



THE THOUGHT DENTIST

JAMES BRIGHTON

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THE THOUGHT DENTIST

James Brighton

Blayne sat in the waiting room of Rosewood Mental Clinic. The pure white walls and floor gave him the impression of floating on a cloud. A receptionist in a blue Hawaiian muumuu dress with floral print sat at the spotless, pearl white front desk, behind a white terminal with one of the logos of the capitalist saviors, an apple with a snake whirling about it in the shape of a spiral. The terminal projected a sky blue hologram screen and hologram keyboard, and the large receptionist poked at both with her banana-like fingers. From time to time, a mental nurse flitted in from the corridor in her all-white pajamas to call on a patient. They probably had a name to those loose-fitting garments, but Blayne chose to call them pajamas, because that's what they looked like. Back in the time of homo sapiens primitivus, nurses had been shapely and beautiful, wearing skimpy nurse dresses, their buxom chests inviting men to do ungodly things. Now, after generations of corporate food and government-mandated science classes, all humans were what primitive man, in their unsaved state, had incorrectly labeled "obese"; hence the expediency of the loose-fitting pajamas. These mental nurses weren't starved and primitive. They were healthy and neteworthy, but when they moved, they floated like lesser clouds trapped inside this cloud world, Blayne thought to himself. All these ungodly thoughts would be gone by the time he walked out the door of this clinic, he knew. It was such a lovely pleasure to bask, to wallow, in the fleeting moments of ungodliness.

He had done copious amounts of research, extending the gaze of his mental eye back eons into the past. He knew that not but a century ago, the female body had been much thinner, but in a more shapely way, with boobs and butt, as if they had been starving but somehow the food still found its way into just the right places. They were almost like aborigines foraging for food, without the help of the holy food industrial complex to shove chemical-enriched manna lovingly down their faces, plumping their plump bodies into healthy plumpness. Now, homo sapiens corporatus, was, thanks to the Corporations and their healthier, sugar and corn syrup-enriched foods, a much larger, amorphous

thing. Modern women's boobs and butts were sucked into their vast blob of a body, disappearing completely into the adipose. Citizens of today knew from body positivity courses (one of a plethora of government-mandated science classes at Govly Academy, the place were all new vatlings were educated) that the homo sapiens corporatus was much healthier and lived much longer than the sickly, malnourished homo sapiens primitivus. They had learned the government motto, "We all must be fatasses. Fatasses are healthy." But—and Blayze allowed himself to splurge in the ungovly thought—the female homo sapiens primitivus was soooo much sexier.

While the saved, corporate females were blimps, floating in the ether of the information-rich, connected modern society, the primitive women were pin-up girls, calling like sirens to the floating men above, inviting them down to the naughtiness of the information-starved soil below.

There was a life-size hologram of a slender female in white robes standing nearby, in front of the row of seats where Blayze sat waiting. With outstretched arms, she was exhorting the patients to remain govly at all times and explaining the importance of maintaining their regular schedule at the clinic. He reflected that the proportions of the female primitives were roughly similar to that of this hologram, the only difference being that this hologram, like all government depictions of the ancestors, wore loose-fitting clothes in order to conceal all that inviting shapeliness. The hologram was a digital angel calling men's minds to the light of their glorious saviors. The female ancestors were devils, tempting them away into the shadowy depths of hedonism.

The last three months had made him an expert on the ancestral human body, along with many other subjects. Blayze loved learning. He loooooveeed learning. Not just about the primitive female body, but about literally every subject. Good thing the government allowed unlimited learning. No bans on books, no censors. Their glorious government was generous, liberal, and lenient. They were able to be so precisely because of these clinics, he knew, and was glad of the thought. Knowledge was a dessert, and

he was a glutton at a dessert buffet. He was living in the best time in history. Thanks to his neteworthy, if corpulent, body, all knowledge in the universe was at his neuron tips. Never bored. The pleasure centers of his brain constantly massaged by the wisdom of the ages.

That's why he didn't mind if the mental nurses, in their slow and methodical way, took a long time to call his name. His pleasure organ, his brain, was being stimulated. He had a mental boner. And that was a good thing, because physical boners were banned, and medication was given to prevent them.

Although he was fond of the alluring ancestral female body, he cringed at the thought of living in their time, in primitive, unconnected society. That wouldn't have been stimulating. That wouldn't have given him a mental boner. It was not being there, but rather studying, learning about primitive society from a distance, that thrilled him. Watching a sim about cavemen is exciting. But actually being a cavemen...that probably would have been boring and tedious to the extreme.

A hundred years ago...the unneteworthy time. Unconnected. Unbandwidthly. Chaotic. Random. Haphazard. So unlike our times now. Primitive unconnected man was a Paleolithic sort of creature, only able to very slowly and precariously find access to knowledge in archaic places called "libraries," with ancient information-holding devices called "books." All information and all human beings cut off from one another. The great unsaved era of darkness. Unconnected. Separated. Analog.

The role of the primitives in Blayne's mind was one of never-satiated intellectual fascination. He was like a marine biologist, who had discovered his own intense passion for sealife as a child, finally voyaging deep into the Mariana Trench. Sailing through the sea of infinite information, he was free to imbibe vast quantities of data from the corporate, saved, modern world. But he preferred slurping down information from the world of the primitives. They were so ungodly and titillating. In their darkness and ignorance, ancestral man did not look so directly into the brilliant light of the government. But their darkness was

something piquant, tempting, strangely inviting. Thus, Blayze would spend three glorious months gorging himself on books, articles, films, photographs, anything he could get his hands on from the past, stuffing his mind to the brink of overflowing, only to come back to this clinic, have it all wiped out, and start over. Like an all-you-can-eat restaurant with a vomiting room in the back. Ancient Rome, all over again.

Of course, they didn't erase all your memories. Only the ungovly ones. The government's approach to badthoughts was neither deterrence, nor punishment, but something far more potent: erasure. The advent of memory wiping meant that the government's thought management techniques had reached an unprecedented level of effectiveness.

But spending as much time as he did guzzling down the past put Blayze in a precarious position. There was a lot about the past that was ungovly. For example, the primitives followed the ancient practice of putting penises inside vaginas. Everyone knew that such a barbaric practice was ungovly and unbecoming of homo sapiens corporatus. In those ancient times, the government hadn't yet started giving out free chemicals to suppress the vestigial sex urge. And the females were allowed to get pregnant and to give birth to children. Corporation-saved man could have children now, but not the primitive way, through sexual intercourse. Only through the government vats. The vatlings were still considered to be the children of their parent citizens, but the government technicians were able to take away or add anything to their genome that they saw fit before the child gestated and emerged from the vat. And of course, they were whisked away to Govly Academy for the first sixteen years of their lives to be indoctrinated by the Govly-Makers before being tested and hopefully deemed govly enough to be turned over to their parent citizens. The ancients had had a roughly similar institution called "schools," where "teachers" fulfilled the role of Govly-Maker.

"Benjamin Blayze?" A nurse called out.

Damn it. I was in the middle of an important thoughtstream, Blayze thought.

"It's Blayze Benjamin," Blayze corrected. They always

make that same mistake switching my name around, he cogitated, as he followed the lesser cloud with its pajamas down a long, white corridor almost to its end, and into an immaculate, white room with an immaculate desk and terminal to one side. And in the center of the room, there it was. The imposing shiny white chair with its arm and leg rests, from which jutted the unfastened pale straps of ultrastrong polycarbonate nanoplastic. He knew this room. He knew this chair.

The mental chair.

It was time now. He had dreaded this for ninety days.

The nurse motioned for him to take a seat.

Blayne sat down in the ominous chair.

“Do you remember your last visit?” the nurse asked.

“Yes, I do.”

“Great. Then you know the routine,” she said in that indifferent, monotone voice these mental nurses were prone to use. “I’m just required to tell you that the straps are for your protection, since some patients can lose control of their body and fall out of the chair during the session.”

“Yes, I’m aware of that.”

“Great,” the nurse repeated apathetically, and then proceeded to fasten Blayne’s wrists and ankles with the super strong straps. She then flipped a switch, and a large, white polycarbonate bubble with openings at its bottom and top whirred down from somewhere above him. This odd contraption was called the cerebral bubble, he knew. It enveloped his head. He could see nothing. Everything was white. The cloud had now eaten him. Subsumed him. He was now part of this white place, not free to go.

The nurse flipped another switch and two prongs came out from either side of the bubble and inserted themselves into his cervical inputs—the two outer sockets, next to the lateral cameras of his external smartphone, a horseshoe-shaped device, made by their bounteous corporate saviors, which encircled his neck. The external smartphone—or extphone—was one part of a two-part system that made corporate-saved man neteworthy and enlightened. It was attached to the internal smartphone—or intphone—which lay

inside his body and gave his brain connectivity, as opposed to the shriveled up, non-connected body of homo primitivus. Thus, through the smartphone, modern humans were able to receive daily indoctrination and salvation from their corporate saviors, the three branches of government. Primitive man had thought that corporations and government were separate. But modern man learned at Govly Academy that the government was composed of three branches: the Media, the Corporations, and the Administration. The Administration was the part that primitive man had called the government. The Media—also referred to as the corporate media—were also technically Corporations, but they were special Corporations that were in charge of daily holy indoctrination from the government, so that all citizens would be full of goodthoughts.

The nurse flipped yet another switch, and inside the cerebral bubble surrounding his noggin, a device called a cranial hemisphere—an ultragloss black upside-down bowl-shaped device lined on the inside with BGS, Bioelectric Graphene Smartfoam—whirred slowly down and slid into place over the top of his head, the smartfoam adjusting to the shape of his skull. Soon it was taut, and Blayze could feel its pressure surrounding his cerebrum. He knew this machine, the Menty 5000, had a technical name. They called it a Mental Scaler, or MS. It was the most important tool in the entire mental clinic.

Citizens' smartphones, with their handy cervical inputs, allowed them, even while not at the mental clinic, to engage in certain mental activities and games with other citizens, such as the temporary but intense Brain Meld, as well as ultra high bandwidth Imaginative Mentation. Of course, various lighter, lower bandwidth forms of these were also available on the Net, as all homo sapiens corporatus were connected at all times to one another, and to their saviors.

But the mental maintenance performed at the clinics required much more sophisticated equipment than even the ultrahigh bandwidth cervical inputs afforded. The Mental Scaler utilized far more advanced technology. Everything was done through EMF, i.e., electromagnetic field. No sockets needed. It was rumored that the

government was working on developing EMF towers with the same capabilities as the Mental Scaler, only at a much longer range. But for now, such precision and control was only capable at very close range. Hence the need for citizens to visit their mental clinic at least twice a year.

The nurse went on. "Looks like last time you saw Dr. Serelli, but she's on maternity leave with her sixteen year-old son, so Dr. Richards will be your mentist today. I'm going to leave you in the meadow, and Dr. Richards will be in shortly to see you."

"Okay," Blayze nodded in agreement. He was a little bit nervous about having a new mentist, but tried his best to hide it.

Suddenly, the cloud surrounding his head melted away and he was no longer in the mental clinic, no longer strapped down to the mental chair. He was free, standing in the middle of a huge meadow. Beside him stood a tall oak tree. The sun shone overhead in the blue sky. At his feet there was a vast field of clovers.

Peering down, he liked the way his body looked in this place, a few hundred pounds leaner than a few moments ago.

As he started walking, he tried to remember what his thoughtstream had been about. He was sure it had been brilliant, fascinating, and ungodly. Furry white rabbits scampered out of the way as he trod through countless clovers. He noticed a line of trees in the distance. Did they still have the same old forest like last time? Or had they updated it? Might as well check it out, he thought.

As he plodded along towards the line of trees, his thoughts wandered, forming a new stream. He knew from his research that ancestral man had visited places called dental clinics, with people who worked inside called dentists. Now, there were only mental clinics with people who worked inside called mentists. The mentists had assistants called mental nurses, following the UK naming convention of old times, i.e., "dental nurse." If they had followed the standard US convention, it would have been "mental assistant," which apparently would have sounded too abstract. The ancient dentists had apparently cleaned

and repaired people's teeth. That was before everyone had perfect, vat-grown artificial teeth from childhood, which didn't get cavities or have plaque buildup, and which grew up in sync with the body's own natural growth process.

Wait, maybe they installed that new patch the government announced that allows for mentation while we are waiting, he thought. He had heard that some of the clinics already had it. He stopped walking and focused his thoughts towards a point in the meadow right in front of him. Suddenly, a grey, square building appeared. The sign on the building read, simply, "Dental Clinic."

Wow! Cool! They had installed it. Hmm...maybe I can upgrade my thoughtstream, he thought. For example, what would one of the old dental clinics look like inside?

He walked up to the automatic sliding glass doors and entered the building. He was in a large waiting room, devoid of people except a voluptuous primitive receptionist who sat at the front desk in a low cut blouse showing her ample cleavage. Okay, I'll just take a seat and have a nurse call me in. In the blink of an eye, a ravishing, big-chested nurse with curly blonde hair came slinking into the waiting room, wearing one of those tight, archaic white nurse dresses which exposed quite a bit of leg and bust, fishnet stockings, and even that funny little hat with a red cross on it. "Blayze?" she called out in a sultry voice.

Okay, he admitted to himself. According to my research, this type of outfit was typical of a medical nurse at a hospital, not a dental nurse. But forget it. It's my fantasy. Dental clinics can have sexy nurses too. He began to follow her down the hall, mesmerized by the sway of her primitive hips, the fullness, the roundness, the firmness of her primitive buttocks. The top of her white fishnet stockings dug slightly into her yummy, smooth thighs.

Wait a minute! All of the sudden mental warning lights started flashing in his mind. I'd better change the nurse and receptionist before the mentist comes in, or he'll think I'm a pervert!

Blayze concentrated his focus and willed the sexy primitive nurse into a pajama-ed lesser cloud, like the ones in the mental clinic. But nothing happened. She still looked

like a righteous, sexy ancestral babe.

Damn it. It was too late, he realized. Sheepishly, Blayze continued following the nurse down the hall, trying as hard as he could not to look at her. He tried to block out the mental images of her full, round breasts, her long legs, the smell of her rosy perfume.

The sexy nurse stopped near a door and motioned for Blayze to enter. "Dr. Richards is ready to see you."

He gulped and walked up to the doorway.

And sitting at a desk on the wall, at a ninety degree angle to Blayze, was a thin, balding man with black rim glasses, and a white lab coat. The sideways, balding man smiled.

Wait...everything in this room is completely sideways! He thought. What is going on? This can't be right. The room was full of equipment, but everything stuck to the wall, as if gravity were perpendicular. Not down. He looked helplessly back at the sexy nurse behind him. At least she was still standing on the floor, like she had been a few moments ago, and not on the wall. Apparently the insane gravity of this room didn't affect her.

"Please, come in," the sideways man said.

Blayze hesitated, and then took a step forward. Would he be sucked into this room's irregular gravity field and thrown against the wall? But nothing happened. He took another step forward.

"Thank you, Dr. Richards," the sexy nurse said with a wink, and closed the door.

Now Blayze was alone in this room with the sideways man, the only person standing in the right direction, unable to orient himself. Suddenly a strong sensation of vertigo hit him. Perhaps he was the one who was sideways, and everything else in the room was correct! Oh god, he thought, clutching his chest and breathing heavily. It felt like the world was spinning around him.

"Don't worry if we don't seem to be on the same plane," the sideways man said. "When one percept system enters another, temporary disorientation is normal. I'm not actually sideways. Your brain is simply interpreting me as sideways. It takes a moment for the percept system of both minds to

orient themselves to each other.

God damn it. That's why the other mentists had always warned me before entering my thoughts. The sideways man had sneaked into my thoughts without telling me and then took them over. That's why I couldn't will the sexy nurse into a lesser cloud. He had been caught. That was sneaky of this mentist to enter his mentation this way. No friendly warning like Dr. Serelli had always given him. Caught red-handed in his ungodly fantasy...

"Your mind will soon sort things out and our consciousnesses will meld, and you'll perceive me normally," the sideways man was saying.

Blayne had heard of similar experiences happening in Brain Meld, especially among less experienced users. Two minds coming together had a disorienting effect on the psyche, which was used to dealing with only one percept system. The brain, suddenly confronted with the simultaneous perceptions of two people, sometimes went into convulsions, perplexed, unable to assimilate the dissonant information.

Blayne looked around the room. Everything was still sideways. He felt like he was about to fall into the wall. Or was it off the wall and into the ground? He could feel his heart pumping faster. His breathing was heavy. He felt like he was about to throw up.

And then suddenly everything was normal.

All of the equipment and furniture was now on the floor of the room, upright, no longer on the wall. And the man in the lab coat was sitting in his chair, upright. Blayne's mind had adjusted to the mentist's percept system. Blayne felt his pulse and breathing slowly begin to go back to normal, the feeling of vertigo receding into the background.

So this is Dr. Richards, he thought. The mentist looked just like the avatars of all those public health officials on cerebralvision. Balding. Black-rim glasses. White lab coat. White shirt. Blue tie. His body was that of a primitive, just like Blayne's. Skinny. The mentist's seat and desk were old-fashioned and quaint, starkly different from the ones back at the mental clinic. On the desk clunky, plastic, and black, were a physical flat-screen monitor and physical keyboard,

not the wispy blue holographic keyboard and monitor of modern computer terminals.

“Have a seat,” Dr. Richards said. He gestured across the room towards what vaguely resembled a mental chair, only, different...

Blayne walked over and sat down. The chair was weird. There was a large adjustable light hanging down from above. In front of the chair was a flat-screen TV. To the side of the chair, there was a miniature sink. And next to the sink, a sort of mechanism holding a bunch of strange-looking tools, each with its own wire hanging below. The tools had a strangely sinister look to them, so he averted his eyes from them, looking back at the skinny mentist.

Wait, we can have skinny bodies in this place, so maybe Dr. Richards won’t be mad at me about the sexy nurse, right? But he knew he was wrong. He knew the problem was not the skinniness in itself, but the flaunting of her sexiness, her risqué outfit with her boobs hanging out and the shortness of her dress, exposing her silky smooth legs and stockings. The mental nurses, when they had needed to come into the meadow in the past, were also skinny. But they always wore their unsexy jammies, not those sexy ancient nurse dresses. Most people preferred these ancestral avatars, he knew. Starving is pretty to look at. Just not healthy in real life, the government warned. But the problem was that he had been caught fantasizing about a nurse clad in ungodly raiments. Oh god, I’m screwed, Blayne thought.

“Does everything look normal now?”

“Yes, nothing’s sideways anymore.”

“Excellent. I see you found the new mentation upgrade we recently added. Very clever...imagining how an ancient dental clinic would have looked. And yes, the chair you are sitting in is an authentic replica of an old-fashioned dental chair.” Dr. Richards flashed a professional smile. But underneath, Blayne felt something foreboding in this man. God damn mentist came at me sideways.

But the things Dr. Richards had created were interesting, Blayne had to admit. Blayne had only created the exterior of the clinic, the waiting room, the sexy receptionist, and the

sexy nurse. Dr. Richards had created this office, the chair, and the tools.

He looked down at the chair he sat in. "It looks so... peculiar," Blayze said.

"Want to see how it compares to the chair you're sitting in right now?" Dr. Richards asked. Before waiting for an answer, the mentist punched a few keys on the clunky, old-fashioned keyboard. The TV in front of the dental chair turned on. And suddenly, Blayze was staring at...himself and Dr. Richards. Only hundreds of pounds heavier. Their normal weight. The images on the TV were of their amorphous, corporate-saved bodies, not these skinny avatars which they wore while inside this mental construct. The TV screen displayed a live video feed of their real bodies, back at the mental clinic. There, Blayze's own healthily corpulent, corporate food-nourished body sat, strapped into the mental chair, a myriad of shimmering cables running from a hole at the top of the white bubble covering his head up to the ceiling. Sparkling data glimmered up and down the cables like a rainbow of cerebral information. And there, at a desk, in front of the modern computer terminal with holographic peripherals, sat Dr. Richards, looking exactly like he did in this mental avatar, except much heavier. The real Dr. Richards on the TV screen had a pair of cables coming out from the cervical inputs on the extphone wrapped around his neck which connected to the desk's terminal. Since mentists weren't performing any procedures on themselves, they didn't need to be connected to a Mental Scaler, like the patient was. Their extphones' cervical inputs gave them all the ultra high bandwidth connectivity they needed to enter into their patients' minds.

Blayze, his initial misgivings about the mentist somewhat allayed, was transfixed by the juxtaposition. Ancient, unconnected, unsaved. Modern, connected, saved. "Wow, it's so interesting seeing the two types of body side by side. I wonder how ancestral man felt going to see a dentist. I wonder if it was similar to how we feel going to a mentist."

The skinny Dr. Richards laughed. The sound only carried in here, in this place. From the TV screen ahead issued no noise. There, Dr. Richards' large roly-poly body had its eyes

closed and was silent, like Blayze's. Two silent roly-polys there, two talkative skinnies here. "I'm sure it was a far more harrowing experience. After all, they had natural teeth that could break down and require painful surgeries. The only thing we have to deal with nowadays is a few silly memories that we don't need anyways. And those are completely painless to remove. We're lucky to live in the time of mental clinics and not back in the time of our ancestors."

"I agree," Blayze said honestly. "We're living in the greatest time in all of history!"

"Definitely," Dr. Richards nodded. "Well, I'm going to run a few scans. This will only take a minute. I'll be back in no time. Do you want to watch TV or mentate?"

"I'll just stay here and check out all these interesting tools you created."

"I've done extensive research on ancient dental clinics myself. Everything here is 100% historically accurate. If you have any questions, feel free to ask."

"Wow! Really? Cool!"

Maybe Dr. Richards wasn't so bad after all. Maybe it had been a stroke of good luck that Dr. Serelli was out on maternity leave.

"Oh, and don't let any of those tools scare you. They aren't real, so they can't hurt you." The skinny mentist chuckled and disappeared into the hallway; then, on the TV screen in front of him, Blayze could see the Dr. Richards in the mental clinic remove the two cables from his neck and leave the room. The shimmering cables above Blayze's head bubble were pulsating much more rapidly now. Apparently the Menty 5000 was now hard at work, scanning.

Whew! I can't believe it! Caught in the very act of having ungovly thoughts! But he didn't even say anything. So maybe that means he didn't care. Maybe that means he's cool.

But that was a close one. Why do I have so many ungovly thoughts? Blayze wondered. Must be because of my pale skin. He had learned from the Govly-Makers that the pales were the most ungovly of races.

Blayze reached over and started toying with the shiny

tools. He grabbed one. It had a weird-looking, circular, fuzzy end. He pressed a button on the tool's handle, and the fuzzy end whirred into life as if it were made for polishing tiny toy cars. What would this thing be called? The fwizzle, he decided. He put it back and picked up another one. It was a thin metal rod with a small, round mirror on the end. A mirror for gnomes? Weird. He picked up the next one. It was some sort of barbaric-looking scraping tool. Must be called a scrapple. The ancient dental tools were so bizarre. It was as if the ancestral dentists had carved out cave drawings on people's teeth. It was a horrifying image. The fwizzle, the scrapple, and the gnome mirror were beginning to creep him out, so he decided to visit the woods.

Blayne concentrated all his ideational energies. Suddenly, the antique dental office disappeared completely, and he was back in the meadow. He walked to the edge of a large wooded area. He noticed a path leading into the forest. I wonder if they installed anything new in this forest, he mused. He entered the forest.

As he trudged along the dirt trail, he noticed a pleasant aroma. Lilacs. He knew he wasn't actually smelling anything. These were simply a set of instructions sent along the wires into his cervical inputs. Ones and zeros. Sent from the mental chair to the extphone around his neck, which passed it along to the intphone, the implanted chip in his neck, which transformed the instructions into electrical impulses which were sent along the spinal nerves to his brain. Looking around, he seemed to be in the same magical woodland he was in the last time he visited the mental clinic. Tiny blue, yellow, and green fairies fluttered past, shining in luminescent pastel colors. Large purple mushrooms with orange polka-dots rose up from the humus below. Fluffy pink squirrels darted here and there, racing up trees. From a distance, he could make out a shimmering white unicorn crossing in front of a frothy purple waterfall. The forest was so saturated, so vibrant. It was like a fairy tale on an acid trip. It felt so real, so alive. This, despite the fact that he knew it was completely artificial, a complex combination of bits and bytes fooling the brain.

The psychedelic forest reminded him of primitive books

he had read about recreational drugs such as LSD. He had never tried any recreational drugs himself. All baddrugs were banned by their glorious government. But they didn't really need baddrugs. They could get all the positive effects of baddrugs digitally. The feeling of lightness, of floating, of feeling high. The euphoria. The feeling of contentment. The extphone could be programmed to deliver all these things into their intphone, which interfaced directly with the brain and made it happen. Of course, all of these artificial highs, these digitally-induced good moods cost admincredits, so one couldn't just sit there stoned out of his gourd 24/7. But he could definitely spend all his waking hours in some pretty tripped out simulations, without the added high. It was cheap to be a digital simonaut, but expensive to be a digital psychonaut.

Many people spent days at a time wandering inside these simulations, lost in fantasy worlds. In fact, most people nowadays devoted the better part of their lives to the sims. Their glorious government encouraged it. Almost no real reality for them. They lived almost completely inside a virtual world. Mediated, engineered, artificial reality.

The sims reminded him of ancestral man and their addiction to that archaic, prototypical simulation, the video game. The main difference, of course, was that most of those were violent. The government had of course banned all violent or sexual simulations. But at least, and Blayze was especially glad of this thought, they hadn't banned any books whatsoever, even the ungovly ones. They had declared, in their infinite wisdom, that knowledge should be free! Therefore, he was free to lose himself not in the sims, like most of the rest, but in a different type of mediated reality...the one called information. He considered knowledge to be the ultimate virtue, and thus had acquainted himself with the wisdom of the ages. The government, being liberal, permissive, democratic, and free held no one back from any sort of knowledge. Therefore, he had read Nietzsche. He had read Marx. He had read Hitler, Lao Tzu, Kierkegaard, Guevara, and Baudrillard. He had even read some books by the anarchist thinkers of the nineteenth century.

Anarchism...ha! No government! To think one would want to live without a government! Blayze was eternally grateful to his great government, which let him spend as much time as he wanted doing his favorite activity—learning. No one had to work. The great saviors of the people, the Corporations, with their vast automated factories, provided food, clothing, and shelter for all. Citizens were allotted monthly credits by the Administration, which they used to obtain all that they needed. No one was found wanting. Freed from the chains of having to work to survive! Of course, fail to show up to a mental clinic appointment, or worse, do something forbidden, like have sex or masturbate—perish the thought—and all credits on your internal smartphone were deleted immediately and your account was frozen. No transactions were possible without the government's permission. Doing anything contrary to the government's will was a death sentence. Unless, of course, you believed in the wild stories of people making it far away from the city to the Forest of the Real and somehow surviving in that mythical place, without the help of the corporate autofactories, without the Administration-issued credits. But that was pure nonsense. Imagine surviving without the admincredits or the autofactories of the saviors. In a real forest! Not a digital simulation of one! It was even more absurd and unimaginable than being a primitive who had to work in a factory to survive. It would be like suddenly turning into an amoeba, rolling back millions of years of evolution.

No, better to simply obey the government, Blayze thought. It's easy. The sexual urge suppressing drugs were made freely available to all. And there were countless sims. Or, if you were a certain Blayze, there were endless books. He had nothing to worry about. There was no chance of him suddenly developing a rebellious streak and going out and doing something cuckoo like having sex or skipping his mental checkup. As far as he was concerned, he was living in a utopia. Why would he want to ruin that? Now, if he could just get rid of those ungovly thoughts. Maybe in the future, he thought, the government will create new technology that will remove the ungovly centers of your brain completely.

That would be so amazing. Then, nobody would have to worry about anything!

Soon Blayne realized that he was standing in a large clearing. Ahead, there lay a magnificent, ivory white castle. And behind the castle, in the background, he noticed the soft pink glow of the horizon. He tilted his head up and looked at the sky above, which had turned a resplendent azure, in which a brilliant array of stars twinkled like a king's collection of gems. Presently, fireworks shot up from the top of the castle, bursting into a brilliant display of red, green, yellow, and purple, which floated down like pixie dust around the sumptuous, pearly white spires. On the highest spire, high atop the castle, flew a white flag with a giant black "X" on it. Everyone knew this to be the flag of asexuality. It was waved about at each of the many Asexual Pride parades, which were officially endorsed by the government.

From a balcony in the middle of the castle, there suddenly appeared Quing Alex, the official ambassador of the Asexual Pride Movement. Androgynous, Alex's appearance was neither masculine nor feminine. Alex had once, when asked in an interview, described asexself as a noman. The quing never wore tight or revealing clothing, but had also revealed in an interview that asex had no sexual organs. Asex wore a queen's dress on one side of asex's body, and a king's garments on the other side. Half of Alex's hair was long and curly, the other half short and straight. On asex's head, asex wore a jewel-encrusted gold crown.

Blayne realized that he was surrounded by a crowd of woodland creatures, both realistic and fantastical. Rabbits, deer, warthogs, unicorns, fairies, toads, gnomes, elves, and squirrels edged closer, trying to get a good look at the quing. Parrots, cuckoos, bluejays, and toucans alighted on branches nearby. All looked expectantly at Alex.

Quing Alex addressed the crowd. "My dear siblings! My fellow nomen! My wonderful neutered animals of all kinds! I am here to bring you the good news. I am here to liberate you from your bonds. I am here to proclaim that asexuality is faaaaaannnnntabulous!" A cheer rose up from the woodland creatures. More fireworks erupted. "My friends, every

noman alive today has the freedom, nay the privilege, of being freed from that oppressive tormentor of our ancestors, sex. Almost all of the problems of ancient man were caused by sexual desire, sexual expression, sexual identity, and sexual aggression. But we today are free to create asex's own destiny...freed from the chains of instinct and biological imperatives. Soon, government technicians will have created the absolute cure for sex, and stripped the biological imperative to have sex from our DNA altogether! Until that glorious day, stock up on free chemical castration drugs, and suppress that sex urge, baby! Don't be a slave to your hormones! You have nothing to lose but your chains! And this liberation is made freely available to all by our magnanimous Corporations and our glorious—”

Suddenly, the castle and Quing Alex were gone, and Blayze was back in the antique dental clinic, sitting in the strange dental chair with its creepy, archaic tools. The fwizzle. The scrapple. The gnome mirror. That was jarring, he thought.

Presently, Dr. Richards walked into the room, carrying a bundle of x-rays under his arm.

“Sorry to interrupt. I just thought this quaint little dental clinic you created would be a better place to talk than surrounded by all those fantasy creatures.”

“No—no problem,” Blayze said. It was weird how this mentist never announced himself. He simply usurped your thoughts. Annoying. Dr. Richards was not quite as tactful as Dr. Serelli. But he also had a lot of useful information, so Blayze decided to dismiss that little detail. At least the transition hadn't been as jarring as last time. Apparently their percept systems had gotten used to each other.

The mentist seated himself and tossed the stack of x-rays on the desk before him. He lifted one up and inspected it. The x-rays were of Blayze's cranium.

“What are those?” Blayze asked.

“These are how my mind interprets the scans done by the Mental Scalar, and thus how they appear to both our percept systems. The mental scalar conducts a noninvasive scan of all LFPs globally and constructs a mental map. That map appears to us in this place as these x-rays.”

Blayze's memories of meeting with Dr. Serelli were fuzzy, but he knew that everything had appeared completely different in those sessions, not like this. Apparently, the combination of their two percept systems had created this reality, sitting here in this dental clinic, looking at these x-rays.

"Hmmm..." Dr. Richards' brow furrowed as he looked at the x-ray. "When was your last checkup?" he asked.

"Three months ago." All citizens were required by the government to have a mental checkup at least every six months. He had learned from the Govly-Makers of his youth that the most important part of the word government was "ment," the Latin root word for "mind," such as in the words mental or mentist. A mental cleaning every six months kept the citizenry's minds govly and orderly. However, Blayze was no ordinary citizen. While the bulk of the citizenry spent their days in the sims, exploring artificial worlds devoid of sex and violence, Blayze spent his days researching, studying, pondering, reading, exposing himself to past eras, cultures and ideas. His relentless quest for knowledge never ceased. His mind took in copious amounts of information on a regular basis, not all of which was govly, especially the information from the primitive era. In the case of the simmers, the simulated worlds which their minds inhabited day in and day out were all 100% Corporation-designed and Administration-approved. Sterile. Clean. Govly. Thus, twice a year was more than enough to keep them spic and span. In fact, they could probably even go a full year without too many problems. But in the special case of Blayze, it was necessary to increase his mental checkups to four times a year, instead of the customary two.

"It looks like there has been quite a bit of mental plaque buildup in the old noggin since your last visit."

"There has?"

"Yes, there has been indeed." Dr. Richards pored over the x-rays, one after the other. Then, with a tone of seriousness, he looked Blayze straight in the eye and asked, "Do you do your mental brushing every day?"

"Yes! I hook myself in every night and do my brushing faithfully." The cervical inputs were useful for more than

playing mental games with other citizens. They also connected to the government service that did what the mentist did, only on a much smaller, more minute scale.

“And what about mental flossing?”

“Well, most days...”

“Blayze, fighting mental plaque is a never-ending battle. As soon as you leave the clinic, ungovly thoughts can pop up, or even worse, doubts in the government.”

“But I don’t doubt the government at all. I love the government!”

Dr. Richards eyed him appraisingly. “I believe that is true, but look here.” Dr. Richards showed Blayze one of the x-rays. It was mostly made up of lovely, clear, white brain matter with the characteristic folds. He pointed at some areas which had begun to be mottled with tiny dark specks. “See these specks of doubt? That’s not what we want. We gotta keep only crystal-clean, approved thoughts in there. Remember what we learned at Govly Academy...doubts are for louts!”

The mentist picked up another x-ray and examined it carefully. He pointed to a region which had begun to get quite murky. What looked like the beginnings of a dark cloud began to sully the clean, white cerebral tissue. “Ah, see... right here we have a PCT forming.”

“A PCT?”

“Yes, a Pre-Conspiracy Theory.”

“What’s that?”

“A Pre-Conspiracy Theory is an accumulation of badthoughts, a.k.a. mental plaque, which haven’t quite formed yet, but, if left unchecked, will no doubt harden and calcify into a full-blown CT...a Conspiracy Theory. And those are very painful to remove, and expensive. That’s if we can remove them at all. Good thing you didn’t wait any longer to come to me.”

So the government is monitoring pre-thought crime, Blayze realized. Not even thought crime. Not even pre-crime. Mash them both together: Pre-thought crime! Catching pre-thought criminals (which were no doubt called PTCs) before they even think what they thunk. Or thunk

what they thought. Or...you know what I mean, Blayne assured himself.

“Now, removing PCTs is more expensive than standard plaque removal. It involves a complex process called Future Accelerated Neuron Temporal Occlusion Mapping, or FANTOM. You see, it’s not as simple as just removing a few ideas or memories. Without a detailed analysis of all possible future thoughtflows, the PCT will easily pop back up again. So in order to root it out completely, and prevent any possible recurrence, the local cerebral bubble on your head will send a request to a vast neural network which is capable of accurately predicting all possible future thoughtflows for your particular set of neurons. The whole process takes a matter of seconds, but is very labor intensive to the network, hence the added cost.”

Blayne gulped. The credits on his internal smartphone were getting quite slim, and this checkup alone was going to put him in somewhat of a bind until the beginning of the month, when the admincredits deposited into the intphone implanted in his neck. Since he spent most of his time researching, and wasn’t prone to brownposting on Thoughtbook, Blayne didn’t have as many credits as some of his peers. Thoughtbook was the approved social media platform of the government. To post an update, one only had to think something, and then give the command to post it, and one’s intphone did the rest. So much easier than the labor-intensive, archaic social media sites where one had to actually type something out with one’s thumbs, at a snail’s pace, and then press send. Brownposting was a term some clever chap had come up with. Well, maybe not so clever; he had been immediately lobotomized by the government after creating the term. It meant the kind of brownnosing social media posts about the government that some annoying Jills puked out of their minds on a daily basis. Of course, the bonus credit payout was minuscule, but if you could tolerate thinking over and over in your mind how wonderful the government was for half of the day every day of your life, then it was possible to accumulate enough credits to afford a swanky meal now and then. That’s why those Jills had enough credits to dine on steak and lobster

regularly, and then immediately brag on Thoughtbook about it and post selfies of themselves eating, along with shots of their ritzy food. Of course, the steaks and lobster were synthetic. Genetically engineered, raised in a vat somewhere in Iowa. Nobody knew what real steaks tasted like—the experience of eating was the one thing they hadn't quite mastered in the simulations—but the engineered steaks and seafood were substantially better than the almost free TV dinners and top ramen Blayze dined on in large quantities on a daily basis. But he didn't care. He didn't need synthetic steaks. His passion, his joy, was learning, and that's what he spent his time on. The very reason he liked the government was because they freed his life and time up to do what he loved. Spending the whole day thinking to Thoughtbook about how wonderful the government was would be self-defeating.

“But how did this PCT even form? Like I said, I love the government. I wouldn't think a conspiracy theory against them.”

“You see, right here,” the mentist indicated an area on the scan, “these dark spots indicate badthoughts that were about to coalesce into a thoughtstream that theorized that the significantly increased adipose tissue of the modern corporate-saved man actually causes organs to fail with greater frequency, and thus is detrimental to the overall health of the body. In other words, that being a fatass is unhealthy. But of course that's patently ridiculous. Extremely high adipose levels are good for the organs. It was the starved ancient man who was unhealthy and died sooner than we do. But even if it were true, it's so easy nowadays to replace organs that go bad with artificial ones. This demonstrates the Neanderthal thinking of Conspiracy Theories. Imagining that a primitive, starved body is better than our modern amorphous, technologically advanced, sugar and chemical-enriched corporate-food body. Sure, primitive bodies look good in the simulation, but in reality the government recommends a weight of not less than 250 lbs for a woman, 350 lbs for a man, or 300 lbs for an androgyne, which everyone knows is the most govy of sexes. Thankfully, with our high-tech, healthy corporate

food, no one is even close to dipping down anywhere near those minimums.”

“So I would have started thinking that theory if I hadn’t come here today?”

“Absolutely. These Mental Scalers are so advanced that they can map out your entire thought patterns and predict subsequent thoughts at least three or four months out into the future, with about a three percent margin of error. Hmm....” Dr. Richards eyed another x-ray, perturbed.

Blayne waited in nervous silence as the mentist carefully scrutinized the image.

“Amazing. Look at this area.” The mentist indicated another area where a dark nebula was forming. “Another PCT. Looks like this one started right after you read on a website that a long time ago it wasn’t possible for the government to read people’s minds and so people had something called mental privacy, and also didn’t have to go to the mental clinic. It even claimed people had something called freedom of thought, as if that would be a good idea!” He laughed. “But it doesn’t even matter. People back then still had those horrible ancestral teeth that got cavities and had all sorts of problems. And they had to go to dental clinics, and do all sorts of stuff to fix those problems. Can you imagine? Having to put up with all that, and for what? Freedom of thought?” Dr. Richards laughed again as if the idea were totally absurd. Looking once again at the x-ray, he said, “I’d say, given another two or three weeks, this would have definitely blown up into a full grown CT.”

“But...is it true?” Blayne asked timidly.

“Is what true? That people had mental privacy and freedom of thought? Of course not! But even if it were true, can you imagine life in those days? Just imagine having to get a root canal.”

“What’s a root canal?”

“Believe me, you don’t want to know. And imagine being all skinny and emaciated and unhealthy.” The mentist gave a disgusted shudder.

“You’re right. Our life is much better these days,” Blayne nodded.

"I believe you when you say you love the government, but unfortunately things like Conspiracy Theories are very insidious, and can take hold of even the purest mind." Dr. Richards closed his eyes for a moment, deep in thought. Then he said, in a serious tone, "I apologize in advance. But the situation is worse than I thought. So please forgive me." The mentist disappeared. And then, suddenly, everything was gone, the dental clinic, the meadow...

Blayne found himself in a large, dark chamber. He couldn't see the ceiling or walls. He was seated at the end of a hard wooden pew. His hand rested on the pew's arm, at the end of which he noticed...a human skull! He pulled his hand back in terror. In front of him he saw many more pews. On the pews sat people in dark, hooded robes. In front of the pews he could make out a large, ornate altar, made of ebony with gold trim and a huge, red pentagram in the center. Behind the altar stood a row of robed figures, standing on a dais, facing the audience. And behind the figures on the dais, it was pitch black, except for a huge, long waterfall...of what appeared to be blood! Dark, red fluid flowed down. But the waterfall didn't stay still. It was rotating. It slowly made a 360 degree rotation, as if gravity itself were spinning.

Nowhere could he see any faces. They were all obscured by long, dark hoods. Then he noticed two lines of robed figures, sideways, walking downwards as if on invisible, black walls on either side of the chamber. When they reached the bottom of the wall, they stepped onto the floor and they shifted, now upright. They slowly marched, with a measured cadence, the first ones getting nearer and nearer to the altar. Then he noticed, that in their hands, they carried...babies! Naked, terrified, screaming babies. In the background he could hear a faint, melodic sound, a kind of ominous humming and drumming. Some or all of the hooded figures were chanting in a strange tongue.

Oh, my god, Blayne thought to himself. What is going on here? How did I end up here? He tried to will this scene away, to will himself back to the meadow. But nothing happened. The procession continued.

One of the robed figures reached the altar. He held the

baby in his arms high above his head for all to see. Then he placed the screaming baby on the altar. The central figure on the dais then lifted his hands high above his head. Blayze suddenly noticed that in his hands, he held a long, shiny, silver sword. Oh my god! He thought. They are going to kill that baby! This can't be happening. Blayze could barely watch as in one swift movement, the figure swung the sword straight down onto the altar. Onto the—

Blayze squeezed his eyes shut, wanting this scene to end. His entire life had been sheltered, safe, watched over by his great and glorious government. His protectors. The corporate saviors. In that moment, fright and horror gripped him and shook him to the foundations of his being. Witnessing such a gruesome act had turned his entire world over in an instant. What sort of reality was he witnessing? Violence was unheard of, and even all violent sims had been banned. Surely he couldn't be seeing what he thought his eyes just saw. He willed himself out of the simulation. Out of the mental chair. Out of this nightmare. He was sure everything would be gone—he would wake up in the mental clinic. He opened his eyes.

And the nightmare continued.

He was stuck, trapped here in this place. No way out. This must be hell, he thought.

He saw, and immediately wished he could unsee it, the eating, the consuming, the devouring. The robed figures were greedily feeding on the murdered baby's carcass. Blood flowed freely down the gilding of the altar and onto the pentagram. Presently, the pentagram took on a deeper and deeper shade of red, and soon it became an unholy, glowing, pulsating thing made of blood. Great drops of blood began to float off the pentagram outwards towards the audience. Those on the front pews began to greedily snatch at them and gobble them up. The figure at the center of the dais who had cut the baby with the sword took off his hood and looked out at the audience. His eyes glowed with an evil light. Dark, thick blood covered his face and dripped from the corners of his mouth. He had the look of a lunatic, a crazed psychopath actually enjoying this ritual of carnage and evil. Suddenly, to his shock, Blayze

recognized the man. Nicolas Randolph. He was a famous politician. He often gave speeches on the news and talk shows on cerebralvision about how the people needed to purify their thoughts, how they needed to be better citizens, rid themselves of all ungovliness, love their great government with all their hearts, etc.

Suddenly, the politician spotted Blayze. He shouted, "There! In the back row! He saw us! He must die!"

Then, simultaneously, the rest of the audience turned to look at Blayze and started chanting, "He must die! He must die! He must die!" Then suddenly he could see the faces of those in the audience. Their eyes were shining with a wicked light.

As they started to close in on Blayze, he clasped his hands together and prayed out loud, "Oh dear Corporate Saviors! Save me from this evil!"

He waited, and nothing happened.

He was stuck in this unholy place. Was Dr. Richards punishing him? Was this happening because of the sexy nurse thoughts he had been caught having? Had the mentist judged him to be ungovly? Or was it because of the PCTs?

He started shouting uncontrollably as a plethora of hands began grabbing for him. "Dr. Richards! Anybody! Help!" He turned around, tried to walk out of the row, tripped over the skull and landed on the floor of the aisle. Masses of robed figures converged on him from every side. He put his hands in front of his face, and as swarms of black-clad figures closed in on him, he screamed.

He was staring up at the blue sky. The bright, gleaming sun shone down from high overhead. A few wisps of clouds sailed slowly by. In the background, he could hear faint, peaceful chirpings of birds. He was back in the meadow.

He had blacked out. How long had he been unconscious? He stood up groggily. He couldn't feel any pain. He looked down at his skinny body. He seemed to be alright.

Suddenly, Dr. Richards appeared, skinny and official-looking in his lab coat and glasses. He walked up to Blayze and put his hand on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry I had to put you through that. But I had no choice."

Blayne's skinny body was shaking. "You...ha–, ha–, had...no choice?" Barely capable of forming words, he tried to gather his wits. For the first time in his life, he had seen the absolute terror which was called violence.

"Yes, I'm afraid it was. See, you were dangerously close. So for your own good, it was absolutely necessary to show you a glimpse of where you were headed. Don't worry, we'll erase the conscious memory of that nightmare, so you won't have to think about it. But it will stay deeply embedded in your subconscious, scaring you from ever going down the wrong thoughtpath again."

Thank god I won't remember that nightmare, Blayne thought to himself. Wait. If they erased such experiences afterwards, does that mean he had experienced a nightmare like that before? Had the mentists forced him to go through horrific experiences like that in the past, only to wipe them out from his consciousness and embed them deep into his subconscious? How did one know what one's subconscious had been programmed with?

Dr. Richards continued, "You see, what you were experiencing just now was the world that Conspiracy Theorists live in. They suffer from a condition called Extreme Paranoid Psychosis, or EPP. They imagine that the government and even the whole world are out to get them. Is that the world you want to live in, Blayne?"

"No. I never want to go through that nightmare again. It was the worse thing I ever experienced."

"That's why we gotta keep your mind fresh and clean, free of any doubts in the government. Doubt is a dangerous thing. If left on your mind too long, it can harden and form *mental tartar*, which makes it hard to think clearly. And if the tartar isn't removed, it can cause *mental decay*. And that means that Conspiracy Theories are eating holes in your brain! I've seen a few really ugly cavities in my day. Truly horrendous stuff. Entire parts of your brain stop thinking completely. And pretty soon you end up in a world where up is down and down is up. That's why we need the government to affirm our reality, so we don't end up living in

a topsy turvy psychotic fantasyland. Have you ever seen a Conspiracy Theorist, Blayze?”

“No, I don’t think so. What do they look like?”

“It depends on if their decay was caused by RWCTs or LWCTs.”

“By what?”

“That’s the technical term we mentists use for Left-Wing or Right-Wing Conspiracy Theories.”

“But what’s the difference?”

“An RWCT often focuses on racial stereotypes, for example that the entire world is run by Jews, with mental images of Jews as the archetypal villain, who, when he isn’t eating babies or murdering Christians is rubbing his hands together greedily, thinking of ways to rob you of your money.

“LWCTs, on the other hand, while also capable of targeting racial and gender stereotypes, such as the evil straight white male, often focus the individual’s rage, and hence their entire life, on one individual, for example Hitler or Trump. Everything that has ever happened since the beginning of time, and everything that will happen, is directly caused by this one person, and nothing else. Thus, every moment of their being is directed at hating the effigy, or the one individual responsible for their misery.

“Now, one would think that RWCTs crop up in the right hemisphere of the brain while LWCTs crop up in the left hemisphere. But in fact, the opposite is the case, because the two hemispheres of our brain act like a mirror image. Therefore, artistic, creative types who rely more on the right hemisphere are often infected with LWCTs, while logical, mathematical people who heavily use their left hemisphere are often infected with RWCTs.”

“Wow, I knew mentistry was complicated, but I never imagined all the multifarious scenarios a mentist must face in his daily work,” Blayze realized.

Dr. Richards had given his explication with a gleam in his eye. It was obvious he enjoyed his work. He performed his duties with a virtuous zeal. He was the absolute expert. He was the teacher, giving out knowledge, and Blayze the pupil,

imbibing it.

The mentist continued. "The mental decay caused by all types of CTs is disastrous. A total agglomeration of RWCTs will turn the human into something foul and repugnant, an inbred, incestuous, pimple-filled, cross-eyed, belligerent, cannibalistic hillbilly. They used to make horror movies about them, where some unlucky travelers got lost in the woods and then some of the local backwoodsmen appeared and chopped them into pieces and ate them all up."

Suddenly a horrific monster appeared to one side of them, something barely human, from the remotest of backwoods. Blayze took a step backwards in fright, but then realized that the mentist had simply mentated this creature up as an illustration to go along with his lecture. The apparition just stood there doing nothing, simply breathing, its crossed eyes fixed firmly ahead.

Dr. Richards went on. "On the other hand, the totalization of the obliteration of a mind by LWCTs turns what used to be a human into a weird and twisted thing called a cat lady, the most vile of creatures, whose mind has been folded in on itself into a twisted paradox, simultaneously hating every living thing on the planet, constantly spewing out venomous, rancid invective, while at the same time believing they are of the highest moral caliber in the universe, a saint, full of love, acceptance, and tolerance for all."

Forthwith, on the opposite side appeared something vicious, vile, and putrid, its eyes full of insanity and hatred for every living thing. It looked ready to spew out animosity and bitterness at any soul unfortunate enough to be within shouting distance, but it too, like the other apparition, only breathed heavily and stared ahead, as if transfixed.

Upon seeing the two apparitions, Dr. Richards' mouth turned up in a smile, and he looked off in the distance, as if recalling something from the past. "You know, back before they banned violent media, there used to be this awesome show where they threw an inbred and a cat lady together in a cage and just let them have at it. They called it a Psycho Death Match. That was really friggin' entertaining. Wish they still had that show. And it was a great way to get rid of the

psychos, to boot.”

Suddenly the two apparitions disappeared, and Blayze and Dr. Richards were once again alone in the clover-filled meadow.

“I don’t want to turn into an inbred or a cat lady.”

“Then we must keep your mind clean and healthy. Do you remember what your Govly-Makers taught you at Govly Academy? What is the purpose of government?”

“Why, yes. Of course I do! The purpose of government is to tell us what reality is.” That’s why I can study and research stuff on the Net and not go insane, as long as I come to these checkups, Blayze thought to himself.

“And how do they do that?”

“Through the corporate media, of course.” Blayze’s memory of that particular lesson at Govly Academy was vivid. His Govly-Maker had driven home the point beautifully. “Corporate media exists to feed us the government narrative.”

“That’s right. And that narrative is reality.

“Does that mean the government creates reality?”

“Yes. Everything the government declares through the corporate media is reality. You wouldn’t want reality to fall out from under you, would you?”

“No, of course not. But I’m not a psycho! I don’t think everyone is out to get me! Honest. I just like studying and trying to understand as much as I can about the world around me. So maybe I run across some interesting info now and then that may or may not be true. Is that bad? Is my curiosity bad? Should I just play the sims all day like everyone else?”

“Curiosity killed the cat, Blayze. Thinking too much can lead us astray. That’s why we learn in Govly Academy that critical thinking is a bad thing. Why try to figure out everything for yourself when there are other people whose job it is to explain these things to you? Like the Govly-Makers. And our great and glorious Reality Mediators and politicians on cerebralvision! Above all, don’t veer off into unknown territory. Any knowledge that’s not approved by the government is dangerous.”

“I remember now on the cerebralvision the other day they were talking about a psychotic person who was painlessly ended by our glorious government.”

“People who don’t believe in government-approved reality are very dangerous to other people. So dangerous, in fact, that the government protects us all by painlessly ending them.”

“But can’t reality fixers cure them?”

“Sometimes. But sometimes they are so far gone that even the reality fixers can’t save them.”

“So...we need the government to tell us what reality is, so we don’t become psychotic and dangerous to other people, right?”

“Precisely. And it all starts with doubt. And doubt starts with information. And that’s why we are here. To stop the doubt, and stop the information, before it gets too far.”

Blayne recognized this as one of the mantras his Govly-Makers had taught him in childhood. He was grateful to be reminded by this great teacher.

“Thank you, Dr. Richards. You are really good at explaining things. You should be one of the Reality Mediators or politicians.”

Dr. Richards laughed. “No, those jobs aren’t for me. I enjoy my work as a mentist far too much. I couldn’t imagine any other job. Tell you what. Just relax. Take it easy. Enjoy yourself in the meadow for a while. Meanwhile, I’ll get to work on this mental plaque and decay, and you’ll be out of here in no time. Sound good, buddy?”

“Okay,” Blayne said, and smiled.

Dr. Richards gave him another clap on the shoulder, along with a friendly smile, and then disappeared.

Blayne thought about going back to the forest, but he had too many things to think about now. And he knew that as soon as the procedure was done—any moment now, really—he would forget this whole conversation. And the doubts. But the things the mentist had told him were intriguing. PCTs. RWCTs, LWCTs. Pre-thought crime. Mental privacy. Freedom of thought. He didn’t need to explore the sim right now. He needed to take this one last opportunity

to think these thoughts, to remember these memories, before they were wiped out forever.

Blayne found himself sitting in the mental chair at the mental clinic. The large, white cerebral bubble was whirring up softly away from his head. Around him he could see the immaculate white room, the modern terminal, the imposing mental chair upon which he sat, with its ultrastrong nanoplastic straps. A large, white, amorphous nurse was unstrapping his hands and feet.

Wait...weren't they going to...? He was confused. Was that it? Had they already done the mental checkup? But he had just barely sat down in the mental chair...right? And the mentist...he hadn't even come in yet.

"Is that—" he started to ask the nurse, but was interrupted by a balding, large, bloblike man with glasses stepping through the door.

"Good news!" The balding man said.

"But—" Blayne started.

The man saw the look on his face and continued. "Sorry, I forgot. We had to wipe out those memories. I'm Dr. Richards, your mentist."

"Oh." Blayne sat, dazed, as the mentist took a seat at the desk across from the mental chair.

"So the good news is...you're done! Looks like we got everything. It was a little trickier than usual, but nothing too severe. You'll get a receipt in your email. The credits have already been deducted from your intphone."

Blayne closed his eyes and subvocalized the word "menu," and a menu appeared in the darkness on the back of his eyelids. He focused his gaze on the cursor, moved it down, clicked on the word "balance." Yes. There was a line item for a mental checkup. Three hundred and fifty admincredits had been deducted.

"So...you are free to go," the mentist was saying.

Blayne opened his eyes. He stood up. He walked out the door and into the hall. That was it, then. Time to leave the mental clinic.

But then a thought flashed through his mind. A memory.

Something he had intended to ask the mentist about.

He walked back to the doorway of the room.

“Um...I have a question.”

The mentist was inputting something in the computer terminal. He looked up. “I’m happy to answer any questions for you while you’re here. I have a couple minutes before my next appointment. Have a seat.” He motioned to the mental chair.

Blayze reseated himself in the mental chair. “Thanks, Doctor. I remember something I was thinking about a few months ago, and I wanted to ask you, since you are an expert on these things. Or at least, you are the most expert person I know, except maybe my Govly-Makers, and I haven’t talked to them in years.”

“But, you don’t remember me—to you, right now is our first time meeting. How do you know I am as knowledgeable as you say?”

“You must be, in order to get such a job as mentist.” Blayze said. Only the most well-educated, elite of vat children were sent to mental school and given a job of such vital importance to the government, that of cleaning and maintaining the minds of the citizens. As Blayze knew, “ment,” or “mind” was the most important part of the word “government.”

“Point well taken.” Dr. Richards smiled, but just a hint of annoyance had started to show up on his chubby face. A nurse walked up and pointed at a digital clockface on the extphone around her neck, as if to remind the mentist about his next appointment. Dr. Richards waved her away with a motion and said, “Just give us another moment.”

“I was just thinking. Is the government a metaphysical entity? Or is it merely a group of human beings like you and me?”

Shocked, the mentist replied, “My boy, any act of questioning our great and glorious government is a Conspiracy Theory.” The mentist still had a professionally pleasant look on his face, but he blinked three times rapidly. The agitation was starting to show.

“All this cleaning of our minds, what do they do it for?”

Blayze realized now that he could remember hardly anything from the last three months. In fact, from the last year, or perhaps several years... His clearest memories were of his years at Govly Academy. But he knew that years had passed since then. And he had hardly anything to show for it in the way of memories. His own life was a mystery to him. All he knew was the things the Govly-Makers had made him recite over and over again as a child. "These mental checkups, they're for our benefit, right? They must do it for our benefit. That must be the reason. But, on the other hand, if they are just people like us..."

"Of course they're for our benefit." The mentist's eyes were serious now. Worried. As if somehow the treatment hadn't taken.

"I remember reading this book a few years ago, *The Selfish Gene*, by Richard Dawkins."

"Of course. I am aware of that book. Our glorious government allows us to read all books. But I am surprised you remember reading it. Somehow we must have missed that..."

"But if there is no metaphysical entity called 'government'... I mean, we learned at Govly Academy that primitive man worshipped metaphysical beings, like the idea they called 'God.' And we learned that we are more enlightened than they were. We have Science. But if no metaphysical being called 'government' exists, than they are just a group of people like you and me. Therefore, according to the selfish gene theory, those people whom we refer to as 'government' would not act in our interest, but in their own interests, in the interests of their own selfish genes. Not ours. Just like all of us do."

"But that's preposterous! I mean...but that is..." the mentist stammered, trying to find the words. "What I want to say is that of course there is a metaphysical entity called Government! And it shares its grace with all of us." He closed his eyes and folded his arms for emphasis when he said this. His face shone with indignation. "Simple logic dictates it must be so! If there were no deity called Government always doing that which is just, and if human beings were motivated by selfish genes, acting in the interest of their

own genes and not of the group, then conspiracies would of course be possible. But we know that is not true. That would lead to an insane world were you couldn't trust politicians and government officials. Thus, any rational mind can deduce that the truth must be that the deity called Government does exist, and people do not have selfish genes. You can rest assured that all of the holy people who represent the Government and its righteous ways are walking the just path, working for your best interests, for the greater good of the species, not for their own selfish interests." He rolled his eyes. "Now, have I answered all your questions?" He said that last sentence with an emphatic disdain. It wasn't a question. It was an accusation. The facade of professionalism was slipping. But defending one's glorious government trumped questions of occupational decorum.

"I mean, please don't misunderstand me, Doctor. I like the people who are called the government...they let me read and study and increase my knowledge. That's all I care about. But they aren't really the government, are they? They are just people like you and me. The Govly-Makers teach us that the god our ancestors worshipped doesn't exist, that it's just an idea. But that means...government is just an idea, too, doesn't it? And the Govly-Makers teach us that the form of our government is a democracy. But democracy is the idea that the people are the government. So that means you and I are the government. Don't get me wrong. This is just a thought experiment. I am completely loyal to the government. I just wanted to ask someone intelligent about it, since most people ignore me when I try to talk to them about theoretical stuff and just go back to playing their sims. But honest, I'm a happy citizen! I love the government. I'd even like to help them if I can. That's why I love learning and getting smarter. Maybe one day I can even be of use to the government. Thinking and understanding reality are what I love to do. I mean, *actually* understanding reality. Not just superficially going through life without ever stopping to ponder what's happening to me. I'm so glad to have a brain and be able to use it. The act of gaining knowledge...nothing in the world can compare to that. I wish more people

thought that way. But you're a thought professional! Surely you, of all people, must understand how I feel."

The nurse-cloud had floated back to the doorway during Blayze's speech. Dr. Richards barked at her, "Get me a reality fixer, on the double." The cloud then calmly glided away again.

Blayze had been deep in thought, but suddenly his eyes brightened up.

"You know what? You're right. I realize now that the Government is a metaphysical being, a deity that cares about us...just like the god our ancestors worshipped! Otherwise, the Government wouldn't be so beneficent! That is the proof I've been looking for of the existence of the god called 'Government.' The fact that the Media, the Corporations, and the Administration are so kind and magnanimous, that is all the proof I need! Good thing too, because if the Government weren't a beneficent metaphysical being, then it would be a small group of people enforcing their own selfish gene interests. Which would be to the detriment of the rest of us. Or even worse, a small group of people enforcing the selfish gene interests of an even smaller group of people. A pyramid scheme. Ha! Oh conspiracy of conspiracies! People acting in their own selfish interests! A small group of people benefiting from the rest believing in the idea of government. But that's not how reality works, thank Government!"

The look on Dr. Richards face continued getting darker and darker.

The cloud reappeared in the doorway, and Blayze could almost swear her white pajamas had turned grey. "Reality fixer on line two."

Dr. Richards grunted. "You know what, forget about the reality fixer. I can handle this," the mentist assured. "Can you just strap him back in?"

The nurse shrugged, and then walked over to Blayze and began fiddling with the straps again.

"Yeah, a group of selfish people...how awful would that be? They'd be hell bent on stopping the rest of us from pursuing our own selfish gene interests. Wait, is that why

they allow us only one child apiece from the vats? I don't want any children anyways, they'd just be a bother. I spend all my time reading and thinking. I'm a thinker, that's what I am! Sorry, I'm the talkative type, at least when there are other intellectuals in the room. I get carried away and ramble..." Suddenly, he looked down and noticed that he was once again strapped into the mental chair. "Wait...what's going on here?"

"Before you go, just one last thing." Dr. Richards flashed a reassuring smile at Blayze. "We missed a tiny spot. This will only take a jiffy."

Wait! Hadn't they already performed the mental scaling? He didn't remember Dr. Serelli ever hooking him up again to the chair. But this man had been chosen by their glorious government to attend to these matters. He must know what he's doing.

"Okay, no worries," Blayze murmured as the cerebral bubble descended around his head and he was subsumed by the cloud once again.

Dr. Richards leaned his massive bulk back in the ergonomic reinforced nanoplastic chair in his private office with hands clasped behind his head and a triumphal look on his face. On his desk, a cantaloupe and cottage cheese sat in front of a pair of large, sky blue holographic computer monitors displaying the cerebral scans of several patients. His eyes were closed.

I just finished my fifth lobotomy of the month, he thought. And then he thought, post. On the back of his eyelids, he could see his Thoughtbook profile. His former posts, the number of likes each one had accumulated, the avatars of his many friends. Upon thinking the word "post," this latest thought appeared at the top of his profile and instantly the likes started pouring in. In no time, he'd have enough Thought Points to bump his double platinum status up to triple platinum. I love this utopia, he thought with a grin.

THE STORY CONTINUES...

...IN MIND GRID, A FULL-LENGTH NOVEL

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. What started out as a short novelette, The

Thought Dentist, became 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 to a growing cult of Brighton addicts.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Brighton is the author of two novels and a novella, including *A Bioscanner Darkly*, a dystopian novel about a technocratic society enslaved under the Panopticon, and which is also a parody about Philip K. Dick, the great sci-fi author and mastermind behind many stories that spawned a plethora of poor Hollywood imitations. He has also written several short stories.

He is planning to do a crowdfunding campaign soon to hire a cover artist to make a gorgeous cover for all his latest novels. He can be contacted at jamesbrighton@tutamail.com.

You can support his work by making a crypto donation:

BTC

12T1K2RRaqFPaAG2muZsds3kFbHQpgPaBM

Ethereum (ERC20)

0x0f17bd0431924cae93fef5eee6b37113b104a9cf

BCH

Qq87xv6q4u5r708ttdm6pf6vm4we5ltvr5m4wkl5ut

USDT-TRON (TRC20)

TKVwWPHdvAT6RVC4mPc68XE5KiWeBgxd5F

* * *

OTHER NOVELS BY JAMES BRIGHTON

A BIOSCANNER DARKLY

In 1933, Howard Scott co-founded Technocracy, Inc., which proposed a plan to control the daily life of all citizens using technology. Fast forward to the future, and the government has declared a series of global disasters, necessitating the consolidation of power into the hands of a few monopolists, who promptly declare that for the cyberproles' good, strict daily limits to all human activities and bodily functions will be set and measured. 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 eat, the water they drink, every sip of alcohol.

As if this wasn't bad enough, the cyberproles are divided into castes based on the color and shape of their genitals, while the monopolists' media companies incite hatred against the lower castes.

Enter Joe, a member of the lowest, most hated caste in society, a Pale Penis, hellbent on escaping the monotony of this dystopic existence. One day, Joe casually wonders what it would be like if life were like a Philip K. Dick novel, jumping around from point of view to point of view, getting inside everyone's head. When mere moments later a strange man in an alleyway offers him a drug, claiming it will turn him into Philip K. Dick for a night, he starts to realize you must be careful what you wish for, as things start to become more like a PKD novel than he could ever have imagined. Things take a turn for the worse when he realizes the entire world is in danger, as this technocratic nightmare has awoken an ancient, cosmic entity intent on turning the entire planet to kipple, and with Joe's newfound abilities, he is the only person in the world able to reach the one man able to save the world from total disaster...

But will he make it in time? Can humanity save itself from the technological prison it has created for itself? Or is it

already too late?

James Brighton's debut novel, *A Bioscanner Darkly*, is many things at once. Philip K Dick parody, absurdist dark comedy, and warning about the dystopic side of technology. Dark, surreal, and absurd, *A Bioscanner Darkly*, plunges us into a world that isn't quite what it seems. A biting social satire exposing the hypocrisy of Hollywood, *A Bioscanner Darkly* serves as the perfect Brighton gateway drug.

WARCAR APOCALYPSE

Meet Bax, a child of the Never Ending Apocalypse. He and his fellow Normericans have never known anything but continual war, each of the splintered Republics fighting to retain control over their territory for more than thirty years now, with no end in sight...

Bax only had two loves in this world. When one of them is raped, murdered, and left in a ditch by a warbike gang, who themselves were destroyed a few days later by a rival gang, only one love remained...

The beautiful machine.

He had only shipped off to Afghanistan because the only girl he ever cared about told him she'd only date a man in uniform. But now she is nothing more than rotting remains, and his sanity is teetering on the brink of infinity inside his war-rotted brain.

Left with only one companion on these lonely highways, his A.I.-powered steed—three and a half tons of steel, electrodes, and enough firepower to start a small war—Bax has nothing left to live for and everything to die for.

Bax was more than just a runner, more than just a smooth warrior behind the wheel, ready to take on a run for a few creds. More than one of the very few people left in Normerica crazy enough to brave the vast territory outside the safety of the megacities, flowing freely across the war-torn continent, rubber gripping the road and finger gripping the trigger. He was all these things, but much, much more.

He was a philosopher, trying to find meaning in this

fuck up world.

And he did his philosophizing with twin vulcan machine guns, a touchsceen windshield, and guided mini-missiles. Eat your heart out Nietzsche.

But when he is approached by a mysterious client to do a run through Hellfire Canyon and to the New Britain-controlled Eastern Seaboard, Bax is about to face his ultimate test.

Nobody gets out of Hellfire Canyon alive.

Nobody.

Sounds like the perfect job.

In Warcar Apocalypse, James Brighton has revolutionized the beloved cult classic subgenre of sci-fi, Car Combat, by welding it together with Cyberpunk and created a cyborg: Cyberpunk Car Combat. For the first time in the history of the genre, car combat is fully cyberized, and things are about to get trippy. Chock-full of over-the-top sci-fi action like you've never seen it before, and infused with a generous dose of Brighton's signature surrealism, Warcar Apocalypse takes a darker plunge than any of his novels yet into the tragic despair of digital drug addiction, and the hidden dangers of merging man with machine.

BEAT THE SILICON BLUES!

A big problem nowadays which prevents many people from reading books like in the old days before the advent of the internet and smartphones, is that many people have become addicted to staring at their device screens all day, and watching audio-visual things such as corporatetube. For anybody who has a problem with not reading as many books & stories as they would like to because of this device/audio-visual addiction, simply download a book reading app with TTS (Text To Speech) like Librera or Evie for tablet, phone, or on a computer using a device emulator program like BlueStacks, and it will read ebooks to you in basically any format, epub, pdf, mobi, etc. Then the book becomes the movie. Stop watching corporatetube and start reading books! You can even set the voice speed to whatever you want, like 2x or 3x, in case the voice is too slow for you. You can also simply listen to it as an audiobook, even if no audiobook version is available! This works for books, essays, or just about any kind of document, or even for web pages, which can easily be shared with ebook reader apps on most devices.