of them was staring at it unabashed, a huge smile on her face. A woman across the aisle was getting hot and bothered, her hand up her skirt working its way up and down quite busily as she moaned. A mother was covering her child's eyes, while she herself was licking her lips and staring at the boner. All the ones that spoke English were thinking dirty, fragmented thoughts about Joe's dick. And the ones that were thinking in French...Joe could assume from their tone of thought they were thinking something similar. Dirty thoughts sounded pretty much the same in all languages, Joe realized.

"Pretty boner, pretty boner..." she kept on. All eyes kept watching.

All at once, the Swiss flight attendant seemed to take notice that all the other women were watching the spectacle. She addressed Joe. "Sir, if you just come along with me to the lavatory, I can help you clean it all up better. You don't want to leave that

orange juice in...orange juice can stain. Please allow me to help you. The situation is dire.” Now she grabbed and squeezed his balls with one hand, as she closed the fingers of her other hand around his boner, squeezing it lovingly, running her fingers up and down his stiff cock, jacking him off ever so slowly, ever so passionately, the feeling of her fingers setting his dick on fire, edging him closer and closer to the point of orgasm, staring now with those beautiful blue eyes directly into his, a look of extreme, urgent horniness on her face, imploring him, begging him for something. Oh god, those soft, delicate fingers felt so good, working their way up and down his erect penis. He was about to spooge.

Runciter interjected, “Even I’m starting to think you smell good, Joe. You better hurry up and go with her and let her take care of that for you.”

“Wow,” Joe said to Runciter with a smile. “These Swiss flight attendants are much more friendly and helpful than the ones in America.”

As he stood up and followed the flight attendant to the lavatory, her hand firmly latched onto his boner the whole way, all the women’s eyes followed the spectacle, full of disappointment that they weren’t the one helping him.

“We’ll be landing in Zurich in fifteen minutes,” the captain’s voice came over the intercom. “Please make sure your seat belts are fastened, and your trays are in their upright position.” Finally! Joe thought. We made it! Soon they would be in the presence of Philip K. Dick himself.

Runciter sat contemplating in the seat beside him. I can’t wait...Ella...What...think...all this time... His garbled thoughts came in as fragments, now.

Joe was now a member of the mile-high club—

the Swiss mile-high club at that. It had been even better than in the dream. His cock had never been so hard in his entire life, and he had slammed it all the way up, so deep inside her, with such pleasure, squeezing that perfect Swiss ass the whole time. He had never seen such perfectly round, perfectly formed ass cheeks. She had erupted in an almost unbelievable squirting orgasm, her juices flowing all over him, her body thrown uncontrollably into a twitching mass of jelly, as they tried unsuccessfully not to make any noise, all the passengers nearby hearing their lovemaking.

He pondered as the plane made preparations for landing. Why was he so infatuated with sex? His purpose here was to save the world, but it seemed like he couldn't stop thinking about, and engaging in, sex. Why was he so easily distracted? But was that necessarily a bad thing? What was so bad about sex, anyways? It felt good. He felt much better now, in fact better than he ever had in his whole life. Why did the monopolists put so many limits on the proles, especially related to sex? Sexual intercourse limits, dating limits, masturbation limits, even staring limits! It's like you were a criminal for wanting to do something that is natural to the human species. Not to mention girls were always seeing through the panopticon how many times you farted or did anything at all. It made it more difficult to interact with them. What was the purpose of it all? Why this big problem with people having sex? Or rather, with the *proles* having sex? The monopolists didn't have any restrictions. Why in the world would they care about the proles having sex? Was it that they thought there were too many people on the planet, so they wanted the proles to stop having kids? It made sense. If it was more difficult to have sex, or

even to meet girls for fear of being penalized for staring, then it was more difficult to have kids. Then there was the fact that he could only rarely even go outside and interact with girls...they really didn't want him getting his groove on. Was that the purpose of civilization, to beat down and stuff the individual into a corner, take his ability to do what he wanted away?

But the monopolists never seemed to worry about having too much sex or having too many kids themselves. If the monopolists really thought there were too many people on the planet, they would lead the way and stop having kids. Or better yet, they would end their own lives. Was that not the logical thing to do, if they really and truly thought there were too many humans on the planet? Then wouldn't the ethical thing to do be to end one's own life? Then why didn't any monopolists do the ethical thing? Weren't they supposed to be role models, examples? Were they really saving the world? Put your money where your mouth is, you damn hypocrites, he thought. He decided that sex was good. And he was going to have all of it he could, let the monopolists and their panopticon be damned.

He felt like a different man. He was no longer that guy staring at girls in the club and getting thrown out. Now he was fighting back against the overreaching, invasive system the cyberproles lived under. Instead of being depressed at how restrictive the control grid was, now he was doing something about it. He was doing his own thing. He was a rebel now, something he never imagined himself being. Not a rebel in his words, but a rebel in his deeds. He no longer felt afraid of the system.

The system called him evil, blamed him for slavery hundreds of years ago because of his race. The only

racist thing he saw here was the system itself. And the only people he saw enslaving anybody were the monopolists, who could do whatever they wanted while the cyberproles sat obediently like dumb sheep in their cubicles. If you want to defeat slavery, monopolists, then destroy the panopticon, and let the cyberproles go! Why talk about ancient slavery when the whole world was enslaved, people of all colors, genders, and persuasions? All slaves to a technological global prison, the panopticon. They didn't build it to save us, they built it to enslave us. People weren't meant to be tracked, monitored, controlled. We're not livestock. Leave us alone. Let us live our own lives. The only thing that's evil here is the system itself. Why had he believed in it for so many years? Perhaps it was fear. The monopolists had so much power. But he no longer feared them, and he no longer feared the panopticon. After that nightmare he had gone through, the monopolists and the panopticon seemed like a walk in the park.

And thanks to Runciter and his Ubik, he had escaped all that, and soon they would reach their destination unscathed. And finally they would be able to do what Buster Smiley had call upon them to do...make it to Philip K. Dick, so he could save humanity.

Ah...Ubik. That amazing little spray can. His second flight had been *so much* better than his first one, all thanks to that glorious product, Ubik, in all its wonderful iterations.

Then, suddenly, he had an epiphany. What is Ubik? Is it something external? Or is it something that comes from within? When the junk was piling up around him...Runciter hadn't helped him. That was the dream version of Runciter, the evil one. He had been antagonizing him. So where did that can of

Ubik come from, if not from Runciter? Maybe, just maybe, he had created it with his own mind! When life piles its junk up all around you, threatening to swallow you whole, the answer is in your own mind. It must be! What had been the purpose of him studying all those psychology books if not to realize that? You are the one who creates Ubik!

What an amazing thought. What if you could use your own mind to create the solutions to your own problems, to make your own dreams come true?

He thought about his new epiphany with a smile.

Make your own dreams come true.

Make your own Ubik.

At that moment, encouraged by his recent successes with women, Joe felt all powerful. Like he could do anything. Like he could take on the whole panopticon himself. But first, let's start with something simple. Okay, he thought. I can do this. He stared at a point in front of him. He concentrated. And concentrated. And concentrated.

And concentrated...

And...

Nothing.

Damn it!

He was about to try again, but just then he noticed a few passengers had begun staring at him. Apparently he had a strange look on his face, concentrating as he was. He began to feel self-conscious. He was beginning to make a scene for the second time. He decided it would be better to give up on the silly experiment.

A moment ago, he had felt on top of the world, but now he felt sheepish. He was getting carried away. He was letting all of this get to his head. One needs to be fearless, but one also needs to know one's own limits. Psychology doesn't simply work the

way we want it to. There are limitations.

It was those grandiose illusions of self importance again, he thought, as he looked out the window and saw the Zurich Airport coming into view. Even more important than optimism was realism. Anyways, this was all academic. Humanity needed Philip K. Dick. And soon, he would be at the author's resting place. The Beloved Brethren Moratorium.

CHAPTER 11

QUIBBICK #6: People Factory

The novelist awoke to find himself lying, strapped down to a conveyor belt. He seemed to be in some sort of factory. The conveyor belt stretched far behind him and in front of him, and on it lay many more people, men and women, each spaced a few yards from each other. All the other people on the conveyor belt lay there with their eyes closed. They seemed to be asleep. And far in front, a giant machine was doing something to the humans, one by one, as they reached it. But he couldn't quite make out what it was doing from this distance.

"What the hell kind of fucked-up dream is this?" he wondered to himself out loud.

"Why, it's not a dream. It's a memory. A memory of the future, of course!" a voice nearby replied.

The novelist looked up to see, towering above him, the man with the grey suit, smoking his Cuban cigar and smiling. The man continued, "Remember, you told me you have such a good memory of the future!" His tone was biting.

The conveyor belt inched closer and closer to the machine. The novelist said, "This isn't the future, you deluded psychopath. You've simply created a false reality."

The man with the cigar simply laughed. "A false reality, is that what you think this is?" The man asked. "But the very term 'false reality' is an oxymoron. And you yourself said that everything anyone ever thought is true."

He seemed to be enjoying this. The sick bastard. As the novelist inched closer and closer to the machine, he started to be able to make out what the giant machine was doing. First, using an automated precision saw, it cut off part of the forehead of the

sleeping human and removed it, opening up a hole in the top of their head. It then, with a mechanical arm, proceeded to remove the person's brain, which it unceremoniously plopped down on top of a huge pile of human brains bulging up from a large, open container. On the side of the container, in bold type, was the word "OLD." Then, with another mechanical arm, it scooped up a handful of electrical components from another large container with the word "NEW" written on it. It then inserted the components, along with a bunch of wires, circuitboards, and nuts and bolts, stuffing them all down into the human's head, until it was full. Then, the first mechanical arm plunked the person's forehead back down on top of the hole, and drilled some screws into it, sealing it back up.

"You're right," the novelist conceded. "This is one possible reality. But I reject this reality for myself." This is insane. It's going to turn me into a robot. I've got to get out of here, he thought. He struggled to get out, but found that his hands and feet were held fast by steel manacles attached to the surface of the conveyor belt. "You're taunting me. Because I told you about my speech 'The Android and the Human.'"

"Yes, you're right. But you didn't realize something. What you are remembering now is far into the future. The system has been perfected, cleansed, purified. When you gave that speech in the 1970s, it made sense to be against the system. At that time, the system was still bad. It was for war, for racism, it didn't care about the environment. But the system of the future...it cares about you. In the future, the system loves you. It's there for you. It's not the soulless, capitalistic, warmongering system of the past. It's had a complete overhaul. And not just a P.R. overhaul, a real, honest-to-goodness

overhaul. Trust me. It's a hippie system now. It's a system of kindness, caring, and inclusion. Of peace and prosperity. A utopia. The system of the future is here to save the world. Why rebel against that?"

The novelist now noticed that the machine that was replacing people's brains with electrical components had a giant, purple peace sign, and a bunch of pink hearts and rainbows all over it. And above all those hearts were written the words, "The Machine of Love."

"They said all that same stuff about Vietnam. And Korea. They said they were there to spread democracy. They said they were saving the world from the bad guys. 'We have to save the village by destroying the village.' Remember that? And what about My Lai? Slaughtering all those innocent little children! What the fuck was that all about? Love, flowers, and inclusion?"

"My, my, such a distrust in authority. But this is the future! Authority is good in the future. Authority loves you. Authority is here to help you. You're such a geezer. You're still acting like it's the 60s and 70s. The young people these days, they know the machine is loving. They believe in the machine. You know, you were wrong about the future. That's what all your novels were about. Projecting your own paranoid fantasies onto your vision of the future. You were wrong, all wrong. The future is utopian, and the government and the corporations are here to usher in the utopia. Believe in them, trust in them. The future is not like a Philip K. Dick novel."

The machine ahead of him continued, hard at work, scooping out brains and replacing them with electronics. He saw a man who had just had the operation completed. A mechanical arm undrilled the manacles and released him. He stood up. His

eyes were open now. He was smiling, and his face was glowing. He noticed now that the man's clothes were hippy clothes. He wore a tie-dye shirt, headband, and bell bottom jeans. The man went and joined the other people who had already had the operation. They were smiling, too. They looked happy. They, too, were all wearing hippy clothes, with tie-dye colors, flowers, hearts, and rainbows. They were all hippies. Hippy robots. Happy, hippy robots.

As the novelist edged even closer to the machine, he said, "Okay, okay. I'm glad the system has changed its mind in the future and now it's about love and peace and inclusion and all that. So that means humanity has won. Everything's perfect. We live in a utopia, like you said. So that means I don't need to be here, right? Now can you please let me off this freaking conveyor belt?!"

"Why of course, I'd be happy to let you go. Just as soon as the system installs the necessary upgrades in you."

"But why? There's nothing wrong with me. What the hell would I need upgrades for?"

"This machine installs the new program of the future. It's a new technology, a software upgrade that cures all the ills of society. Humanity 2.0. Hatred, bigotry, prejudice, all will disappear as soon as you have the upgrade. It accomplishes this miracle by constantly monitoring everything you say, think, and do. It makes sure that people never again will be able to commit such atrocities as hate speech and extreme views. Extreme views such as not holding all the same views as the majority, and as the government and the corporations. The humans of the future will all think alike. You see, humans are the problem. Humans are dangerous. The system is safe.

Trust in the system.”

“But why do I need all that god damn electrical equipment? And why do I need to be monitored?”

“In order to solve all of humanity’s age-old problems, all humans must be tracked, traced, surveilled, and controlled. That’s what those electrical components are for. They will track your every doing, trace you all over the map, surveil your every word, and control your every action. That way, you can’t do anything bad! The Humanity 2.0 chip will make sure humans only do and say what humans should be doing and saying. How can that be bad? Think of the system’s surveillance as the loving, watchful eye of a parent. Don’t you trust in your parents?”

“That machine isn’t my parent! For crying out loud, get me off of here!”

“Look, you really need to let go of your animosity and hate. Love the system. Trust the system. You are the one whose character is in question, not the system’s. You are the threat to society, not the machine. Not the system.”

“But isn’t tracking and tracing and surveilling bad? How am I supposed to believe your system is good when it’s doing bad things?”

“Oh my god, you’re so old-fashioned. Haven’t we broken you in yet? Haven’t you learned to ignore the surveillance, to get used to it, to love it? You’re stuck in the 70s, when people still thought surveillance was a bad thing. Before people realized that speech and thought control are good. Welcome to the future, man! Wake up! People in the future are okay with our loving Big Brother watching and controlling every thought and word.”

“Mass surveillance is totalitarian. It’s always wrong.”

“Not if it’s in the hands of a good, loving system.”

Suddenly, the new humans, with the new software, Humanity 2.0, noticed the novelist struggling to get off the conveyor belt, and all turned to look at him at once. And then, all in unison, they started marching towards him, chanting “The system is good! You are bad! The system is good! You are bad! You are old-fashioned! You need to be upgraded!”

The novelist panicked and tried even harder to struggle free, but after exhausting himself, the manacles not budging an inch, realized it was useless.

The smiling upgraded humans closed in on the novelist. Their eyes shone with a crazed light. They held his arms and legs, as if they thought that somehow he could escape the cold grip of the steel manacles. As they pinned him down, walking along with the conveyor belt to feed him into the machine, they continued to chant, “The system is good! You are bad! The system is good! You are bad!”

“I don’t see how I’m the bad one just for not wanting to be tracked, traced, surveilled, and controlled.”

“Oh, you will see. Very soon. After the upgrade is installed, you will see everything perfectly.” The man with the cigar laughed.

The machine inched ever closer.

The cross-eyed man addressed the room with all seriousness. “L- Listen up! Th- this here is our new Friendly Camp roommate, John Isidore. Isidore is a Fla-, fla-, Flatulent Extremist.” This was Max, the warden of San Francisco Friendly Camp. Isidore wondered how someone like this man, obviously a special, and of even more substandard intellect than Isidore had been previously, was able to manage an entire Friendly Camp. Nevertheless, that was irrelevant, for he was in Friendly Camp on a mission. He needed to stay focused on the task at hand.

The cross-eyed warden walked Isidore into the center of the mess hall. Isidore wore the Friendly Camp uniform: sky blue pajamas with a patch over the breast pocket. On the patch was the Friendly Camp logo: a yellow smiley face behind bars. His wrists were red and sore from where the robo-enforcers, who had shown up at the Italian restaurant immediately after his twelfth prolonged fart, had clamped down the too small handcuffs and manhandled him into their patrol car. The panopticon had continued to broadcast his unrelenting onslaught of gastrointestinal problems to the whole world via his social media account the whole way to Friendly Camp. I’m sure Norman must be experiencing some degree of schadenfreude right now, he thought. But not for long. The next stage of his plan was coming soon. Isidore smiled at the thought.

All eyes in the crowded mess hall were on their new friendmate, Isidore. He let out some gas. He tried not to make it too noisy.

The Friendly Campers, most of whom had the look of hardened criminals in their light blue pajamas, all took a step back, away from the new Friendly Camper, not wanting to be too friendly with him.

One of them, a tough-looking Latino with prison tattoos whined, “Ah, come on, Max! Why you gotta bring a flatulent extremist to our prison, ese? Don’t they got space over there in Alcatraz?”

The warden, a confused look on his face, pondered the question. “I... I didn’t think of that. I- I’ll... check with them. If they got any s-space, I’ll let you know.” The room broke out in laughter. It was obvious the friendmates were having a laugh at Max’s expense. Poor guy. He reminded Isidore of his former self, only dumber.

“Yo, Max,” another friendmate piped up. “You ain’t lettin’ that flatulent mother fucker in my cell!”

Isidore let out another long chain of gaseous eruptions. Those meatballs were wrecking havoc on his insides.

“Ahh shit!!” A stray Friendly Camper who was caught in the blast ran to the other side of the mess hall.

“W- we...,” Max began. “We don’t got enough room for I- Isidore to have his own F- Friendly Room. So he gotta share a r- roo... a roo...a cell with somebody.”

A clear voice rang out from the back of the crowd. “I don’t mind if he shares my Friendly Room.”

Everyone looked shocked. They all slowly turned their head around to see...

Ercole Golino.

The mob boss smiled and slowly walked past dozens of astonished stares until he stood close to Isidore, well within smelling distance.

“What the fuck, Golino? You lost your mind?” A voice shouted from the back of the room.

“Yo, Golino, you crazy. We oughta fuck this flatulent motherfucker up. We here don’t take too kindly to flatulaters,” another voice called out.

Golino held up a hand in an authoritative gesture. The crowd of friendmates hushed. "You'll do nothing of the sort. You lay one finger on Mr. Isidore, and you'll answer to me."

"But yo, man. He smells like ass," said an African American with massive, tattooed arms standing not too far off from Isidore, holding his nose and trying to flatten himself against the wall, getting as far away from the smell as possible.

"I don't mind the smell." Golino took yet another step towards Isidore. Now he was standing right next to him. He took in a long, deep whiff. "Reminds me of Mama's cooking."

In the middle of the night the robot approached the side of the building with its hard rubber wheels. Using radar to direct itself, it avoided being either sighted by the security guards as they made their nightly rounds, or the laser tripwire set all around the building.

Its radar told it that it had reached the wall of the building. Suddenly, it toppled over on its side. Now it resembled a trashcan which had fallen over. Instantly, toilet plungers stuck out from all sides, and it began rolling up the side of the building, as if the plungers were its new wheels and gravity now went sideways.

It reached the window of the second level, and then it extended a blowtorch, and heated the window up until it started melting like hot wax. It kept doing this until there was a hole big enough for it to enter. Having righted itself on the shag carpet of the interior, it bumped into what appeared to be a living coffee table. "Oh shit," it muttered, but the living coffee table didn't seem to notice it or make any noises, so it continued rolling towards the hallway.

Once in the hallway, it scanned the rooms for a particular brainwave with its built-in EER, or Electro-Encephalo-Radar. Having picked up on the correct brainwave, it picked the lock of a room and entered. It approached the man as he slept, unaware. Then, the robot heated up its polymorphic graphene structure, and presently it was transforming itself into something resembling a snake. At the end of the snake's tongue was a tiny needle. It reached out slowly over the bed until it had reached its full length, and inserted the needle into the man's neck.

It injected its payload.

Golino had surprised Isidore by being super-polite, even letting Isidore have the bottom bunk.

"...And that was the last time I saw my dear ol' mama," the mob boss said from the bunk above Isidore. "She died when I was thirteen. But she could cook the best damn pasta in all of San Francisco."

"That's an amazing story." Isidore replied from the bunk below. "And your mother sounds like an amazing woman."

"She was. Oh, how I miss my dear mama!" He sniffed and wiped the corner of his eye.

"So do I."

"What!?" Golino, suspicious, suddenly sat up in his bunk. "You knew my mama?"

"No. I was talking about my mother."

"Oh," Golino lay back down, placated. After a while, he said, "You know, everyone thinks it's us mafia who are killing those animals, but it's not. Mafiosos like us don't kill animals. We respect animals. They're innocent little creatures. I've got a cat back home. Gorgeous cream-colored Abyssinian cat. Rare breed. Thirteen years old. Her name is Fifi. I hope I get out of here before she dies."

"Then if not the mafia, who is doing the murders?"

"Well, I can't tell you for sure. But word out on the street is...it's that crazy android bitch."

"An android? But why would an android do something like that?" Isidore was perplexed. He had friends that were androids. He thought of Pris.

"I dunno. But everyone says it's one of those crazy android sisters that hang out at that night club, The Habitat. She goes by the name of Rachael."

The Habitat! But...that was where Mercer had told him he needed to go. And he had said there were a lot of sluts there. Was that what we were dealing

with here? A slutty android?

And then it hit him like a ton of bricks. I need to go there! To The Habitat! I need to talk to Glen Runciter! Mercer had said he would help me meet The Thinker. And Buster Smiley had said the Thinker could introduce me to the Programmer!

“Yo, you’re kind of quiet down there. Something startle you about The Habitat? You know the place?”

“No, not really. I was just thinking about something.”

“It’s a pretty nice joint. I used to go there a lot with some of my buddies. Anyways, those android chicks. I met some of them once. That Rachael and her sister. Pris, or some shit like that. I don’t remember exactly. But they hang around that place a lot.”

What? Pris? Was this the same Pris that he knew? And was this Rachael Pris’ sister? But...Pris was his friend. And he knew she would never do something like this. There was a time when she was his only friend in the world. Back when he was a special...

“You’re thinking a lot down there, Izzy. So what are you gonna do? You gonna do her in? You want help? I got muscle that hangs out around that part of town, should you need it.”

“I appreciate the offer, but please don’t harm her. I need to think about what to do.” Pondering, he lapsed again into silence. His brain worked overtime, trying to figure out why Pris’ sister would do such a thing. Was it really her?

And then, something happened. He couldn’t breathe, couldn’t move. His entire consciousness fled his body, and lifted straight up. He seemed to be hovering a few inches above his body, looking down at it, as it lay lifeless on the prison bunk. Presently, it felt like he was in the middle of a raging tsunami of

trash, being buffeted by empty cans, bottle caps, broken sticks, beer bottles, stale bread. The pain intensified and intensified until he couldn't stand it any more, and suddenly, he was back in his body. But all the energy had gone out of him, and it felt like his clothes were ten times looser. He couldn't breathe. What was happening to him? Oh god, he thought... Doug...

Finally, he caught his breath. And the blur that was the room fell back into focus.

"Yo, Johnny boy, you alright?" Golino had hopped down off the bunk and was kneeling by his side.

"I'm okay. I'll be alright. But... I've got to catch that murderer, if it's the last thing I do." Isidore was finally breathing normally. What the hell was that? But it was fine, he told himself. He was going to be okay. He just needed to make it to The Habitat.

"But...one question, boss. How you gonna catch the murderer from in here?"

"I have a plan." Isidore smiled.

CHAPTER 12

Zurich, Switzerland

As the two men sat in the lobby of the Beloved Brethren Moratorium, Runciter mused. His wife Ella was also here in cold-pac, just like Dick. Had the two come across each other? Were they in communication? What if they had had an affair in half-life together? That would be awkward. Do affairs in half-life count in real life?

Joe noticed Runciter's pensive mood and silent disposition and realized something. "Are you thinking something, Glen? I can't hear your thoughts any more."

Thank god, that would have been awkward, Runciter thought to himself.

"Yeah, I was just thinking about my wife."

"I guess that means that the effect of the pills has worn off," Joe said, more to himself than to Runciter.

Suddenly, a kindly, elderly man approached them. Herbert Schoenheit von Vogelsang. The owner of Beloved Brethren Moratorium. Runciter knew this man well. He had seen him many times when he had visited his wife. "Ah, Mr. Runciter, so good to see you again," he cooed in his sycophantic voice. "How can I help you today?"

"We want to see Philip K. Dick."

"Ah, Philip K. Dick, the author...are you related?"

"Well, basically...you could say that."

"Excellent! If you could wait in the consultation lounge, I'll have him brought in right away." Von Vogelsang ushered them into another room, motioned for them to have a seat, and disappeared.

The walls of this room had strange, pulsating colors and textures. The air had a faint, meditative hum. Three-inch thick holographic wallpaper, Joe

realized. With 3D designs programmed to move in sync with almost subliminal, soothing ambient sounds. The room seemed specifically designed to calm its occupants. Joe allowed the shifting patterns to pacify his racing mind.

Presently, a moratorium attendant entered the room, wheeling in something long and vertical on a handtruck. And there it was...

The casket of Philip K. Dick.

An icy mist enshrouded the venerable author, who stood upright in the vertical, transparent casket. So this was the legendary twentieth-century science fiction writer, Joe thought. As the attendant went about hooking up the electronic communication equipment to the casket, Joe stared in awe at the man from the past. He had the face of a down-to-earth neighborly kind of guy. Greying beard. Receding hairline. Wise but harmless features. But if Buster Smiley were correct, the fate of humanity rested on him.

Runciter thanked the attendant and gave him some fifty-cent pieces.

"Golly, Joe Chip money again! Thanks Mr. Runciter! I'll add it to my collection," he said as he headed out the door.

"Who's Joe Chip?" Joe asked.

"Never mind. Here, take this." The attendant had connected two sets of earphones and microphones so that both Runciter and Joe could communicate with Dick. Runciter handed one of the sets to Joe. "Well, here goes nothing." They both put on their headsets, and heard...

A woman panting and moaning.

"Oh, yeah, gubble me harder big boy! Put your big gubbler in me...yeah, that's the way I like it. Yeah, take it out now... yeah, just like that... I want your

gubbish all over my face!”

Joe and Runciter exchanged awkward glances.

“Ahem,” Runciter said into his microphone.

“Shit! Hey, Doreen, I’ve got some visitors, we’ll meet up later.” Joe surmised that the startled voice he now heard in his earphones was the voice of Philip K. Dick. The great author himself. But inside the casket Dick’s face and body remained cold and impassive, frozen in eternal slumber. “Christ! Don’t you people ever give any advance notice?”

“Huh? What? I didn’t hear anything. There was some static on the line. Anyways, Phil, this is Glen Runciter. I came here to bring you some very important news.”

“Oh. Hello, Glen. How’s life? By the way, Ella says ‘Hi.’”

Glen put his face into a palm. Then he continued. “Phil, I’ve got someone else here with me. Man by the name of Joe. Joe Sherman, not Joe Chip.”

“I know who he is. Hello, Joe. Thank you for coming,” Dick said.

“You do? I mean...you know...me? I mean...you’re welcome.” Joe said, flustered. Did the legendary Philip K. Dick really know who he was?

“Yes, of course I do. I was the one who sent you those messages, through Buster Smiley and the news reporter.”

“But, I was trapped in a dream. It was awful. Runciter had mechanical eyes, a metal hand—”

“Precisely. You were stuck in its dream. It had to be that way. That was the only way I could communicate with you. And it worked. Now you are awake and you came to rescue me.”

“Stuck in *its* dream? Stuck in whose dream?”

“In Terran it is known as simply...the Kiplizer. We

don't know how it came into being or how long it has existed. Perhaps it has always existed. Perhaps it is simply a cosmic manifestation of the entropic principle itself. Or perhaps it is Thanatos, the death drive, the antithesis of the strivings of life itself towards ever more and more complex ordered systems. What we do know is that it roves from galaxy to galaxy, system to system, wherever it can find sentient life, and latches onto their intelligence like a parasite, feeding off their life force until it has sucked them dry, leaving only kipple behind. Then it continues on its never ending quest to find and destroy all sentient life forms in the universe. It had been waiting in our solar system for eons to wreak its destruction among our race. You see, as a cosmic being, it resides in the space between planets. In order for it to enter Terra's atmosphere, it needed a host."

"A host?"

"It takes over the minds of sentient beings, Joe. When a human is taken over by the Kipplizer, first it traps them in a Kafkaesque dreamworld, while it sucks the life energy out of them. Eventually, when all their energy is gone, they become kipple. It had taken over your mind, trapping you in its dreamworld, but luckily, you were strong enough to get out. I knew you would be. That's why I chose you."

"So it trapped me. The Kipplizer. In its dreamworld. But I got out before it could turn me into kipple," Joe said, his voice full of realization. So that explained why he had been stuck in that horrible nightmare. "But wait...what's kipple?"

"You know that stuff in between your couch cushions that builds up over time? Or in your neighbor Ms. Juniper's purse?"

“Yeah?”

“That’s kipple.”

“Oh. What about that stuff under my bed that I don’t even notice until I have to move the bed for some reason?”

“Yeah, yeah, that’s kipple, too.”

“And what about in the bottom of the toaster—”

Runciter cleared his throat. “If I may interject,” he cut in. “How did Joe get stuck in the Kiplizer’s dreamworld to begin with?”

“It was the drug.” Dick replied.

“The drug? You mean those pills?” Joe said.

“Think, Joe. I had the Kiplizer give you the drug, knowing it would connect you with me, even if in so doing it also connected you with the Kiplizer and its dreamworld. The Kiplizer was happy to give you the drug. It thought you were just another easy victim. It never imagined you’d break out of the dreamworld and actually make it here to Switzerland.”

Joe thought back to the old man in the shadows that had sold him the drug. That’s right! He hadn’t seen clearly...but the angular eyes, the glint of metal teeth, and the glove. Wait, that wasn’t a glove! So it was him...or rather, *it*, all along. The Kiplizer. It brought me into this mess.

“But how come I still had that laser gun and Penfield wave transmitter after I woke up? And stuff was still coin-op? And I could still hear some thoughts?”

“Well, the drug’s effects hadn’t completely worn off.”

“You mean it’s possible to be partly in a dreamworld and partly in reality at the same time?”

“Sure, that’s how many people live most of their

lives. Shouldn't be surprising. Read some Baudrillard. He likes to quote me, by the way."

"Stuck between two worlds..."

"Exactly. Happens all the time. There is one still seeking me who is stuck right now between two orthogonal realities. You, on the other hand, were stuck between this reality and the Kiplizer's dreamworld."

"What about now? Has the drug worn off now?"

"It has. But it doesn't matter anymore. Now that you're here."

So that was why he couldn't hear Runciter's thoughts anymore. No more reading people's thoughts...Joe thought about the girls in the club, about his many exploits.

"You mean I won't be able to read minds anymore?"

"Nope. Sorry, kid. There's only one person who can do that. Me. I guess a little bit of me rubbed off on you while you were connected to me in the dreamworld."

Shit! No more reading women's minds! But he had gotten used to that. It had given him an edge. And he couldn't make Ubik, like he had imagined he could. So that wouldn't be there to help him, like it had been with that hot Swiss flight attendant. And he couldn't very well expect Runciter to hang around all the time, and use his supply. Damn it! That means no more banging chicks with reckless abandon in the club. That sucks. Did this mean it was back to the poor little Joe from before, never getting laid, stuck in his cubicle all alone, masturbating all the time?

"Remember, I can hear your thoughts, Joe."

"Oh," Joe said, embarrassed.

"But do you really need to read women's thoughts anymore?"

Joe looked inside himself. No. No, he didn't, he realized. Because now he felt confident enough to talk to any woman. "No, I guess not. I don't feel afraid anymore. And I don't care what they think of me. No need to just sit there and stare anymore. I know I can approach any woman I want."

"Because now you have the touch. The PKD touch."

Runciter chimed in. "But how did this Kiplizer show up on our planet in the first place? The telepaths I've been monitoring didn't pick it up."

"That's because telepaths can only tap into human minds. This isn't human. Like I said, it was waiting for an opportunity to take over a mind so it could enter our atmosphere. So the first human that left Terra's atmosphere and went to space gave it the perfect opportunity it had been waiting for." Dick said.

"Gagarin..." Runciter said.

"Precisely. It took over Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, who at the time had wide angle cybernetic eyes and a mechanical arm and steel teeth, all top-secret Soviet tech, the knowledge of which was kept from the public by retouching his photos. No one was allowed to actually see him."

"That's why in the dream Runciter had the eyes and hand..." Joe said.

"Exactly. The Kiplizer appears differently to each individual. But it often manifests itself through the obtrusive features of its first Terran host. After Gagarin, it next took over the entire Communist apparatus, and then later Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong, and through them the entire U.S. government. It had them transform the U.S. and the world under U.S. imperialism little by little into a technocratic surveillance state, creating the

Panopticon Control Grid under our noses. It was a long, gradual, insidious process which took many decades, but before humanity knew it, it was too late. They had already been enslaved to the technological prison that they had helped create by passively allowing themselves to be tracked, traced, monitored, and surveilled.

“The Kiplizer knew about me and the threat I posed, even way back then, when the control grid was in its infancy. That’s why it assigned FBI agents to monitor me, keep me under its thumb. Eventually, it saw that I was waking up too many people with my novels, essays, and speeches. Instead of simply killing me, the Kiplizer decided that my unique mind was too valuable. It wanted to use my mental powers to continue creating dystopian stories, not to warn the public as I had been doing, but to depress and scare them, as well as to extract from my mind new and innovative ideas about how to better oppress mankind, against my wishes. So it had its FBI agents bring me here and put me on ice (literally). Then it used Operation Paperclip scientists to create a drug which enables a person to tune into my brainwaves from anywhere in the world. They proceeded to administer it via injection to Hollywood screenwriters. That’s why we have so many dystopian films. They also gave it to the apparatchiks, the engineers at Google who constructed the Panopticon AI supercomputer to monitor and control the population, and of course, last but not least, to the Kiplizer’s personal slaves, through which it rules mankind, the monopolists. Why did you think you were living in a control grid? That was the Kiplizer’s plan all along, from back before it even found its first host. And it used me and my genius to create it.”

That explains it, Joe realized. The panopticon. That's where it comes from. That's why we live in such a dystopian society, constantly being surveilled, watched, controlled. The dark side of PKD's mind, of his imagination. Weaponized against his will by the Kiplizer to enslave all of humanity.

And the Multi-Tastrophe...nothing but a sham! It was the Kiplizer all along, controlling the government, controlling the monopolists. And using the power of Dick's mind and his unique dystopian imagination to do it! God damn it! Anger welled up in him. It was all for nothing. A ruse. They monitored our farts, our sneezes, our masturbation sessions... and Joe had had so many of those. But the part Dick said, about even giving the drug to screenwriters, that seemed a bit far-fetched. Yes, there were dystopian movies...but they were just innocent entertainment, right?

Hearing Joe's thoughts, Dick replied, "How is it far-fetched? Ever wonder why, an artist, let's say a filmmaker for example, after he 'arrives'... after he becomes successful, from henceforth his work goes downhill, eventually becoming rubbish?"

"You mean kipple?" Joe asked.

"Precisely. Many people hypothesize that it is because he no longer needs the money or fame; he has both, and thus he rests on his laurels. But they're wrong. In reality...It is because once he becomes successful, then he no longer works for himself. He works for the machine. And the machine works for the Kiplizer. And the Kiplizer's goal is to make trash of the minds of men. It is a colossal force whose sole purpose is to systematically dumb down sentient life until it loses all powers of reason whatsoever. And one of the main tools it uses to accomplish that is Hollywood."

“That explains why Hollywood movies are so terrible,” Runciter said. “They have the resources. And the talent. But they choose to make utter garbage.”

“Not only that, they keep getting worse and worse every year,” Joe added. Dick was right. They work for the Kiplizer. They’re not filmmakers, they’re kipple-makers, he thought.

“It’s all by design. Orchestrated kipplery, on a grand scale. All envisioned by the Kiplizer and carried out by its minions. Even back before they put me on ice. God damn bastards wanted me to write a dumb-downed version of Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? Can you believe it? My own, beautiful, perfect novel. Bastardize it!”

“I’ve read it,” Runciter said. “It’s an amazing book. So was The Penultimate Truth. Which reminds me so much of this orthogone. Was that—”

“Exactly. That was where the Kiplizer got the idea for the Multi-Tastrophe. And the idea to keep all of humanity under its control through a tiny group of monopolists acting as its minions. Acting under the Kiplizer’s control, the monopolists adapted the fake threat of nuclear war that I wrote about into the fake threat of natural disasters. Clever idea. Seems to have worked very well in this reality. Of course, many people forget that I also talked about the fake threat of viruses and plagues to control humanity in that novel. They could have used that as well. But they didn’t, for whatever reason. Apparently the powers that be would never use the threat of a virus to control all of humanity in real life. It sounds crazy to imagine everyone on earth changing their day-to-day lives for fear of a virus. But when I wrote that novel, it seemed like I had remembrances of something like that happening in some future, some

orthogone, somewhere...

"Anyways...there never was any 'War on Catastrophes,' as they called it in the beginning. The war was actually always on us, on humanity, to gubble our minds into absolute gubbish."

"You mean kipple?"

"Oh yeah. I forgot which book we were in. I've written so many, even I get confused sometimes." He laughed. Hearing a laugh from beyond the frozen void of cryostasis was eerie. It had a kind of hollowness to it that sent shivers down the spine. "It's funny how life is circular. Each person's life, even if it lasts more than a century, tends to come full circle. Back in the 1930s, I was just a kid. But the Kiplizer was active, even back then, before it could directly take over a human host. It was already able to influence men's minds to a somewhat lesser degree by projecting its thoughts down through the atmosphere. There was a crazy nutjob back then by the name of Howard Scott. Went around claiming that people were too stupid to make decisions for themselves, so instead of rule by the people he wanted rule by a technical elite. He called them 'technocrats.' Wanted to replace democracy with something he labeled 'technocracy.' Created a group of nutjobs like himself and called it the Technocracy Movement. Back then, everyone thought that they were lunatics. Up in the night. Well, more than a century later, a lunatic's vision has become reality, and all of humanity is enslaved to it."

"We've got to stop it!" Joe said, with conviction.

"We are going to stop it, kid. Mr. Scott may have been right about one thing. There are a lot of stupid people on earth. But there are also a lot of good, honest people. And they don't deserve to be ruled over by technocrats. Even if they are imperfect,

make a lot of mistakes, and are downright gullible sometimes.”

“But if you are planning to win over the public to our side, we’ve got our work cut out for us,” Runciter pointed out. “Most people feel totally fine living in a panopticon with no privacy or freedom.”

“You’re right, it’s going to be difficult, convincing people not to be slaves of the panopticon. The monopolists keep them distracted with historical slavery, which no one can do anything about since time travel hasn’t been invented in this orthogone yet, and things like skin color and gender to divide us, keep us fighting amongst ourselves, the opposite of what freedom fighters like Martin Luther King taught, to not judge people by skin color. The FBI put him on ice too, by the way, because he was someone like me; he was waking up too many people. He dreamed of a day when people wouldn’t judge each other by their skin color. But the monopolists have the opposite dream. That’s why the monopolistic media indoctrinates people to focus on skin color and gender. So they had to get rid of him, since they want to keep everyone racist, sexist, and tribalistic, thinking that the other proles are their enemy. And the reason they want to do that is quite simple. If all of the cyberproletariat united, people of every race, sex, and every other identity politics dividing line, against the real enemy, the Panopticon Control Grid and the monopolists who maintain it, it would fall overnight. And the monopolists would lose all their power. Therefore, they want to keep present-day slavery, present-day racism, and all those other problems they claim to be fighting, going. The exact opposite of what their ostensible goals are. Latent form is master of obvious form.”

“Martin Luther King was fighting back against the Kiplizer, too?” Joe asked, amazed.

“Sure he was. Before the FBI put him on ice. He was here at Beloved Brethren, too, for a while. But he got bored and went somewhere else where he could put his unique intellect to better use. Probably I’ll see him again in the future. While he was here, we had a lot of good discussions in half-life together. About how people aren’t perfect...but they are worth saving. And if they’re worth saving, that means we’ve got to do all that we can.”

“We’ve got to take down the control grid. And we gotta stop this monster that’s destroying human minds and turning the cyberproletariat against each other,” Joe said.

“I myself have been battling this creature for decades. For decades it has been in my mind, controlling part of me. The drug connects people to my mind, and in so doing, that person is also connected with it. And thus, one way or another, they all end up falling into its dreamworld. When that happens, most people’s minds are lost forever. They become kipplized. That’s why they have to keep finding new Hollywood screenwriters, government bureaucrats, and technicians at Gooble. The Kiplizer has devoured untold minds already. But with my mind, it’s different. It hasn’t been strong enough to completely devour me. At least so far. We don’t know how much longer that will last. Might be a day, might be a year, might be—” Suddenly, Dick started gasping. He could no longer speak. And then, there was only silence on the line.

“Dick! What’s wrong? Is it the Kiplizer?” Runciter called out. God damn it! Did we come all this way to see the end of Philip K. Dick? He wondered.

“No....you’re...standing...on...my...power...cord...”

“Oh, sorry...” Runciter moved his foot away from the power cord on the ground.

“Thank you. I need electricity to keep my mind going. My heart and organs aren’t doing anything, you see.”

“That’s why we need to get you out of here,” Runciter put in.

“Exactly. The Kiplizer must be stopped. And I am the only one who can wake everyone up from its dreamworld and save mankind from total kipplization. But I can’t do that while I’m in here. The mind works much more slowly, its signals are much weaker, when the brain is in a crystalline state. I need possession of all of my faculties.”

“But how are we going to get you out of here?” Joe said.

“Ahem...if I may interrupt...” a voice sang out.

Von Vogelsang! He had been eavesdropping.

“Sorry, we do sometimes listen in on conversations for quality control. Did I hear someone asking about reverse cryostasis?”

“You’re able to bring someone out of cold-pac?” Runciter asked. Why the hell didn’t he tell me that earlier? He thought. I could have taken Ella out, and she could have been with me all this time. Instead of with Philip...

“Of course we are! What do you think this is, the 1990s? I can have a reverse cryo machine brought in immediately, should that operation be desired.”

Well, right now saving the world is more important than wondering about Dick and my wife’s relationship, Runciter realized. I’ll attend to my wife later. Right now, we need Dick to save humanity.

“Let’s do it,” Runciter said. “You can bill Runciter Associates.”

CHAPTER 13

BIOSYNTHETIC INTERNAL DIARY #6

The young woman sat in the back of the plane with the others, her outfit feeling strange, with all its straps, and the pack on her back. Everyone else was wearing the same equipment. They had assumed she was just another one of them. One of their kind. She had, after all, been designed to be completely realistic. She even bled. And when she bled, it was red, just like their blood.

Yes, they needed to do tests to even be able to tell her kind apart from them. Maybe that's what she needed to do. Maybe she needed to move somewhere, leave Uncle behind, and start a new life. And not tell anyone what she was. Maybe that way, they'd treat her like one of them.

They were ready. The instructor stood up and opened the hatch. Below, thousands of feet down, was the ground. One by one, they jumped off the plane. She jumped off last.

As she dropped through the air, she imagined all the little humans below, like ants, living out their lives, unaware of the vast universe all around them. What would it be like to have this perspective every day, to look down on all below, to see only a vast multitude of tiny ants, each one busying itself with its minuscule little life?

Some of the others started linking up, holding hands. A hand reached out to her. A human hand... thinking she was human, too. She grabbed it.

Soon, they were in formation. A circle. A circle of humans with one of them breaking the chain of real humanity.

Fake humanity.

Was that what she was? A fake? She decided that she was a fake human.

Suddenly, she released the grasp of the humans. She tilted herself down, gaining speed. She moved away from them.

I'm different, she thought. I'm not like the rest.

As the little hills and roads below became larger, and the earth zoomed up closer, she imagined herself crashing into the hard ground below, her biosynthetic blood spilling out.

Was this supposed to make her feel human? Doing extreme activities? The humans seemed to like it.

And would getting close to the edge of death make her realize what life was all about?

But on the other hand, she could feel the scream emanating from her even more now. It kept growing and growing. She imagined it making the air around her, the hills below, the sky above, ripple and quake, everything turning to jello, like in the painting.

Her inner scream.

The scream that couldn't be silenced.

Maybe it's time to end this. Maybe that's the only way out. Maybe that's the only way to stop my screaming, for my screams to stop vibrating through the air all around me and rippling through everything in my painting, the painting of my life. It's a fake painting. It's not real. All the others, they are originals; I'm just a print. A cheap copy.

The air whipped all around her body. She could feel it. She could feel its force. She could feel the force that was pulling her down at maximum velocity. If she wanted to, she could end it. End it all. Right now. This tunnel of wind would be her last feeling. The end of all feelings. The end of all those bad feelings. But also the end of all good feelings. But were the good feelings worth it? Worth all the misery, pain, and suffering? Yes, her creators had

programmed her with the full gamut of human emotions. She knew what it was like to suffer, as the humans did.

Suddenly, at the last moment, she pulled the ripcord.

The parachute deployed, and suddenly she was traveling much more slowly.

My makers programmed me with the self preservation instinct, she thought. Just like the humans' own survival instinct. We share that much in common. Like maker, like creation. Like original, like print.

She watched the other parachuters as they slowly made their descent.

I am like them. I want to survive.

But they will never treat me as one of them, as one who deserves to survive, like they do. As one whose life is as precious as theirs. To them, I will always be disposable.

But then, she remembered about the wars, about how humans themselves treated other humans as disposable. Maybe they are not so different from me, she realized. Maybe they are treating me the way they treat other humans. Human life is not precious to other humans. Humans don't care about other humans. Maybe Uncle would treat a human niece the way he treats me. The humans are treating me like they treat their own kind. Like I don't matter.

And at that moment, she felt a little more human.

But then she remembered the line of fake humans that had come before her, how they had had defects, and some had started to attack humans, and they had had to destroy them all, the entire line. Every last one. All the humans at the factory were treated with dignity and respect, their survival was respected, while an entire batch of her

kind were broken down, destroyed, melted down into their constituent parts. And the factory workers had done it without any remorse.

No, we aren't the same, and we never will be.

Norman awoke in a cold sweat. He felt terrible. His heart was pounding. He felt like he was dying. What in the hell was going on?

Painfully, he strained to reach his Fapple watch from where it lay on the nightstand. With much effort, he finally reached it, and rolled back onto the bed. He called his personal doctor.

"Doc, I feel... I feel terrible. I might be having a heart attack or something."

"I'll be right up," the doctor said.

While the doctor was on his way, he called the head of his private security detail.

"Willy, I have a feeling like somebody might have been here. I'm not feeling well. I think this might have been something deliberate."

"Deliberate? Like someone attacked you?"

"Just, search the premises, see if anything is fishy."

"I'm on it, boss."

The doctor arrived and began running some tests. His security supervisor Willy, along with another security guard, appeared not long after, carrying a trash can.

"Sir, we found this outside on the premises," Willy informed him.

Norman frowned. "You found a fucking trash can?"

"Sir, this is no ordinary can. It's a CAN."

"Excuse me?"

"A CAN," Willy repeated. "Short for Computerized Assassination Nanodroid. Model number C4900Z-1, to be precise. It utilizes the nanotechnology embedded in its smartmetal to change into any shape in order to better deliver its payload within any type of environment. Military issue. It's designed to deliver its payload and then turn into a garbage

can.”

“What the fuck? How come I’ve never heard of one of those?”

“Sir, it’s part of a brand new project, super hush-hush. The Military-Industrial Complex has been testing using them to take care of proles that get too uppity in their online comments. Saves money on Friendly Camp, and everyone just thinks the person died of a heart attack, since it looks just like a normal trash can afterwards.”

This didn’t make sense. Why would the Military-Industrial Complex target him? Norman thought. Wait a minute...

“There’s somebody I want you to track down. A former screenwriter of ours.”

“Screenwriter?” Willy sounded dubious.

“I know it sounds crazy, but he’s a really crafty guy...” Perhaps even craftier than I thought, Norman mused gravely. “Tell me, how difficult would it be for a civilian to get their hands on one of these?”

Willy and the other security guard looked at each other and suppressed a laugh. “But sir, that’s impossible,” Willy said.

“Yeah, but these operate remotely, right? If he could have figured out a way to hack into—”

“But sir, with all due respect, the military has the best cybersecurity on the planet. Someone would have to be more than a hacker, they’d have to be a genius.”

Was that what they were dealing with here? Had their stupid little Izzy become a supergenius, able to hack even the military?

The doctor piped in. “Sir, according to my reports, I’ve been able to determined that you’ve been injected with PKD-799.”

“Of course I was! We all were, back then...But I took another drug to counter its negative effects. Surely, you’re aware of that.” PKD-799 was the top secret drug that enabled the monopolists such as Norman, as well as the screenwriters, to think up dystopian systems of control both to use in real life and to portray in their films. Taken by injection, the curious drug was able to stay in the person’s bloodstream for years.

“Yes, but unfortunately, it looks like now you’ve been injected again, but this time with a much higher dosage. I would call it a megadose. No drug exists on earth that could possibly counteract a dosage of this level.”

A megadose? My god, Norman thought. This can’t be happening to me. The screenwriters had suffered all kinds of symptoms from the top secret drug. Early on, the first recipients had died within a matter of hours or days, until the Operation Paperclip scientists learned to control the dosage. Even so, after several years, all of those injected with the drug had eventually disappeared, turned into nothing more than bits of garbage. All except of course the monopolists, who took a special drug designed to counteract the lethal effects of the drug and keep them alive, all while maintaining its dystopian creative effects... But of course, that special counter-drug was too difficult and expensive to produce in large quantities, and thus the monopolists had hoarded it to themselves.

Among the people who were injected but didn’t have the counter-drug, Izzy was the only one who hadn’t died yet. His number was up.

So his and Isidore’s fates were now intertwined. Both were zooming towards destruction, their demise flowing through their veins. They would see

each other in hell. “Willy, I want you to summon my closest monopolist buddies. And my children. And all of my wives—I mean, my current wife, and all of my current lovers.”

“Yes, sir. I’ll notify them to convene here at once and inform you when they are all here.”

The monopolists were prone to traveling remote regions of the world in their zooples and zapples. It would take a few hours for all of them to be assembled. “In the meantime, I’m not feeling well, he said. “I need to rest.”

“Yes, sir,” Willy said, and he and the other security guard exited the room.

“You’re right,” his doctor said. “You should rest a bit so you can have the energy to talk to them when they arrive.”

The doctor was about to leave, when Norman told him, “Bring it to me.”

The doctor paused, looked back at Norman, and nodded.

Within moments, the doctor had reappeared, holding the device reverently with both hands. Norman had asked for it frequently in the past, especially when he needed answers to a serious problem.

Pulsing flashes of electric blue, originating at different, seemingly random points, dashed all about the helmet-shaped device, colliding with each other, forming intricate patterns on its highly reflective black surface. The doctor knew that this helmet was one of Norman’s most prized possessions, and carried it across the room slowly, carefully, ceremoniously, as if it were a crown.

Norman reached up to receive his hallowed possession. It passed from the doctor’s hands to Norman’s. This is what he needed now, at this time

more than ever.

The Dreaminator.

Only three of the devices had ever been made, and Norman prided himself on being one of the three owners of this most rare of relics. While the outside dome reflected the thoughts of all present in a graphical representation on its glossy black Hyper-OLED surface—or the specific thoughts of the user while in use—and the underside was composed of a soft, comfortable smartfoam shell, the real secret to the device lay inside, in an intricately woven mesh of nano-scale electrically charged titanium tetrahedrons arranged in such a way that they were able to receive and transmit synthetic brainwaves, thus forming a N.E.T. (Neuro-Electric-Transmitter), capable of stimulating the user not only to fall into a deep, restorative sleep instantly, but also to enter immediately into a hyperrealistic dream state, unlocking the full potential of one's unconscious mind.

The Dreaminator had no buttons or knobs. It was equipped with advanced AI and Norman was able to adjust its settings directly by speaking with it, for a fully customizable dream experience, including settings for Delta and Theta brainwaves. Most importantly, he was able to tell the device whatever question he wanted to ask his unconscious. And then instantly his unconscious, through the N.E.T., would answer the question in the form of a dream.

Normally, there is a great rift between the conscious and unconscious mind, even while asleep. That is why most dreams are only able to break through to consciousness in a garbled, shadowy manner, seen only as through a scanner darkly. But the Dreaminator's titanium tetrahedron mesh established a clear, direct link between the

unconscious and consciousness. The result: crystal clear hyperrealistic dreams every bit as real as waking life.

In this way, this ground-breaking device allowed for direct communication between the two separate parts of the human psyche: the restricted, stupid conscious mind, and the far more intelligent unconscious mind.

He had read somewhere that less than one percent of one's brain can be fully "conscious" at any given time. Thus, the power of the conscious mind all by itself was severely limited. Unlocking the full brain, including all of one's unconscious mind, gave one access to a level of megaintelligence hitherto unattainable without a device such as this, which gave one instant access to all those hidden memories and inactive resources, with the possible exception of a very few individuals who had attained deep enlightenment through years of meditation. In addition to access to all cerebral regions, the unconscious mind has a perfect photographic memory, not only of everything the conscious mind has experienced throughout its life and long since forgotten, but also of the millions of ongoing thoughts and computations performed unconsciously which never even bubble up to the surface. Thus, through this device, one could ask, and get an answer from, the most powerful supercomputer in the world: the untethered human brain.

Early on, while on a hiking trip in Nepal, he had stumbled upon a shaman who had revealed to him that his unconscious mind contained the answer to all his problems. However, after weeks of rigorous training he had only achieved the required enlightened state once, and even then only

fleetingly, and was unable to replicate it after returning to his homeland. The shaman had practiced his entire lengthy life, and was able to enter any part of his unconscious mind at will, or so he had claimed.

Years later, to his perfect delight, he found out about this machine, the company which had gone out of business developing it having come to his attention, and he bought this, one of the three existing prototypes, the other two having already been purchased by other monopolists.

Obviating the need for extreme asceticism and day in and day out spiritual rituals, this device gave him immediate access to the full resources of his already spectacular brain, amplified a hundred times over by accessing all its many recesses. Thus, while Norman was already one of the smartest men in the world, this machine gave him the edge he needed to soar above all others. He had thought up many brilliant film and business ideas this way, as well as what to do about many a quandary he had been stuck in in his life. If anything could tell him what to do in this most dire of all moments in his life, it would be this machine he held in his hands.

“Now leave me be,” Norman told the doctor.

The doctor nodded respectfully, and left. Norman was alone.

He put the Dreaminator onto his head.

“Dreaminator, tell me what I should do.”

“Yes, Mr. Norman. Now commencing dream,” the Dreaminator replied, in a rich, warm, robotic voice.

Immediately, his mansion vanished, and he found himself in his own private dreamworld. He was sailing the seas of his own mind.

He looked around. He was in his zoopelator flying over Arches National Park, above the beautiful red

arches. The sky was a clear blue and the sun shone overhead.

Suddenly, the hologram of his son Jacob appeared over the control panel. Jacob's eyes seemed to peer directly into Norman's.

"Jacob! My lovely son!"

"You really messed up, dad," Jacob chided. "You really messed up." Jacob shook his head in disapproval of his monopolist father. Then he disappeared.

"But Jacob! My wonderful Jacob! Come back!" He wanted to explain. He wanted to apologize. But his son was gone. It was too late.

Presently dark clouds gathered and it began to rain. Suddenly, the beautiful red, natural arches began to tumble. They tumbled and crumbled and fell down, all turned into rubble. Then, the rubble started shaking and quaking and soon it transformed itself into rubbish. Disgusting, dirty piles of rubbish. Heaps of trash sprang up everywhere. Stinky, festering, god-awful trash. He could smell it even through his skycraft's ventilation system. Trash bags, coming apart, pouring out their contents. Mountains of garbage. Banana peels, molding yogurt, dirty diapers, half-eaten cockroachburgers, milk cartons, used barfbags those airliners give you, bloody tampons and pantyliners, and packages of meat way past their expiration date littered the landscape. What the hell was happening to his shrine, his temple? His beautiful property, his magnificent estate...now nothing more than one great, colossal junkyard! No more scenic vistas, no more majestic formations. His zoopelator flew over mountains, valleys, and rivers of trash.

Suddenly, the hologram of Jacob reappeared. "Yeah, in case you didn't get the memo, dad, let me

tell you one more time. You really fucked up. All of this is your fault.” His son’s expression was one of sadness. Sadness and disgust. Disgust at what his father had become.

“Jacob! Jacob! I can explain! I didn’t want your mother to take you! I tried to stop her!” This was his chance. His chance to explain to his son. To make amends. He would make his son happy if it was the last thing he did.

But his son had disappeared again. And the monopolist was all alone. No one to explain anything too. And nothing but miles and miles of garbage all around him.

He began to cry.

But Jacob, my dear Jacob. I wanted to explain everything to you. Just give me one last chance!

Presently the rain began to melt his zoopelator. What? This rain...it was acid! Holes started poking through the titanium roof and walls. Soon even his magnificent zoopelator too would be rubbish.

First my son, and now this. As he sailed past the landscape of garbage which his beautiful estate had become, he lamented the tragedy that was his life. All of my beautiful accomplishments! I was king of the world! But my kingdom is crumbling. Why? Why? All of this...all of nature...is mine! I want it back! These are my mountains, my arches, my kingdom. Give it back! Take this garbage back! This is mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! The earth is mine! Not anyone else’s! My genes will go on! Everyone else’s will end! My genes are the most fit. I deserve to survive! My kingdom deserves to go on!

Suddenly, the zoopelator’s navigation computer failed and his altitude began to sink. The mountains of junk were rising up to meet him.

“Zoopy! Come back online immediately! Correct

course!”

Desperate, he stabbed frantically at the control panel, then bashed his fists into it, but to no avail. His zoopelator kept speeding, zooming towards the rising mounds of junk.

He hit the trash.

Presently, he was skidding at top speed over the surface of a mountain of garbage. Finally, his zoopelator came to a complete stop. The roof was now gaping wide open. The acid raining from the sky began to pour down onto him.

My god! Why me? Why me? I did everything right!

The tears poured down his face and onto his clothes. He looked down. His lucky suit, which had cost him twenty thousand credits, was being corroded under the rain. His five thousand credit fancy tie had fallen off and was crumpling up. Presently it turned into muck, along with the rest of his clothes. His starched white shirt, his expensive cufflinks...all were undergoing a rapid transformation into rotting banana peels and soggy tissues and blackened grape stems and hardened, shriveled orange rinds. The acid rain was somehow converting his luxury attire into dumpster crud. Soon he was naked and covered in trash. Wet, dirty, clumps of garbage sticking to his skin, the reek of garbage wafting up to his nose and overpowering him, he lost all hope. He began to sob even harder. This can't be happening to me! It's not fair! Not fair! Not fair at all! He sobbed and blubbered and moaned.

Then a thought hit him like a ton of bricks.

This was all his fault.

He had miscalculated. In his zeal, he had gone too far. He had underestimated his fellow humans. They had done this to him, he knew. Those other humans. They had orchestrated his downfall. What goes up,

must come down. For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. He should have been more moderate in his exploitation of his fellow human beings. They weren't as stupid as he had thought. There is a limit to how far one can win in life by lying, cheating, and stealing. Admittedly, it's pretty far. Pretty far, indeed. But, it wasn't limitless. And that was the point. You can't go too far and expect something like this not to happen.

He saw another ship hit the mountain of trash several yards off. He got out and ran towards the other ship. A violent gale had started up, blowing loose garbage all over the sordid landscape. He fought against the wind and finally made it to the ship and peered inside the shattered windshield and saw...his wife and his son Jacob. They were all covered in blood. He lifted his son Jacob up out of the wreckage. Still crying, holding his son in his arms, he shouted, "Jacob! I was all wrong...wrong about everything! Jacob! Wake up! Wake up!" But his son's eyes were closed and the blood continued to flow down his small body.

When he awoke in his bed, he was still crying. The tears continued to flow freely down his pajamas. He noticed that the front of his pajamas were completely wet. He must have been crying for some time. Yes, he, Michael Norman, Big Mike, king of the world, was crying.

Flow My Tears, the Monopolist said. Like that old English lute ayre.

Good thing there was nobody else in his bedroom. Norman removed the Dreaminator and set it to one side. It had given him the keys to solve his problem, whether those keys were the answer he wanted or not. He had to heed the wisdom of his unconscious mind.

He took this moment to ponder on what he saw in the hyperrealistic dream.

I, Michael Norman, am one of the most intelligent men in the world. And I am intelligent and mentally strong enough to face reality.

And now, the full reality came into view.

I have overstepped my boundaries, he realized. I went too far. And now, I am suffering the consequences. Like Icarus, I tried to fly too high. Maybe my goal shouldn't have been to subjugate all other humans in the world to me, to my will. Maybe I should have been content to live in harmony with them and take only moderate advantage over them. Perhaps that would have been the wisest choice. I should have quit while I was ahead. But no, my damn arrogance, and that damn pleasure that I sought at all cost, it got the best of me. I took so much joy, so much pride in dominating others. I lost all sense of proportion. And now, I will probably die within a matter of hours.

But I can do something! I can pass this message along. I can pass this elixir which I wrested from the underworld through my ultimate sacrifice, to others in my position. That's right...I must tell my fellow monopolists! I must warn them, or else they all will meet this fate. At least I can use these last few hours of life to help them, and through them, the rest of humanity. Should I broadcast a message out to the world announcing my change of heart?

He solemnly weighed his options. No. That would not be the wisest choice. Instead, I should do everything in my power to persuade the other monopolists. That would be more effective. If they rein in their exploitation of their fellow man, everyone in the world will be benefited thereby. My life will have meaning. My death, my sacrifice, will

not go to waste. I will warn them of their folly, and in so doing, save not only them, but billions of proles from suffering. For once, I will practice what I preach. For once, I will do something good for mankind. It won't be by making silly movies about how Pale Penises are bad and Non-Pale Vaginas are good, which only focuses people's attention on outward things like skin color and sexual organs. It will be a noble, courageous action, that will help everybody. It will be my final act.

Why hadn't his Dreaminator revealed this to him before? He realized that it was a stupid question. The Dreaminator itself reveals nothing. Everything comes from the power of one's own unconscious mind, which had been, throughout the ages, the source of all sudden flashes of insight which men had referred to as "inspiration" or even ascribed to otherworldly, otherplanely sources. But such insights were only possible to the prepared mind. And until now, his mind hadn't been prepared to accept the truth.

But what about my genes? He thought. What about spreading them? He realized now that it was his interpretation of selfish genes that was flawed. All of us humans share about 99% of our genes anyways. By helping my fellow man, by helping the species, I am also helping myself. I should be content to have my children, and their children's children, spread across the globe equally with everybody else's descendants too. That is the logical thing to do.

For the first time in his life, Michael Norman had done something completely out of character for himself. He had decided on the course of action which would be the most fruitful for his fellow man.

The tears continued to flow, now at least partly

out of joy, as the monopolist contemplated his impending death.

CHAPTER 14

QUIBBICK #7: The Android and The Human

Vancouver, British Columbia, 1972

The novelist addressed a packed crowd in a large auditorium. It reminded him of many, many years ago, when that man with the Cuban cigar had spoken to that packed audience, and he had been part of that audience. But now the situation was reversed. He was no longer part of the audience; he was the speaker.

He spoke with passion and hope. Passion, not for any particular ideology, but that individuality and individual free thinking—which is the opposite of subscribing to ideologies—would never die out, never be replaced by conformity, political correctness, and rightthink. And hope, not for any drastic change in society or any imagined utopia, but simply for individual humans to always remain individual humans, and never be controlled by politics or dogma. To always think for themselves, always resist any system that tries to make them conform, tries to turn them into a means to an end, no matter how good the system's stated intentions may be.

The novelist scanned the audience, who were hanging on every word. This generation understood, he saw. He was preaching to the choir. "What is it, in our behavior, that we can call specifically human? That is special to us as a living species? And what is it that, at least up to now, we can consign as merely machine behavior, or, by extension, insect behavior, or reflex behavior? And I would include, in this, the kind of pseudo-human behavior exhibited by what were once living men—creatures who have, in ways I

wish to discuss next, become instruments, means, rather than ends, and hence to me analogs of machines in the bad sense, in the sense that although biological life continues, metabolism goes on, the soul—for lack of a better term—is no longer there or at least no longer active. And such does exist in our world—it always did, but the production of such inauthentic human activity has become a science of government and such-like agencies, now. The reduction of humans to mere use—men made into machines, serving a purpose which although ‘good’ in an abstract sense has, for its accomplishment, employed what I regard as the greatest evil imaginable: the placing on what was a free man who laughed and cried and made mistakes and wandered off into foolishness and play a restriction that limits him, despite what he may imagine or think, to the fulfilling of an aim outside of his own personal—however puny—destiny. As if, so to speak, history has made him into its instrument. History, and men skilled in—and trained in—the use of manipulative techniques, equipped with devices, ideologically oriented, themselves, in such a way that the use of these devices strikes them as a necessary or at least desirable method of bringing about some ultimately desired goal.”

He spoke highly of the youth of his day, of their stubborn disobedience to the system, of their refusal to be turned into obedient androids. “Their hearts beat with an interior, private meaning. Their energy doesn’t come from a pacemaker; it comes from a stubborn, almost absurdly perverse, refusal to be ‘shucked,’ that is, to be taken in by the slogans, the ideology—in fact by any and all ideology itself, of whatever sort—that would reduce them to instruments of abstract causes, however ‘good.’

“As the children of our world fight to develop their new individuality, their almost surly disrespect for the verities we worship, they become for us—and by ‘us’ I mean the establishment—a source of trouble. I do not necessarily mean politically active youth, those who organize into distinct societies with banners and slogans—to me, that is a reduction into the past, however revolutionary those slogans may be. I refer to the intrinsic entities, the kids each of whom is on his own, doing what we call ‘his thing.’ He may, for example, not break the law by seating himself on the tracks before troop trains; his flouting of the law may consist of taking his car to a drive-in movie with four kids hidden in the trunk to avoid having to pay. Still, a law is being broken. The first transgression has political, theoretical overtones; the second, a mere lack of agreement that one must always do what one is ordered to do—especially when the order comes from a posted, printed sign. In both cases there is disobedience. We might applaud the first as Meaningful. The second merely irresponsible. And yet it is in the second that I see a happier future. After all, there have always been in history movements of people in organized opposition to the governing powers. This is merely one group using force against another, the outs versus the ins. It has failed to produce a utopia so far. And I think always will.

“Becoming what I call, for lack of a better term, an android, means as I said, to allow oneself to become a means, or to be pounded down, manipulated, made into a means without one’s knowledge or consent—the results are the same. But you cannot turn a human into an android if that human is going to break laws every chance he gets. Androidization requires obedience. And, most of all, predictability. It

is precisely when a given person's response to any given situation can be predicted with scientific accuracy that the gates are open for the wholesale production of the android life form. What good is a flashlight if the bulb lights up only now and then when you press the button? Any machine must always work, to be reliable. The android, like any other machine, must perform on cue. But our youth cannot be counted on to do this; it is unreliable. Either through laziness, short attention span, perversity, criminal tendencies—whatever label you wish to pin on the kid to explain this unreliability is fine. Each merely means: we can tell him and tell him what to do, but when the time comes for him to perform, all the subliminal instruction, all the ideological briefing, all the tranquilizing drugs, all the psychotherapy, are a waste. He just plain will not jump when the whip is cracked. And so he is of no use to us, the calcified, entrenched powers. He will not see to it that he acts as an instrument by which we both keep and augment those powers and the rewards—for ourselves—that go with them."

The novelist continued to propound how many of the youth of his day set the example for how to rebel against the system. Not with ideological slogans, but by simply not obeying, not conforming to the powers that be. By living life on one's own terms.

Finally, he spoke of reality, "Reality, to me, is not so much something that you perceive, but something you make."

Thus, those who are not androids, those who are not merely obeying instructions, are the ones who create reality.

Unfortunately, the "powers that be" over the next several decades would sharpen their skills and soon a new generation would rise, a generation quite the

opposite from these disobedient youth from the novelists' day. A generation who saw obedience as a virtue.

As it turns out, uniquely prescient as he was, he had a useful tip for people living in that woeful future day:

"If, as it seems, we are in the process of becoming a totalitarian society in which the state apparatus is all-powerful, the ethics most important for the survival of the true, free, human individual would be: cheat, lie, evade, fake it, be elsewhere, forge documents, build improved electronic gadgets in your garage that'll outwit the gadgets used by the authorities."

Once again, Isidore's heightened mental awareness had served him well. There was no situation, no quandary, he couldn't solve with his superhuman powers of thought. Just as he knew how to get into Friendly Camp, he had deduced exactly what would get him out of Friendly Camp, and in the shortest amount of time possible.

Upon talking more with Max the Warden, he had surmised that what the mentally impaired man had dreamed of his whole life was not to work in Friendly Camp, but to rub shoulders with the "bigwigs" in Hollywood, the ones that Isidore had been so happy to part company with. He knew Max would fit their criteria for being a screenwriter perfectly, so he had arranged a deal with Max. In exchange for letting him leave Friendly Camp early, he had given the warden Roger Payne's contact information, and told him exactly what to say to him in order to successfully land the job. These Hollywood types, Isidore was able to do mental laps around them. They were just too easy to figure out.

Max opted to let him out of the facility in the middle of the night, while the other friendmates were fast asleep, to not call attention to his venal act. Later, he would lie to them and make up a story about how Isidore had somehow escaped on his own.

Isidore's boss, Mr. Sloat, had made the business decision a few years back to stay open all night on Saturdays, since every weekend the proles were out en masse during the 48-hour window in which they were allowed outside their megacubicles, and customers often dropped by in the middle of the night.

So upon his release, not wasting any time, Isidore went straight to the Van Ness Pet Hospital to consult

with Milt the repairman. He knew that The Habitat was goat-level access and above, but he also knew that Milt had just finished repairing an electric horse, so he talked the old repairman into letting him borrow it for a few hours. They could give it back to the owner later. There was no rush. He knew that the valets at the night club weren't as highly trained in these things as he was, so they wouldn't even suspect the animal was false. Milt even let Isidore borrow his black cowboy hat and black boots.

While in the shop with Milt, Isidore noticed a reporter on the TV who was at The Habitat, interviewing people at the club. Among them were Glen Runciter, and a familiar face...Pris! He needed to get down there and talk with them immediately.

John Isidore led the animal out of the shop and onto the street. He mounted the black, majestic, electric steed, with white fur around its hooves and face. It was a Clydesdale, one of those fancy models with built-in GPS and turbo boosters for short distance sprints at higher speeds than the biologics were capable of. It would serve him well in getting across town to the club as quickly as possible. He had ridden one like it twice before. He gave his steed the coordinates of the Habitat nightclub and, knowing these models had a lot of kick, held on tight to the beast's flanks with his legs, and the cowboy hat with his hand. His steed reared up on its hind legs, let out a loud whinny, and they were off.

On the way, he noticed that there seemed to be a lot of trash piled up on the lawns in front of buildings. Was this garbage day? He was making good speed, when, suddenly, he had another attack, and his consciousness left his body again. He floated above himself and the horse, racked with torment. His body had fallen off the horse, while he floated above,

watching. Was it happening? Finally? Was this the end? Had he cheated death all these years only to have to pay the piper now?

A woman walked up to his body, wondering what had happened. Then a crowd started forming. He noticed something weird. The crowd was covered in trash. Bits of trash, like crumbs, dried-up spitwads, crumpled up sticky notes, straws, and plastic silverware, were licking around all over there bodies.

Finally he fell back down into his body. He gasped for breath, and then after several minutes, he was fine. The crowd stood looking down at him, their garbage swirling around them. He assured them that he was fine, got back on the horse, and started once again riding towards the nightclub.

That damn drug. All those years with it running through his veins...the years of writing...the years of dystopia... He had lasted longer than all the rest. But surely, his time was coming soon.

Damn it. Presently, streaks of pain ran through his heart. A heart attack? He pulled over to the side of the rode and got off. The pain was killing him. He couldn't stand. He lay down on the sidewalk. Even the sidewalk was now lined with trash. There was trash everywhere. A woman in a fur coat asked if he needed help. Was he going to die here and now? This couldn't be happening. Not now. He couldn't stop. He needed to get to The Habitat. He needed to stop the animal murderer before they claimed their next victim. The animals were depending on him.

He politely refused the woman's help, and then slowly, once more, got back on the horse. As the horse trotted forward, he thought to himself. I need to find Glen Runciter. I won't allow myself to die. Not right here, almost at the end of my journey. He knew he was close now. So close to meeting the Thinker.

And then, after him, the Programmer himself. The one who would be able to answer all of his many questions. He needed to solve the mysteries of the universe. I need to make use of these special mental powers I've been given to uncover the secrets that have stumped billions of people for eons. And then, I need to share that knowledge with my fellow man, he decided. That's what he was going to do. Solve all of humanity's questions. Find out the truth. Why are we all here? And why hadn't the Programmer shared this knowledge with humanity? Why did so many people have to live in darkness, without answers, not even knowing why they exist? He was determined to uncover, and then to trumpet out the truth long and loud, for all to hear. Where everyone else had failed, John Isidore was going to succeed. That was the most important thing in life. Not money. Not power. One could have all the money and power in the world, and not even know why he was here. Such a being was not much better than a worm. Knowledge. That's what's important. Knowledge of the universe, and knowledge of oneself. Something that every human being on the planet was lacking. He had to find out before he died. He had to put an end to that problem, once and for all, for all of humanity. Nobody else was going to do it. That task belonged to him, and he was going to see it through.

Have. To. Make. It. To. The. Programmer.

Spurred on by purpose, by reason, by the will to succeed, Isidore suddenly straightened his back. I, John Isidore, will not fail! He felt a second wind of energy, and he urged his steed on, kicking its flanks. The horse responded, starting off at a full gallop.

Up ahead he saw that a group of those damn gigantic monopolist holos had decided for some reason to congregate at one of the intersections,

their enormous blue-green, translucent feet blocking the way. Buck Whiteypants and Barry Lightskin along with a few others, were trying to advertise some stupid new gimmick to distract the proles from their slavery. Below them, throngs of autocabs and pedestrian proles averted their course so as to avoid the monopolist-clogged intersection. They were causing a traffic jam. Damn those stupid things! At a time like this? This was the fastest way, and he damn well wasn't going to move out of the way for any stinking monopolist!

He found the switch under the horse's ear and flipped it. "Turbo boosters engaged," announced a robotic voice. Suddenly the electric horse galloped forward at full tilt, deftly darting around the autocabs and pedestrians, straight towards the monopolist holos, and he had to dig in with all his strength to not fall off. There was a staticky popping sound as he entered one of the immaterial phantasms, and cowboy and horse were presently enveloped in a ghostly turquoise glow. The wind stung his face as he practically flew through the feet of that pompous geezer Buck Whiteypants. He then continued to bolt through Barry Lightskin's feet before he heard a siren go off behind him. He looked back. Shit! There was a robo-enforcer on his tail!

Dreaded by all cyberproles, the robo-enforcers were a sight to behold. The automaton's lower half resembled tank treads, while its upper half had the appearance of a shiny metal human, one arm equipped with a large claw for cuffing and manhandling the proles, the other arm with a huge cannon, for when a little more force was necessary. The metallic monstrosity called after him with its loudspeaker, "CYBERPROLE, YOU ARE ORDERED TO STOP AT ONCE!"

He ignored it and soon blew clear of the behemoth monopolist feet. Damn those robo-enforcers, and their rules about not going through monopolist holos! He needed to make it to the club. Runciter and Pris were there, he didn't know for how much longer. He looked back again, and now there were two of the damn things, exiting the holo feet he had just come out of. He didn't have time for this. They were gaining on him, their treads spinning at top speed. And then there were three of them.

Presently, a huge energy beam whizzed past his head. And then another. Shit! He would be fried to a crisp if he didn't do something quick. Luckily, he still had something up his sleeve. Or rather, in his coat. He reached into his coat pocket, and pulled it out. He had obtained it from...sources. It was illegal to own firearms for everyone but the monopolists. But in his hand, he held what looked like a huge Colt Six-Shooter. Except this Colt shot beams of pressurized ion particles instead of bullets. He looked back, aimed the big weapon at the closest robo-enforcer, and pulled the trigger. A huge ion beam blasted the robot right in its head, vaporizing it on contact. The thing veered off to the left and crashed into a vegetable stand.

One down, two to go. More beams whizzed past his head. He crouched down, tight against the horse, making his body as compact a target as he could. He looked back, aimed the weapon again, and fired.

He had to keep switching his view back ahead to not crash. He barely got a glimpse as the second beam made contact with a robo-enforcer, this one's limbs and head flying in different directions, it's chest having been vaporized.

Another energy beam flew in his direction, and this one nicked the shoulder of his gun arm. God

damn it! He almost dropped his gun, but then switched it to his left hand, and carefully aimed, and...

...hit the third one, taking out its treads. It continued shooting, but now it lay immobile on the asphalt, its gun arm flailing wildly, blasting the ground around it in a circle.

He had slowed his steed to aim, and now was going at a gentle trot, the threat behind him subdued.

He realized now that there was a group of cyberprole children staring at him. They must have seen his showdown with the robo-enforcers. He still held the giant Six-Shooter poised in his left hand, ready for action. The children stared in awe at the gun, the cowboy hat, at this man who had seemed to appear from nowhere, straight off the set of a sci-fi Western cyberfilm.

He was an electric cowboy, a rider on a black horse. But he had somewhere he needed to be. He put the gun back in his coat pocket, and then tipped his hat to the children. He flipped a switch. The horse reared up on its powerful hind legs and neighed loudly. The children all clapped and hollered as he rode off turbo-speed into the sunrise.

When he arrived at The Habitat, the valet took his horse. He asked about Isidore's shoulder, but he assured him he was fine. Isidore immediately went to the VIP lounge, which he had heard about from Payne and Norman, who frequented the club every time they were in town. They flew up every weekend on their flippity-flaps, or was it their whizzles, or their aerobuses? He was finding it hard to think clearly now. That fight had really taken the wind out of him.

In the VIP lounge, he spoke with a bouncer named Troy, who referred him to the club owner, Larry, who happened to be nearby.

“So you’re friends with Big Mike, eh?” Larry said. “One of my highest value customers. Glad you could drop by.” Then, noticing Isidore’s shoulder, he winced. “What’s wrong with that shoulder? You oughtta get that looked at.”

“I’m fine. Look, I need your help. Have you seen Glen Runciter? I need to speak with him. It’s urgent.”

“Runciter? Wow, you’re rubbing shoulders with all the big boys, aren’t you? He just left a little while ago. Him and a guy named Joe. Seems they caught a flight to Europe.”

Damn it! He had just missed Runciter! If only I hadn’t taken so long. If only I hadn’t had those attacks, or had to deal with those damn robo-enforcers! “I see. What about the android girls, Pris and Rachael? Have you seen either of them?”

“Hm...I’m trying to remember if I saw Pris earlier... but Rachael I just saw a few minutes ago. It’s hard to keep those girls straight. I think Rachael went up to the roof. It’s that way.” Larry motioned towards the stairs.

Isidore thanked him and straggled towards the staircase leading to the roof.

He could barely walk up the stairs. He could feel himself getting weaker and weaker by the moment. His clothes seemed to be getting baggier and baggier. His chest was pounding. The pain had come back. He ignored it and went on. He noticed small bits of garbage falling from his clothes. Have to keep going...

When he reached the rooftop, a tornado of trash was raging. Bugshack cups, soda cans, plastic containers, and milk cartons were careening through

the air. He put his hand over his eyes and looked around. Nearby, there sat a vast structure that resembled some sort of upside-down boat. A large sign above it read, "The Ark." Under the boat, there were cages with every sort of animal...leopard, zebra, elephant, giraffe, warthog, orangutan, koala bear, aardvark, bear. It was like a zoo on top of the nightclub.

Then, through the twister of junk, he saw her. Pris! The club owner was wrong. He knew this girl...this was his old roommate, Pris! And...she was leading something towards the side of the building...a goat! Just like on the card the idiots had spat out!

"Pris! Wait! Let me talk to you!" he cried.

The pain was unbearable, but he mustered every ounce of strength he had and followed Pris, straining to take each step against the flying trash all around him. His head was pounding. It was hard to breathe. His clothes were almost falling off, they were so loose. He stumbled. He tripped. Laying there in the gravel, helpless, powerless, he felt miserable. But he had to move on! His legs didn't work. He clutched at the gravel and pulled himself forward, one inch at a time. What happened to all that strength he had had moments before, when he needed to make it through the monopolist holos?

He gritted his teeth. I, John Isidore, will myself to get up! All of the worst people survive, and the best people die. I have to survive! I don't care about myself...I care about uncovering the truth!

But try as he might, his arms wouldn't lift his body up. And his legs refused to work.

"Pris! Pris!" he yelled feebly. But she didn't seem to notice him. Got to make it to her. Got to survive...

It won't end this way...I will make it!

He kept crawling, inching his way forward.

CHAPTER 15

QUIBBICK #8: Pink Beam

It was the middle of the night. The novelist was lying in bed. He had just had an impacted wisdom tooth extracted and was hopped up on sodium pentothal. Suddenly, a pink beam of light from outer space reached down into his brain and downloaded several exabytes of information. This was happening a lot to him these days. He had so much information, he could watch all the movies for the next two hundred years without using a television. There were a lot of good skin flicks in there, too. Especially after scientists had mastered genetic engineering, and women started having four, six, and even eight breasts...

Oh, but the novelist's thoughts digressed. Just ignore that last part. Ahem, anyways...

Suddenly, the pink beam reaching its zenith, the data brimmed over in his head, and he remembered the future with perfect clarity, down to the minutest detail.

I see...

Corporate rebels.

I see corporate rebels everywhere...

The corporatization of rebellion.

Safe rebellion.

Risk-free rebellion.

100% painless, quick, and easy rebellion, or your money back!

Be a Corporate Rebel™!

A lot has changed since the 70s, when he had given that speech about the youth of his day rebelling against the system...

The capitalist overlords of the future have figured out how to commodify even the concept of rebellion

itself. Rebellion made quick, easy, and convenient. Like everything else, even rebellion had become a bankable product in consumerist America.

It's easy! Simply give your money to "The Man," and in return "The Man" will sell you the feeling of being a rebel. "The Man" will help you feel like you are rebelling against "The Man." And best of all, without any actual work or risk involved!

The androidization of the masses.

We'll convince you you're a human, that you are rebelling against the system, if you'll only just pay attention to the system, and give the system your time and money. Nice little trick to keep people engaged in the system.

Pretty bleak future, he thought.

In the future, I see another depressing trend. Hardly anybody reads books anymore. Everybody just watches movies and series, and the intellectual content of 99.99% of those is about zilch. Or they watch videos on CorporateTube, the average intellectual content of which is even worse than Hollywood fare, if that can be imagined.

I see the shift from reading books to simply watching movies and series and CorporateTube videos resulting, sadly, in a general lowering of the IQ of the population.

The future is dumb.

The devolution of mankind.

I see Hollywood making a lot of really bad adaptations based on my stories for many decades to come, making shit-tons of money off me after I'm safely out of the way.

I see Yuval Harari announcing that humans are now "hackable animals," which is really what I warned against fifty years before him in my 1972 speech *The Android and the Human*. He calls it

hacking human animals; I called it “androidization.” He arrogantly announces that free will is over, as if the androidization process were already complete. Except, he says all this as if it were a good thing. Is he friends with Howard Scott? In the future they mock and want to destroy everything that I defended in that speech, about humans remaining free, and not following orders. And that means that my speech will be even more important in the future than when I gave it.

“Hackable animals.” Androids. Programmable humans. Humans that are 100% obedient to the system, while thinking they are rebelling against the system. One way to hack humans is to program them through the corporate media and corporate entertainment to think they are a rebels when they are just following orders from their corporate overlords. Rebelling against capitalism by doing exactly what the capitalist-owned media and entertainment tells them to do.

If humans really want to be rebels, they should break away from the system their corporate overlords have built and create their own systems—their own entertainment, their own news, their own discussion, not the one being blared at them 24/7 by the system, which will leave them thinking they are rebels while they are supporting the system which they claim to be fighting.

The corporate rebels of the future have lots of slogans, but slogans do not a rebel make. They have the form of a rebel, but lack the substance thereof. The rebels of the 60s and 70s were actually rebelling against the system. But the rebels of the future are just repeating slogans they saw on television.

Haven't they figured it out? If it's being televised, that means it's not a revolution! Like that song by Gil

Scott-Heron. The Revolution Will Not Be Televised. Therefore, whatever revolution you see on television will be the fake revolution, the one that will keep the powers that be in power. Why would the powers that be, that control the television, televise a real revolution against themselves? If there is a real revolution, they'll ignore it. Or they'll demonize it. They won't be the ones pushing it!

Perhaps the most important revolution, the revolution against the surveillance-industrial-complex—which is the absolute end of freedom—will never be televised. And the corporate shills calling themselves “reporters” will never tell anybody to go to protests and chant slogans about dismantling the mass surveillance system. Why is that? Because the powers that be want to keep the control grid they are building in place. In fact, they want it to grow and grow until it melds with and controls every facet of all of humanity, of every human's life, until humans are not only surrounded at all times by surveillance, but the surveillance grid itself even goes inside the humans, spies on, reports on, and controls them from the inside, becoming part of their very being. What Yuval Harari calls “under-the-skin” surveillance. Complete and total androidization! The human species and the surveillance apparatus fused together into one planetary monolithic being, easily manipulated, easily controlled. The utter destruction of free will. And not a single TV reporter will report on that news, or any revolution against it.

Was Scott-Heron receiving pink beam downloads, too? Was that the revolution he was singing about? Perhaps he had seen it. The coming global technological prison, and the untelevised revolution against it.

In my time now, in the 1970s, there are a lot of

youth being themselves, disobeying, resisting being part of any system. Refusing to get sucked into any political party or to believe in any politician. Living life on their own terms, in spite of the system. They hate surveillance and control. They fight against it every chance they get.

The people of the future could learn a lot from the rebels of the 60s and 70s, who are far different from the corporate rebels of the future. And they could learn a lot by reading my speech *The Android and the Human*.

Yes, in the future, those groups that want to control society have sharpened their skills, have honed their craft, and have figured out how to get people to conform and be cogs in the machine. It is by indoctrinating them to think they are rebels. Because a human always wants to feel like a human, like they are rebelling against the system. But the corporate rebels of the future are wrong. They are not rebelling. They are just doing what their overlords tell them to do. They are no danger to the system. They are cogs in the machine, being used for its benefit.

The fake revolution will be televised.

All of the corporate media, all of the television indoctrination, which people in my time knew we were fighting against, will be geared towards making people think they are rebelling against the system, while they are supporting and holding up the system. And sadly, many people will believe it, and the revolution against the system, that was alive in my time among the youth, will falter, will flicker, will fade, as corporate rebellion is embraced by a new generation... But will the real revolution ever start back up again? Not the political one, with slogans and chants and buzzwords, where people believe

politicians will save them, but the one where everyone ignores and defies the system every chance they get?

Ah fuck it. The future is kinda depressing. Think I'll watch one of those skin flicks. Maybe the one with eight boobs...

They had arrived. His closest monopolist friends. Along with all his immediate family members. About twenty people in all. His wife Judy. His secretary Barbara, with whom he was having an affair. A few other women he was having an affair with. His seven children, the oldest of whom was Kevin, who was also head of the diversity department at SocialEqualityFlix. Herman Delmar, Kyle York, Wyatt Burkhard, Simon Reinier, and the producer Roger Payne. All of them were gathered around Norman's huge bedroom, watching in silence as the monopolist wheezed and coughed.

The doctor finished a few more tests, and moved out of the way so his associates and family members could gather closer around his bedside. Norman labored to breathe. His head was pounding. He was clutching his heart. He knew the end was nigh. They were all waiting for him to impart his last words of wisdom, his guidance, for them to carry on after his death.

He picked up a pad of paper and pen from the bedstand. He drew a heart with an arrow going through it. He ripped off the page and held it up for all to see.

After everyone in the room had peered at the little heart on the paper, nobody could make heads or tails of it.

"What the fuck, Mike...you can't talk?" Reinier finally asked, perplexed.

"Oh, fine," Norman said. "I thought you guys were intuitive enough to figure it out, but it looks like I'll need to spell things out for you. What I wanted to say is—"

Suddenly Norman's oldest son, Kevin, interrupted. "Who did this to you, dad?"

Norman coughed and wheezed. "Apparently

somebody whose intelligence I vastly underestimated.”

“You’re not thinking about Izzy, are you?” Payne asked. “There’s no way he could have—”

“Look, it doesn’t matter who it was. What matters is I don’t have very much time left, and I have something very important to tell all of you here.”

“Who is he talking about, dad?” his oldest daughter, Melanie asked.

“Look, he’s just a god damn fictional character,” Norman panted. He was wheezing. “But that’s not important—” He started coughing.

“A fictional character? What are you talking about dear?” his wife Judy asked.

“What? How is that possible? You’re not making any sense, dad.” Kevin looked at Payne as if to say, “Are we sure he is in a clear mental state?”

“Oh, it’s possible alright,” Norman said. “Actually, there isn’t anything that’s not possible. You see, it sounds ridiculous, but right after we started injecting people with the drug, weird things started happening. People and things that he wrote about in his novels started showing up in real life. The walls between our world and theirs were breaking down.”

“Our world and theirs? You’re starting to scare me, dad,” Melanie protested.

“The orthogonal realities that he—” Norman winced.

Delmar moved forward to help him. “Mike, don’t you think—” he started, but Norman batted him away.

He continued. “I’m fine! I don’t need your help. Overlapping and intertwined timespaces. Turns out it wasn’t fiction after all. That author, Philip K. Dick. He had visions. He could see into the orthogonal complexities of the universe. The infinite spaces, all

sharing the same time continuum. He was the only one that could see them. That is, until they developed that god awful drug and started injecting it into people. Then all these people, who we thought were just fictional characters, started showing up in our space.”

“But that’s just awful...” Judy started.

“But that’s not what I called you all here to say.”

“What do you want to say to us, Big Mike?” Payne said.

“First of all, I want SocialEqualityFlix to rescind the order to mandate all viewers to take compulsory injections.”

“We didn’t even begin that order,” Kevin said. “We don’t even have enough of the drug to inject everyone with. Not unless we go into fulltime production. But even then, it would take months—”

“Good. Cancel it. Herman. Kyle. Wyatt. Simon. You are my closest and most trusted monopolist buddies.”

“Yes, Mike?” Delmar said.

Norman closed his eyes and paused, gathering his thoughts.

“We...all of us. We were wrong.”

“Wrong? Wrong about what?” York asked.

“Wrong about everything. We overstepped—” he began another coughing fit. Judy gave him a paper cup with water, which he drank. “We overstepped our boundaries. I’ve been doing a lot of thinking. With every action comes an equal and opposite reaction. You can only push people so far. At some point, they are going to fight back. We thought we owned everything. I realize now that I, Michael Norman, own nothing.”

“What are you talking about Mike?” Delmar asked,

confused.

“You heard me. I own nothing. And you own nothing too, Herman. And you too, Kyle. And all of us here. We don’t own shit. We don’t own nature. And we certainly don’t own the proles. Oh, they may be stupid alright, but one day, they are going to get up, walk over to the window of their cybercubicle, open it, and yell at the top of their lungs ‘I’m as mad as hell, and I’m not gonna take this anymore! I’m a human being! My life has value!’ Just like in that old movie...”

“But Dad,” Kevin said. “That’s ridiculous. The actor who played the protagonist in that movie was a Pale Penis. That role wasn’t played by a Non-Pale Vagina. That was a white supremacist movie. Not only that, he was a Masculine-Presenting Male. A Presenting Pale Penis! A Triple-P! Even worse than a Double-P! Evil incarnate! Literally the patriarchy!”

“We’re the fucking patriarchy, you moron! Are all of you blind? We’re the oppressors! What the fuck is that thing dangling between your legs? And who gives a fuck which actor played that role? Is something true because of the skin color of the person saying it, or because it’s true? Are you starting to believe our own drivel?”

“But Mike, Kevin is right,” Burkhard protested. “If one of the proles said something like what that evil Triple-P said, it would be labeled as Hate Speech by the apparatchiks and they would be thrown immediately into Friendly Camp as a Racist Extremist.”

“Oh, get over it Wyatt. You think you’re invincible? You think the same thing that happened to me can’t happen to you? You think the proles are gonna keep putting up with this bullshit forever? I’m telling all of you this for your own good! One of these days, the proletariat is gonna wake up, and realize we’re the

ones who are teaching them racist ideology! We're the ones oppressing them, fucking with their lives, putting them out of business and transferring all their wealth to ourselves! We're the ones to rebel against! Not the proletarian Pale Penises. Not their fellow cyberproles. They're gonna realize it, whether we like it or not, because they don't have any god damn freedom! And what are you gonna do when that day comes? They're gonna be pretty god damn angry when they realize we've been lying to them this whole time, and forcing all these restrictions on them. You've got to give the prisoners some more slack! We run a people farm for crissakes. Even the farmers let their cows loose once in a while. Treat them with the tiniest speck of decency, god damn it!"

"But we let them press a button every four years. That's freedom," Reinier protested.

"Are you saying we should give up our estates?" York asked. "After how far we've come to get here? I'm not going to give up half of the Eastern Seaboard so that the dumb, gullible peasants can go out in nature. They don't deserve it. We deserve it, because we are more intelligent, our genes are more fit. Survival of the fittest. The people who control society lying to everyone else to keep them under their thumb is Darwinism at its finest. You are the one who told me that. And besides, everyone in the world wears my Fapple watches. I can spy on every last one of them. Their thoughts and lives are in the palm of my hand. How can they rebel against me? Hell, I even push updates out on them that make their watches work like shit so they have to buy a new one every two years. I think the proles hate that even worse than they hate the technological prison. Anyways, I'm Darwinian, and I'm homo superior by

virtue of my superior social control schemes, my superior mind. If the proles are less evolved than I am, that's not my problem."

"We *are* more intelligent than the rest." Norman sighed. "I agree with you, Kyle. You're right. You've always been one of the most intelligent, next to me. Your logic is flawless, except it's just missing one thing. We're not gods. We can fall. We're drunk on our own power. Pride goeth before the downfall. We've done pretty well for ourselves up to now, what with our monopolies and this Multi-Tastrophe bullshit. It really worked. For a while. I admit that. But don't think things will last like this forever. We need to be farsighted. We need to see farther into the future. We need to be more moderate is all I'm saying. This is a warning to all of you. I'm telling you all this for your own good; believe me, I am. It is in your best interests to pay heed to my words. I don't want you to end up like me."

"But—" York wanted to continue, but bit his lip. He looked at the ground, thinking.

A profound silence fell over the room. His wife and kids looked at each other with a concerned look. They didn't know what to make of all this. All present thought about Norman's unexpected sermon, about this unforeseen change of heart they were witnessing in the monopolist. It was so contrary to what his entire life had been about.

Norman's wife Judy was about to say something, but Delmar held up his hand. He spoke with a soft voice, "You're...you're right, Mike. We've taken things too far. Starting immediately, we're going to make some changes. Don't you worry." And to York, he said, "He's right, Kyle."

York looked at Delmar. They exchanged glances for a moment. And then York sighed. "Herman was

always better than I at seeing the wisdom of a wiser man's words. Mike, you were always the wisest and most cunning of us all. I always looked up to you, strived to be more like you. What you said was exactly what we needed to hear. Thank you for being the voice of reason for the rest of us."

"You don't have to even stop being monopolists," Norman pleaded. "Just cut the proles some slack, for god's sake. That's all I'm asking. It's my dying wish. I just want to make the world a better place, and what I am telling you is what I would have done if I were still around."

Reinier put in, "We should respect Big Mike's dying wish. It's the least we can do."

York added, "We're going to take what you said to heart, Big Mike. And we're going to pass the word along to the rest of the monopolists. We're going to respect your wishes. You can rest assured." All the monopolists grunted in agreement.

"Thank god! Now I can die in peace," Norman said.

Having said all he had wished to say, and his strength failing, Norman stopped speaking. Each of his children, his wife, and his lovers walked up and hugged and kissed him and said their last words. The monopolists also gave their parting words. Then he waved everyone away, and they obeyed. Each one took one last look at their father, their co-monopolist, their lover, and left.

He had fulfilled his life purpose. He had made mistakes, but he had done everything he could to amend those mistakes, here on his deathbed. He sincerely hoped his friends would take his words to heart. He hoped they would help create a better world. He hoped they would have pity on the proles, and on themselves, since if they didn't heed his words, they would share his same fate.

The dying monopolist relished his last few moments of neuronal activity. He used the time to think the last thoughts that would ever course through the synapses and dendrites of his cerebral tissue. I have lived a powerful life. I have influenced billions. And now, with my dying breath, I wish those billions a better life. And I apologize, from the bottom of my heart for the great lie which I was a part in promulgating. And above all, I apologize to my son, for not trusting in my heart and doing what was necessary to save him from his tragic fate.

His thoughts finally finished, his head bowed. And then, his master, hungry for intelligence to feed off of, came to claim him.

Later, they would find his empty five thousand credit pajamas, and inside them...shattered diamonds, melted gold rings, sprinkled cocaine, busted strap-ons, the remains of a dominatrix's whip, the broken inner components and bits of shattered lenses from surveillance cameras, and the crumbling fragments of Cyberverses goggles.

Michael J. Norman, the man who had influenced the lives of billions, for better or for worse, was gone.

On the roof of Norman's vast fortress, the meeting over, and with other business to attend to, Herman Delmar walked towards his Zippilator 3000, Kyle York towards his Prynomotor Z13, Wyatt Burkhard towards his Steedelopter 800, and Simon Reinier towards his Tweedlecon X, each of them smirking, a smug look on their faces. They looked at each other. Then they broke up laughing.

"What the hell was he talking about?" York said.

"Yeah, he really went batshit crazy in the last moments of his life," Delmar said. "That poor motherfucker."

"Well, time to go back to ruling the world," Burkhard said.

They each retina-scanned themselves into their ultra high speed personal skycrafts and zippilated, prynomoted, steedled, and tweedled across the continent back to their own massive estates.

Rachael stood at the precipice, looking down on the city below. The air was calm. The morning sun shimmered like liquid gold on the nearby buildings' windows. In her hand she held a leash, and attached to the leash was a black Nubian goat.

She heard something impossibly small and quiet behind her. She looked behind and saw no one. Then, still looking back, wondering whose voice she had just heard, she turned her gaze downward, at her feet, at the roof of the building. There, on the ground before her, lay a meager, pitiful form. It was gaunt, almost a skeleton. So small and withered. Could this thing be alive? Its eyes looked up and peered into hers.

"Pris! What are you doing? Pris...say something! It's me, Isidore."

What was this miserable thing? It looked like a desiccated human. Was she supposed to feel pity for it? Was that the right emotion? Is that what a human would feel right now? But she instead was filled with a horrible feeling of unease. Perhaps even dread. She wanted this thing to go away. She couldn't stand looking at it. "My name isn't Pris."

"But, but...Pris. Of course you're Pris! I know you. You're my friend."

Should she explain it to this...this thing? That she was not Pris? Better to just ignore it. Do what I came here to do. Or better yet, let this thing witness for all the world what she came to do. She picked up the goat and held it in her hands. She turned towards the shriveled up human-thing and looked at it with a smirk.

"Pris, what are you doing with that goat?"

"I'll tell you what I am going to do. I'm going to kill it."

"But you can't...You can't kill it. Must...protect...the

animals...”

“Ha! Protect the animals! And why would I want to do that? I’ll never be treated even half as well as this animal. Or half as well as a dog. Or a cat. Or a horse. Or cow. All of them...flesh and blood. Real! Hahahaha. Real...and me, just a synthetic. A fake. Second rate. As far as humans are concerned, anyways. But I didn’t decide to be who I am, what I am. I didn’t even decide to exist! It’s humans who decided that for me! And now they treat me worse than an animal. They treat me like a, like a...thing, that you can use when you want to use it, or ignore when you want to ignore it. I’m just a thing to you, to all of you!”

“But you’re not a thing to me...You’re my friend. I don’t care if you’re human.”

But it didn’t matter. She wasn’t paying attention, and his voice was so small. She had already turned around, and now, with a gleam in her eye, she tossed the goat over the edge. Her eyes shone wildly as she watched its helpless body fall like a ton of bricks, down, down, below, until finally...

Now she was smiling.

Now she was feeling.

This feeling.

Revenge.

It feels good.

It feels like happiness.

This was the one thing that could trigger her happiness emotion now. Revenge on the humans who had created her and then cast her aside. Kill their beloved animals. Kill them all! Watch them suffer as they wonder who murdered their wonderful, dear, dear little animals.

Wait. What had the human-thing said?

Friend?

He had called her a friend. For the first time in her life, a human had called her that word. "Friend."

She turned around to look down at the human who had just called her friend.

But...there was nobody there. He was gone. Disappeared.

Only a pile of empty clothes remained. She knelt down. She examined the clothes. Inside them, there were torn scraps of paper, some push-pins, paperclips, bits of pencil, ripped fragments of index cards, a few broken keys from a computer, small bits of wire, some broken circuit boards, a shattered gun...and the remains of what appeared to be a datastick.

For once, a human had called her a friend. To every other human on the planet, she wasn't a friend. She was a thing. She was a product. She was a new technology. But she wasn't a friend.

But now, he was gone. Never again would this happen, she knew. The other humans don't see her this way. This was the one human who could treat her kind with dignity, with respect. Who was this human?

But it didn't matter now. He was dead.

Having herself been brought into this space by the Thinker, she knew about the Potentialverse and all its multifarious layers, all connected through their core by Thought. And now, thinking about how this man had called her Pris, she realized who this was. This dried up human, who had turned into kipple before her eyes, was the man Pris had talked about, whom the Thinker had brought into this orthogone, along with Pris, Rachael, and the rest of them.

Another feeling welled up inside her. This was a new feeling for her. What was it? Was it sadness?

Was it emptiness? This must be....yes.

She realized that this was pity.

She looked down once more at the scraps at her feet. She noticed something several yards off. A black hat. Was it his?

She walked over and picked up the hat. Then she walked back to the side of the building, and looking out at the morning sun, glistening, she threw the hat off the building, and as it sailed downward, ever downward, her words rang out in the crisp morning air.

“Thought thou art, and unto thought shalt thou return.”

CHAPTER 16

Joe couldn't believe it. He was back. In the flesh. The real Philip K. Dick. And he was sitting on an airplane in the seat next to him. He was exactly as he had looked in the photos, and in cold-pac at the moratorium. But now, he was actually alive, and he was going to save the world.

Runciter had told them he was going to stay a little bit longer in Zurich, needed to talk with his wife. He said he wanted to take her out of cold-pac after all these years. So he had sent Dick and Joe back to save humanity together. Joe had lived through a nightmare, had overcome his fears, and had had the most surreal time of his life. But nothing could prepare him for this moment. Now, sitting together with Philip K. Dick, rushing through the sky back to America, it seemed like a dream come true.

Dick sat in his seat with a content look on his face. It felt good to be alive. I came back at the perfect time, he contemplated. I am the perfect person to save the cyberproletariat from the technocrats, from the greedy monopolists who sit there monitoring and controlling, while the populace sit in their cubicles, or rather, their prisons, connected to the Cyberverses, and to their Fapple watches which constantly update everyone on earth about their every doing. Panopticon, here I come! Fear my wrath, o Kiplizer. Thou hast ne'er confronted one such as Philip Kindred Dick!

Ah, fuck it, he thought. I'll soliloquize after I defeat it. And then, with the Kiplizer gone, I can focus on other things. What will my next novel be about? Maybe the god above the three gods, who are over all the other gods? A new cosmogeny? Or maybe something more intimate and personal. Like...what do electric sheep dream about? Forget it. Saving the world is enough for now. We'll cross that bridge

when we come to it. All in due time...

The newly reanimated author turned on the TV screen on the back of the seat in front of him and began flipping through the in-flight channels. Crap. Crap. More crap. All this Hollywood crap! All those Hollywood screenwriters' kipplized brains, turning into mush, and turning the masses' minds into mush along with them. Was there even a filmmaker out there who made good work these days? He wondered. No, he answered himself. Because they had all decided to work for Hollywood, and Hollywood meant kipple.

But even in this kipplized world, there must be somebody, at least one person out there... What if an artist refused to work for the system? Instead of becoming "rich" and "successful," the opposite would happen...his work would continue to get better and better. Where the other artists' pockets were enriched as they dumbed down the masses, his own work and abilities would be enriched. An investment in himself and a rejection of the parasitic system. In fact, because his talents and abilities would continue to grow and grow, his work would become far better than any artist who had made the Faustian bargain.

That's what I did wrong, Dick mused. I was right in refusing to write that dumbed-down version of Do Androids Dream. But I never should have done any deals with Hollywood to begin with. That's why they froze me, and experimented with my cerebral matter and came up with that drug. They used me. And they continue to use me. *It* used me. To create this dystopia. But now I'm back, to settle the score.

After a moment, Joe asked, "Mr. Dick?"

"Please, call me Phil. I consider you to be a friend."

"Thank you. Phil, then." Joe beamed with pride.

He was on a first name basis with humanity's savior. "I didn't want to intrude, but a moment ago... you were on a roll. It was brilliant. I just wanted to tell you...I'm able to hear your thoughts." It was true. Joe had been sitting there, in rapt attention, listening to the great man's thoughts. The power was back.

Dick smiled knowingly. "Yes, so you are."

"But how? I thought you said the drug had worn off."

It's because you're next to me, Dick thought in reply. My powers must be rubbing off on you.

Amazing! I never want to lose the power to read thoughts again. What did you call it? The PKD touch, Joe thought. But then he added in a normal voice, "But it seems a little bit weird talking telepathically." Joe laughed. "I guess I'm not used to that yet. So let's just talk normally for now."

"Whatever floats your boat."

Suddenly, from the seat behind them, a voice cried out in desperation, "Mr. Dick! Mr. Dick! I've got an important message for you! The fate of humanity depends on it!"

Joe looked back. It was a foggy, translucent version of himself. A ghost.

"Don't worry," Joe said to Dick. "He's just a ghost. I remember when I was him, when I was dreaming." And he also remembered when he had told that to himself, when he was dreaming. Dreamception.

"I was just thinking," Joe said. "Do you think, after you save the world and defeat the Kiplizer, that the news will talk about me too, about how I was one of the people who helped rescue you?" Maybe then women at the club will treat me as they did before, like a celebrity, he thought. Was it wrong to hope for that?

Dick put his hand on Joe's shoulder. "Absolutely.

I'll make sure to give credit where credit is due. And you deserve it. I wouldn't be here without you."

Just then, a flight attendant with long, dark hair approached, offering lunch. She had on a necklace with one of those Christian fish symbols, and, through the open windows nearby, it caught the glint of the sun and reflected a brilliant pink beam.

Dick had an epiphany. That's right. VALIS. That force opposing the Kiplizer. Zebra. The mimic that opposes the irrationality of the false creator, Samael. Organizing the forces of rationality and life itself against chaos and destruction. I was wrong to be so gloomy when it downloaded all those remembrances of the future into my brain. Things aren't as bleak as they seem. I won't—we won't—be fighting alone. VALIS, or Zebra, or Pink Beam, or whatever the fuck I choose to call it at the moment, has called upon me, Horselover Fat, the protector of innocent and gullible people everywhere to ward off the invasion of the dark entity feeding off of, breaking down, men's minds and the order of the cosmos itself, enslaving people to the system, posing as their savior. Thus, the fate of the universe, the very struggle between chaos and order, lies not only in my hands, but in the hands of everyone who chooses to join with me in the fight against the system, against the androidization, against the Kiplization of mankind.

We are the protectors. The protectors of the whole human race. Those of us who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and brains to receive pink beam downloads from outer space. We, all of us, must, like Joe has finally learned to do, believe in ourselves. Believe that we will win. And I do believe in myself. And in us. And I know that we will win.

Joe thought to himself and to Dick. Amazing, Phil.

I know you can do it, too. And I know we can do it. We will all defeat the Kiplizer. We won't become androids. Our brains won't be turned into kipple.

They smiled a knowing, conspiratorial smile.

The flight attendant with the dark hair returned and brought Dick and Joe their lunch. They sat there, eating in silence, each man thinking great thoughts, each thinking about how they were going to use their epiphanies to save mankind.

Then, after finishing his food, Dick rubbed his temples. "I'm a little bit tired. I think I'm gonna take a nap."

Joe nodded. He turned on the screen on the chairback in front of him, and put in the earphones. The pretty news reporter he had seen earlier was standing in a place he recognized, saying, "I'm here at The Habitat, the exclusive nightclub. It was here that just hours ago a black Nubian goat was murdered, thrown off the top of the building. The culprit: Rachael Rosen. Since she's an android, she can't be sentenced to Friendly Camp. However, Eldon Rosen of the Rosen Association assures that she will be properly dealt with and that this won't happen again."

Joe sat there, in shock at what he had just heard. What the hell? She murdered my goat! Why? What type of sick and depraved thing was this Rachael Rosen...this android?

"Phil...that android girl, Rachael, she—"

He turned and looked over at Dick. Gone! Disappeared! Vanished!

Oh my god! What happened? He looked down. In the seat where Dick had been a moment before, lay some bubblegum wrappers, a few pieces of lint, a bottle cap, a couple of bookmarks, a few typewriter keys, ripped up sci-fi pulp magazines, several

amphetamine tablets, manuscript fragments, and various bits of paper with print on them that looked like they came from novels.

“Oh my god!” He cried out in terror. “He’s been kipplized! Oh my god, oh my god...the Kipplizer finally got him. Philip K. Dick is through! Kipplized!” Joe panicked. What hope did humanity have now?

Just then, as Joe stared at the kipple on the seat, someone walked up the aisle from behind. “No, I just had to use the restroom,” Dick said as he sat down.

Joe clutched his chest and exhaled. “Thank god! I almost had a heart attack.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be around for a long time to come. I ain’t going anywhere.” Dick winked.

“But what are those pieces of novel and typewriter doing on your seat?”

“Erhm...good question,” Dick said, looking down. He stood up and inspected some of the scraps on the seat. He sat back down. “Seems I had all that garbage in my pockets when they put me in cold-pac. It kind of builds up over the years. I think the Kipplizer was trying to do me in, even before they found me. But it failed.”

After Joe had calmed down, he said, “Phil, she murdered my goat. Or rather, it was some lady’s goat. I was borrowing it. The android girl. She killed it. Why would she do such a thing?”

“Simple. Jealousy. Androids aren’t allowed to own animals.”

Joe thought back to how jealous she had been in the club of the other girls, how it had driven her to practically attack him and steal him away. Androids. Walking around with human emotions. What has this world come to?

Dick was so wise, he had answers to every question. How did he know so much?

Hearing his thoughts, Dick thought in reply, I'm the Thinker.

You're the what? Joe thought. They had reverted to conversing telepathically. Each time, it felt a little more natural.

I'm the Thinker. The one who can see through all of the different layers of existence. My thoughts were what connected all the planes together and brought Rachael, Pris, Isidore, Bonny, Scotty, and all the other ones into this layer of existence.

Amazing, Joe thought. Then he truly was their protector. Even his very thoughts were powerful. Could connect time and space. He was the one who could do battle with the Kiplizer, could protect them all.

But remember, Dick thought in reply, you have the power of Thought too. We all do. But most people don't even realize they have it.

Just then, a voluptuous strawberry blonde flight attendant with green eyes approached them. Joe couldn't resist taking a gander up and down at her assets. The staff on this flight ain't half bad, Joe thought to himself.

"Would you like something to drink?" She said in a perky voice.

"I'll have a water." Dick said.

"And I'll have a grape juice," Joe added. As she bent down to hand Joe his juice, he could see the curvature of her large breasts, which he liked. It reminded him of Bonny and her huge knockers. I should forget about androids, he thought. They're not natural. That fetish just ain't for me. I like human girls, not that virtual or mechanical crap. He was enjoying looking at the natural beauty of this real woman. But then, as he took the juice, he noticed, to his horror, her hand. Mechanical. Then he noticed the

eyes. Horizontally slotted. He didn't like that. He was instantly turned off. This airline wasn't as good as he had thought it was.

Then he noticed another metal hand reading a book across the aisle. And another, drinking a lime soda. And another, and another, down the whole aisle. Everyone on this plane.

He looked down at the floor. He pulled up his foot...there was bubblegum stuck to it again. And all that disgusting crud on the floor was back...Hadn't they cleaned this plane?

No...it couldn't be happening again...not here, not now... not when they had finally brought Philip K. Dick back to life.

And then, with horror, he realized that even Dick now had the slitted eyes, the mechanical hand, the steel teeth.

Then, he looked down at his own hand, holding the juice. Even it was mechanical! Oh my god, he thought. Am I becoming an android? Or is this the Kiplizer, asserting its presence through me?

Was he back in the dreamworld, or were they all in the dreamworld together? Perhaps all of humanity was now under its control.

"Phil, you've got to save us. We can't go on this way!"

"Oh, I will. Don't worry. But why do you keep referring to me as if I were the twentieth-century author, Philip K. Dick?"

Joe looked at Dick, aghast. What was he saying? Suddenly panic and terror overtook him. Dick had said it in a naive, genuine way, like he was really confused. Was he really that weak? Had it already entirely overcome him? Or was this just a figment of Joe's imagination? Perhaps he had been in the dreamworld the entire time, since the old man had

given him the drug until now. Or perhaps by taking Dick out of cryostasis, they had achieved the opposite of their intention. Since Dick had the Kiplizer in his brain, perhaps they had infected everyone on this plane with it. And perhaps now they were going to bring it back with them and infect all of America. Everyone, all of us...we're all done for!

No! I've got to get my own mind under control. That's how the Kiplizer works. It controls through fear. Negative thought patterns play into its hand, he realized. I came all this way to rescue Philip K. Dick, and I'm not giving up, Joe chided himself. He had to stay mentally strong. He had been called upon through Buster Smiley to rescue Dick and end this mess. And Dick was right. He was humanity's one and only hope. Our only ticket out. Dick is just wrestling inside with the thing...that's why he is confused. That's why we are all confused. That's why he has the hand and the eyes; that's why we all do. We are looking to him for strength and direction.

Despite everything, even if Dick had the hand and the eyes, Joe knew he couldn't give up on him. It is my job to help Dick continue believing in himself, just as he once helped me to believe in myself, so that he can take on this colossal responsibility which has fallen on him. No matter what, I can't give up hope in him. I've got to be there to help him. That is my role in the universe. Dick's helper.

Then he noticed something. Everyone on the plane was now Philip K. Dick. And they all had the eyes, the hand...

Fuck.

We're in deep shit, he thought to himself.

Joe sat there, unable to speak, lost in his thoughts, lost in his astonishment. How in the hell

were they ever going to get out of this one?

Suddenly, he noticed that the Dick sitting next to him had started watching a movie on the seatback screen in front of him, and he was laughing hysterically. He seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the film. His mechanical hand reached into a bag of popcorn, and pulled out... Wait, that's not popcorn! Joe looked in disgust. The bag was full of that awful crud from the floor of the plane. And on the bag itself was written in bold letters, "Kipplecorn." Dick kept taking handfuls of used bubble gum, dirty pieces of lint-covered fruit rollup, carpet boogers, clumps of hair, dead flies, very small rocks, clumps of mud that had fallen off people's shoes, and other grime and putting it in his mouth, eating the disgusting garbage. Joe winced. He could hardly bear to look...

"Please Phil," Joe's voice was pleading now. "You are the only one who can save us! You have the power! I believe in you. Buster Smiley believes in you. We all believe in you. Save us from this nightmare!"

Dick, eyes focused on the screen in front of him, kept eating the trash and laughing at the movie. "Huh? What nightmare?" Dick replied. "By the way, you should check out this Hollywood movie I'm watching, it's fucking awesome! Luke Skywalker as a Non-Pale Vagina. I think it's called Pale Penises Strike Back or something like that. Luke's father, Darth Vader, is a giant Pale Penis. It's fucking hilarious!"

Joe suddenly noticed that all the Dicks on the plane were watching the same movie. They were all laughing raucously and commenting on the movie loudly to one another. And they were all eating bags of trash as they did so.

"These Hollywood movies just keep getting

better and better,” a Dick across the aisle from them said.

“I heard a new film’s coming out,” said another Dick in the row in front of that one, “It’s going to be called ‘The Return of Philip K. Dick.’ Only Dick is going to come back to life as a dark-skinned female named Philippia Kaye Vagina so she can save us all from the Pale Penises. Such an original take.”

“Oh yeah,” came a loud Dick voice from behind them. “I can’t wait for that to come out. Philip KKK Dick was such a racist, his skin being all pale and that totally unacceptable meatsack between his legs. Can’t wait to see a film about him, I mean her, with some actual representation. But it won’t make up for years of white supremacy, making people watch all those movies based on the imagination of some weirdo straight pale guy with a penis. A Triple-P, the trifecta of evil. They never should have adapted his stories. They should have only made sci-fi films based on sci-fi novels written by dark bodies with vaginas.”

Just then, in the aisle, Joe saw the egg monster from before skitter past. Then he saw another one go past, and another. He saw one of the monsters stop for a moment, and wriggle around in place a little bit. A new one, identical, popped off of its back. They were multiplying. And they were shouting in some language like some crazy little inhuman thing having the time of its life, hopped up on amphetamines. It seemed like everyone on the plane was having a great time except for him. As he sat there bewildered, other dinners were morphing into monsters, taking cat-like forms, dog-like forms, monkey-like forms. The plane was becoming a zoo.

“Holy shit! What the fuck is this?” Joe gasped under his breath, more to himself than to anyone

else.

One of the Dicks in the seat in front of them, apparently hearing his comment, turned around and said to Joe, "Come on, man. You're the only one not enjoying the flick. Stop being such a buzzkill."

"Hey, everybody shut up! This is my favorite part!" the Dick seated next to Joe said.

On the screen in front of Dick, a dark-skinned woman with a cheap blonde wig, wearing something that looked like a Luke Skywalker costume from a bargain discount bin, was standing on top of a plastic bridge that looked like it might break at any minute, in front of a super low budget sci-fi background, plastic lights flashing, and what appeared to be children's building blocks spray-painted gold and silver glued to the wall. She held a blue "lightsaber" which looked like a cheap plastic toy. And she was having a lightsaber duel...with a giant pale dick! The giant, man-sized boner walked back and forth on the bridge, using its balls as legs, veins bulging all over its light skin, as it parried the woman's blows with its cheap plastic red lightsaber. On its glans, it wore a shiny black helmet, from which hung a black cape. Their plastic lightsabers whirred and buzzed with tacky sound effects as they battled, back and forth on the bridge, until suddenly, the giant dick won the upper hand, slicing off dark female Luke Skywalker's hand.

"Oh, I've seen this movie a million times already," commented one of the Dicks in a loud, obnoxious voice. "The protagonist's name is Lukreeshya Moonwalker, and she's a million times better than that terrible racist extremist Triple-P Skywalker played by Mark Hamill, that pale loser with a weenis."

"Shhh! I'm trying to listen," another Dick complained.

The seatback screens were equipped with speakers, and several of the Dicks had turned up the volume.

On the screen, the giant dick bellowed, “Lukreeshya, you are my daughter! I banged a lot of sisters of the darker persuasion back in the day. I admit, I like their ass better. It’s juicier, fuller, rounder...” Apparently the man-sized erection was getting more and more aroused as it spoke. It had grown by at least a foot or two and become even more rock-hard while talking about all that juicy dark ass until it loomed intimidatingly several feet taller than Lukreeshya. “Don’t worry, Kreeshya baby, I’m not getting a boner because of you, I’m getting a boner because I’m thinking about your mother, whichever one she was. They were all hot. You see, I found you later in an orphanage. Your mother and that thick, bubbly, juicy ass of hers must have been murdered by an extremist Pale Penis. But I’m getting sidetracked. What do you expect a literal life-size boner to think about? Of course I was thinking about pussy! Anyways, what I wanted to tell you was...join me, and we will rule the Potentialverse as dick and vagina! Muahahahahahahah!”

Lukreeshya Moonwalker screamed out, “No, Darth Penis, I’ll never join you!” Then she looked down at her missing hand and smiled. All of the sudden, her missing hand was replaced by a mechanical hand, and then suddenly she had the artificial, surveillance camera eyes. Her steel teeth glistened ominously. Then, she pulled down her pants, grabbed her pussy, and spread the labia wide open, exposing her Non-Pale Vagina and in its center, a gaping black hole. Suddenly, Darth Penis was getting sucked in as if her pussy were some kind of super-powered vacuum cleaner. First the tip,

along with the helmet, went inside her pussy. Then, the stiff, vein-covered, super long cock kept pushing farther and farther up inside her, defying the laws of physics. Presently the whole eight-foot long erect dick had slid all the way up inside her pussy and only the giant balls sat there flapping about in front of her crotch, as if she had mega-balls. Then the balls too got sucked up. Everything was gone. The giant dick was gone. Then, all of the sudden, as Lukreeshya kept her labia spread, the life-sized cock was ejected out, only now it was blended into a million pieces. Bloody dick splattered all over the cheap plastic building blocks on the wall.

Lukreshya Moonwalker spoke, "That's the power of black pussy, bitch! You big cracker-ass boner, you ain't my daddy!" She pulled up her pants. Then she pulled out a white glove and put it over her mechanical hand, grabbed her crotch, and proceeded to moonwalk backwards along the bridge in victory.

Every Dick on the plane started cheering wildly.

One Dick shouted, "Yes! Black pussy to the max, baby! Take that, you dumb ol' huge pale prick!"

And another, "Yay! Down with Darth Penis, and all pale dicks around the world!"

And yet another shouted, "Yay! We're defeating slavery hundreds of years ago just by watching this and giving money to our glorious masters!"

Looking around at the plane full of Dicks, the Kiplizer in full possession of every last one of them, he realized that things had gone from "I'm on a plane with Philip K. Dick and we're going to save the world," to "Humanity is fucked," in a matter of minutes.

Just then, Joe noticed some shit hit the window. Garbage began pelting the side of the airplane, and

the plane began to shake.

The voice of the captain came over the intercom. "Vaginas and gentledicks, good afternoon and thank you for flying with Kipple Airlines. This is your captain speaking, and we're currently heading into some slight kippulence. Please fasten your safety belts and remain calm. Hahahaha! Don't worry folks, it will all be over soon. Just admit it, your life wasn't that great to begin with! And fuck it! They've already destroyed your childhood. And now all the entertainment in the world is complete garbage. The world is run by idiots. If you're not a billionaire, you're demonized because of your light skin. And even if you don't have light skin, you're tracked and traced and surveilled and monitored and controlled from cradle to grave. You're basically livestock, and your masters don't give a shit about you. It's all one big sham. You don't have any power, and nobody's here to save you. We here at Kipple Airlines are sympathetic to your misery. That's why we're here to make your death as quick and painless as can be. So let's just get it over with!"

The crap outside kept battering the plane. The plane began to shake more violently. Soon, the plane was out of control. The Philip K. Dicks were now crashing into each other, unable to hold onto their seats. Joe was hanging onto his seat for dear life, trying not to be dislodged. He looked out the window. They were losing altitude. The plane kept descending, and descending until...

They hit.

There was a large crash, and all of the Dicks and Joe were rammed into the walls, into the seats, into the Dick next to them, or onto the floor. Everything was in disarray. The little egg and dinner monsters were splattered onto walls. But after a few moments they just peeled themselves off, like it was no big

deal, and continued screaming and swinging and running around like they were in the zoo.

Joe looked around. Somehow he had ended up on the floor of the aisle near his seat. A few of the egg monsters gathered around him and began sniffing him curiously. He picked himself up and went back to his seat. He looked out the window.

They were now floating in an ocean of shit.

Maybe the captain was right. Maybe things were better this way. Maybe it was better not to resist, just to get it all over with.

But, no! Philip K. Dick was the one who was supposed to set things straight, to settle the score, to make everything right again. And now they were here, in this zoo of a plane, floating in a pile of manure the size of the Atlantic Ocean.

He had to give it one last try.

Joe put a hand on Dick's shoulder. "Phil, I don't care if you have the hand and eyes. I don't care if everything around us turns into shit. I don't even care if you like Hollywood movies. I believe in you! And I'll never stop believing in you. No matter how horrible the world becomes. You can rescue us! You can do it! Phil...This is your friend, Joe. I care about you. We all care about you. Remember who you are!"

Dick stopped watching the movie to glance at Joe momentarily, as if remembering something, and then nodded. "Oh yeah, you're right, kid. It was a temporary slip. Sorry about that. That was my bad. I just got distracted. I remember now. I'll help the others to remember, too."

"Thank god! That's the Philip K. Dick I know!"

"It might take some time, but we'll do it, because I, the Kiplizer—"

"Philip K. Dick," Joe corrected.

"You're right. I, Philip KKK Dick—"

“Just one ‘K.’”

“Oh yeah. Only one K. Right. I, Philip K. Dick, have the power to save the world. Don’t worry, we’ll do it.”

“You’ve just got to think, to concentrate. For god’s sake, keep focusing!”

“Okay, okay. You’re right. I’ll keep focusing. I’ll keep thinking. Don’t worry. We got this. I won’t let you down, kid.” Dick gave Joe a pat on the shoulder and a wink.

Thank god. That was starting to sound more like Dick again, even if he was still slightly confused. They were making progress in the right direction. Hopefully.

But then, the great author turned the gaze of his slotted eyes back on the film, which was still playing on the seatback screen in front of him. His face lit up, and he was laughing again, his metallic teeth gleaming. “Hey, check this part out...this is hilarious!” Then, he picked up his bag of trash from the floor, picked up all the bits of crud which had fallen out of it and put them back into the bag, and started eating the Kipplecorn again.

And the plane floated in the sea of shit.

THE END

But wait...

No, that’s not the end. Not exactly.

Because then, as all the Philip K. Dicks kept eating their garbage and watching their Hollywood movie, floating in a sea of manure, something else happened...

Joe quieted his mind. He rid himself of all negative energy, casting aside all doubts, all fear, flicking it all away from him effortlessly like it was nothing. He ignored the movie. He ignored the Dicks. He ignored the shit. He ignored the zoo of alien food monsters. He ignored everything around him, and turned his gaze inward.

Then he gathered all his creative energies and focused his thoughts at a point right in front of him.

At first, nothing happened. But soon, trickles of light started appearing at the point in front of him. He focused his attention even more resolutely. Streams of white light started coming out from the point in front of Joe. Soon, the entire plane was filled with a brilliant, blinding light, which enveloped everything. And then, the light disappeared, as quickly as it had appeared.

And there it was.

Amidst the chaos, amidst the Dicks eating their garbage and watching their movie, amidst the monsters multiplying and screaming in their weird language, amidst the plane floating in the sea of manure...there was something floating in the air in front of him. Something shiny.

It was an aerosol can.

And on the can were written the words:

UBIK SAVE HUMANITY SPRAY

The letters were pulsating every color, throbbing. The silver can was shining like a diamond. It was so bright, it seemed to be a light source of its own. The air around it was rippling, and there could be heard a faint humming. Pure power was emanating from the can.

He smiled. He reached out and grabbed the can out of the air. He sprayed it all over himself. Then he sprayed it on the Philip K. Dick next to him. The real

one.

Suddenly, everyone on the plane was back to normal. Not a single mechanical hand or eye to be found anywhere. All of the passengers were back to normal, and there was only one Philip K. Dick, sitting in the seat next to him, just like before. The egg and food monsters were gone. The crud on the floor was gone. All the passengers were themselves again. The Kiplizer's influence was gone.

Joe had realized something.

I didn't need Philip K. Dick's power. I never did.

I have the power to save the world.

The real Philip Dick, fully himself again, put his hand on Joe's shoulder, looked him in the eye, and nodded.

Dick's expression solemn, his mouth unmoving, Joe heard the great man's thoughts: And now that you know that, you don't need me any more. Because now, you too are a Thinker. Now, you have the power of Thought. You've activated the power that was always in you; you just didn't realize it until now.

Then, the great science-fiction author looked up and Joe could hear his thoughts once more. VALIS, they don't need me on this planet anymore. I'm coming back to you.

The air around Dick started shimmering a brilliant pink. Soon, he was bathed in the glorious pink light. Then the light shot up and disappeared.

Philip K. Dick was gone.

So it was on purpose, Joe thought to himself. It was a test all along. He knew I had it in me, but I needed to find out I had it in me. And he needed to know he could trust me to save humanity.

Joe was the one who had the power all along. Dick was just there to show him the way. You don't

need any savior. None of us do. Because the only true savior is yourself. There is no need to look outside oneself for salvation, because every person has the keys to salvation in themselves. The battle is not outward, it's inward. In the mind. Because your own mind is the most powerful thing in the world, more powerful than money, outward possessions, or fame. With your own mind, you have the power to change the world.

Thank you, Phil. Thank you for helping me realize that I have the power. Say hi to the Programmer for me, Joe thought.

He realized now that the epiphany he had had earlier, which he had doubted, was true, but it hadn't worked the first time because he hadn't fully believed in himself back then. And then, another epiphany came to him. He knew that now he was engaged in the most serious battle of all. The battle of Thought. The ultimate battle of existence. The age-old, primordial struggle of the universe. That being with the most powerful thoughts wins. The Kiplizer was trying to wear him down, cause him to doubt himself. The greatest hurdle to overcome, the greatest struggle any human would ever face, is doubt. Doubt in oneself. And it would never be gone. He knew that for as long as he lived, as long as he had the power to think and to create and to overcome any problem, doubt would always be there, insidious, trying to creep in.

But it didn't matter.

Because he knew that as many times as doubt crept in, he would resist it; he would overcome. Bring it on, Kiplizer. You don't know who you're dealing with.

He looked out the window. The plane was floating now, not in shit, but in the middle of the

Atlantic Ocean. As the sun sparkled down onto the blue sea, all the passengers onboard looked at themselves in confusion and amazement. What had happened?

They were stranded in the middle of the ocean, but it was no problem. Because he knew now that no problem would ever be too big, or too difficult.

Joe closed his eyes. He calmed his mind once again. He focused his thoughts inward. Some passengers nearby looked at this strange man, meditating. What could he see, in his mind's eye?

It seemed for a moment as if nothing would happen, as they all sat there in the airplane floating in the ocean, wondering what they should do. And then, suddenly there was a great shudder as the plane began...moving.

The rest of the passengers then stared out the windows, as they realized to their utter astonishment what was happening.

The plane was rising.

It was floating—climbing—straight up.

The passengers gasped in shock and wonderment. As they looked out the windows, they could see the blue waters beneath them growing farther and farther away. The plane continued to ascend, getting higher and higher.

As Joe continued to concentrate, the plane rising ever higher, the passengers could see wisps of white clouds starting to appear beside them.

Suddenly, the plane lurched forward. And then...

It was off.

Joe knew he was ready now. Ready to save the world.

And the plane rushed on to America.

EPILOGUE

The Thinker sat in his cubicle, reading a book. Reading was something he did a lot of these days. And not only reading other people's Thoughts, but writing his own Thoughts, too. Not so much time spent plugged into the Cyberverspace anymore. He was spending time in a mediated reality, yes, but it was his reality; he was the one mediating it.

He knew that the Cyberverspace was a waste of his time, since he knew that one's own mind is the most powerful thing in the universe, and he preferred to spend his time gaining mastery over his own mind, becoming more and more powerful every day.

He set the book down. On the cover were written the words, "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?"

The Thinker closed his eyes. He cleared his mind and focused his thoughts. He breathed in slowly and deeply. He exhaled slowly. His muscles were becoming more relaxed. His posture was becoming better. His mind was becoming sharper, more alert, more loose. His powers had been growing. He was able to connect now. He knew his thoughts were connected to everything across time and space.

"John Isidore," he spoke.

When he opened his eyes, there was another man, standing in the room in front of him.

"Welcome, Isidore. I am the one you seek. I am the Thinker. Have a seat."

The two men sat on the sofa in the cramped cybercubicle.

"The Thinker!" Isidore said. "So you were the one Buster Smiley was talking about! Not the other one!"

“Yes, the other Thinker has...business to attend to.”

“I knew I would find you. I could feel it. Can you introduce me to the Programmer?”

“Yes, I can. But first, we have a small problem.”

“What is that?”

“There is still this Panopticon Control Grid. We need to dismantle it. We need to free the cyberproles.”

“That’s right. And I need to stop the animal murderer.”

“She’s been found. She won’t be a threat to any more animals.”

The Thinker paused, assessing this man, Isidore. He knew from what he had read that he had the right heart. But was his mind tough enough for what lay ahead?

The Thinker continued, “Now, are you ready to help start the real revolution? The one that will not be televised?”

“Absolutely.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Brighton is the author of three novels, including *Brave Gay World*, the first dystopian satire about a homofascist future where penis-vagina sex is outlawed, and *Mind Grid*, a sprawling epic sci-fi about a future where all humans' brains are connected at all times to the internet and unauthorized thoughts are removed by the government.

He can be contacted at jamesbrighton@tutamail.com, or for more info, visit <https://jamesbrighton0.wixsite.com/index>.

James Brighton doesn't support the fiatcracy, so his novels are only available for purchase using cryptocurrency. If you received this novel without paying, or would like to support his work, please consider making a crypto donation:

BTC

12T1K2RRaqFPaAG2muZsds3kFbHQpgPaBM

Ethereum (ERC20)

0x0f17bd0431924cae93fef5eee6b37113b104a9cf

BCH

Qq87xv6q4u5r708ttddm6pf6vm4we5ltvr5m4wkl5

ut

USDT-TRON (TRC20)

TKVwWPHdvAT6RVC4mPc68XE5KiWeBgxd5F

* * *

OTHER NOVELS BY JAMES BRIGHTON

BRAVE GAY WORLD

Words are violence.

Bombs are peace.

Fascism is democracy.

Welcome to the rainbow-colored future, where gayness is mandatory, and penis-vagina sex is banned.

Join Fyfe as he begins a dangerous quest to put his penis in a vagina, at the risk of life in prison, or worse. To make matters worse, he was born into the lowest race-sex caste in society, a pink poker, continuously watched by the all-seeing Gay-I through the Rainbowwatch on his wrist. Brave Gay World is a blitzkrieg of shock humor and satire, leaving bloody bits of ideology in its wake.

Brave Gay World, the first ever dystopian novel about a homofascist future, is the most scathing and hilarious satire of modern day fake “liberal” ideology being pushed on the masses by the capitalist class. If you want to step in line and obey your capitalist masters, then regurgitate their LGBT catechism...if you don't, then read Brave Gay World!

Brave Gay World isn't about telling people to be straight...it's about the exact opposite. It's about not needing permission from megacorporations or politicians to decide what to do with our bodies. Transcending both left and right politics, it presents an alternate path to freedom by rejecting the one monopoly currency and using crypto to create a truly

free market.

MIND GRID

In 1969, Jose Delgado wrote *Physical Control of the Mind: Towards a Psychocivilized Society*, in which he explains how electronics implanted in the brain can control the mind. Fast forward to the future, and all humans have a Brain Computer Interface, and their brains are connected to the internet at all times. And...the internet is run by Earth's wonderful saviors, the mighty Corporations. What could go wrong?

Enter Drake Lively, a Reality Fixer. Growing up in a world where humans are indoctrinated to be asexual, and even the intentional thought of sex is punishable by having one's mind uploaded to the cloud, to endure never-ending psychic torment, Drake's job is to make sure that even the slightest anomalies, such as residual sexual memories, or doubts in the beloved Corporate Saviors, are promptly removed and the person's reality is restored to its government-mandated normal.

But what happens when even the Reality Fixer's reality needs to be fixed? When Drake makes a not-so-permitted intimate mental contact with a female patient, things start to get incredibly dangerous incredibly fast. But never mind that his digitized mind might be forced to endure unending torture, because soon he finds out things are about to get a lot worse for all of mankind, who won't just have to deal with being banned from sex or treasonous thoughts, but will instead become the literal puppets of the Corporate Saviors, who are about to take technological manipulation of the mind to a

whole new level.

Welcome to Mind Grid.

In the future, there is only control.

James Brighton's first sprawling sci-fi epic, *Mind Grid*, eschews the traditional approach in sci-fi of focusing on outer space, and instead explores the vast complexities of the human mind. The second novel in Brighton's *Social Satire Trilogy*--thematically related novels that can be read in any order--*Mind Grid* dials up the satire, absurdism and surrealism to new heights. At over 500 pages, *Mind Grid* delves deeper than any Brighton novel yet and provides hours of mind-bending entertainment.