

الواح حقيقة

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These works are produced at the request of B.T. as a record of events, from the first, the Eve Sharif affair, I have been at pains to point out my unsuitability for the task.

My English is not good, in grammar especially. The detailed explanations are necessary, and I try to simplify as much as possible, but B.T.'s work is complex and at times arcane (if that is the right word).

Moreover, I have not the facilities for professional proof reading and editing. All this I have pointed out to B.T., but of no avail, he insists on sending me material. So here it is, I hope the reader can understand and my poor abilities not prevent these stories from being read. Thank you in anticipation for your understanding. JFW.

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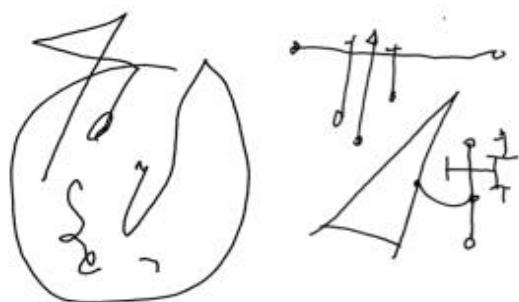
Dedicated to the non-existent boy.

The Tablets of Truth

A Billy Taylor Story

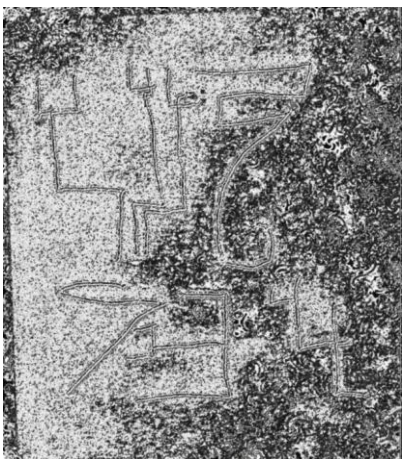
By James F. Whitehead

‘The writer has given up telling ‘stories’ and creates his universe.’
Albert Camus.













The Tablets of Truth

الواح حقيقت

alwah haqiqa

A British Army Sargent, Sgt. Alfred Sellers, with a small squad or section was escorting geographer, Mark Thomas, in Persia during the late 1930s. By 1938 this looked like the survey would be cut short by the impending war in Europe. On a trip some 80 miles north of Yezd the company came across a series of ruined buildings. After camping for the night one of the members of the platoon informed Sgt. Sellers that he had found 'a pile of tiles with drawings on them' in one of the buildings. On entering what looked like a temple of some sort, or 'library', they found stacks of tiles with inscriptions.

Mark Thomas had a camera, though only 3 exposures remained, he photographed 3 of the tiles. Having only 3 days left before due back in Yezd, he and Sgt. Sellers and two of the squad, who were reasonable at drawing, copied all they could of the remaining tiles.

During the return to Yezd they asked local villagers about the site and the tiles. They being devout Muslims said the site was not a holy place and so had been deserted for many years. Legend was that a mullah had begun breaking these when he suddenly died of a heart attack. Myth had it that many ages ago the name of the site was called 'The Place of The Tablets of



Truth', or

jaygah alwah haqiqat

This was now thought to be a blasphemy.

After arriving back in the UK during the war Mark Thomas enlisted, he was killed in action in Egypt, his survey work never completed and lost. In the confusion at arriving back in the UK Sgt. Sellers found he had the drawings and photographs in his pack. He fought also in the desert campaign, and later in Italy. He had kept the photographs and drawings. After the war he tried to interest the British Museum, but such work was not as vital as the post-war effort, and the location in Persia was now lost.

As a civilian Fred Sellers worked for the Birmingham Cooperative, in the stores and dispatch department. First as a junior manager, then as a chief assistant. The Birmingham Cooperative movement was another product of the late Victorian period. It had Grocery stores throughout the city, and butchers, bakers, delivered bread and milk, it also had a funeral service, and in Birmingham city centre in High Street, a department store, or rather two stores either side of the High Street, connected by its own subway. The Cooperative movement being one in which the shareholders were the shoppers. From the 1960s The Birmingham Co-operative Society went into something of a decline, the High Street stores closed, new supermarkets, milk delivery and the funeral service remains.

Alfred lived in Bordesley Green, a district some 3 miles from the city centre. He married in 1951 having only one child, a boy. He died two years after the child was born, but his mother continued to live there with her father. He died in 1968 and she then moved to Chelmsley Wood, a new housing estate on the outskirts of Birmingham.

The photographs and drawings from Persia were lost.



CHAPTER ONE: BORDESLEY GREEN

Bordesley Green was a working-class area in the east of Birmingham, mainly Victorian and other housing, built between the two world wars. To the west is the district of Small Heath and Bordesley, made famous by the 'Peaky Blinders' BBC TV series, set around the Garrison Pub, in Garrison Lane. Here is the football ground of Birmingham City F.C., 'The Blues'. The ground called St. Andrews, and like many football grounds has a 'Kop' end, named after Spion Kop. The name, a Kop or hill, derives from a famous battle of the Boer War, the second one, fought between the British and the Dutch Boers – 1899 – 1902. Birmingham City F.C. originally Small Heath Alliance, was renamed 'Small Heath' in 1888, then 'Birmingham' in 1905, and Birmingham City in 1943. There is perhaps an irony at work here, for many roads in Bordesley Green have names which derive from the Boer War and British Colonialism. Botha Road, Pretoria Road, Churchill Road. This was named after the young reporter writing on the war in South Africa, the journalist working for the Morning Post, was none other than Winston Churchill. He was captured by the Boers and when he managed to escape, he became something of a celebrity, and so a road was named after him, long before his entry into politics. The road in which Alfred Sellers lived was not named after anything or anyone specific but was simply called Colonial Road. The irony being not just the legacy of the British Empire and its colonies, but the area of Small Heath and Bordesley had a large Irish contingency who from the 1960s moved out of these areas to be replaced by immigrants from the Indian Sub-Continent, the former British colonies. Maybe an ironic re-colonisation. And the council houses now owner occupied by many Muslim families who may well be unaware of these names and their significance. Whatever, Islam has replaced a predominantly Roman Catholic area, and with this, not unsurprisingly many of the public houses frequented by the Irish are now closed. The Country Girl, The Custard House, which had an outdoor stage and bowling green, and the Sampson pub. The area now has numerous mosques.

And somewhere in 85 Colonial Road, home of a Muslim family,



was a cardboard box. Lost in what was once a coal bunker, lies a box containing the drawings and photographs from jaygah alwah haqiqat. Or supposedly so.



CHAPTER TWO: THE MISSING FAITHFULS

There must be about eight mosques within a half mile radius of 85 Colonial Road, and they are well attended by the faithful. The elders in the community especially so. It was then not a sudden surprise, but a slow realization when in a particular mosque it was noticed some of the older men seemed not to be attending as often. And then not at all. Imams and others began to talk, and it soon became apparent this was not confined to a single mosque.

Abu Muhammad was a student at South & City College Birmingham - Bordesley Green Campus, studying A levels. One of which was geography. He had a particular interest in local geography, and maps, old and new. He, unlike many, was familiar with the history contained in the street names. Somehow in conversations he became aware of the rumours of the seeming disappearance of these older men from attending their local mosques. One afternoon on a bright early September day he was in his bedroom in Yardley. It was his family home, a large house in the suburbs further east of Bordesley Green. His bedroom had a desk where he could study. He had a local map on his desk, he had always loved maps, which accounts for his choice of A level geography. He was also studying computer science and mathematics.

As his mind wandered and he thought of these rumours from conversations he thought he might plot which mosques were involved. He used google maps and found his location, entered 'mosque' in the search panel. He recalled a couple of the mosques.

The total came to 13, in the area and not eight. He printed the Google map and pinned it to his pin board.

Next, he marked those mosques of which he had heard the rumours with a red coloured pin. For the other mosques he had not heard of rumours he messaged some friends, who in turn messaged others or asked parents. He marked these likewise with red coloured pins. It was now clear that there was a definite



cluster. His college lay to the west of the cluster. It was also clear that Bordesley Green was the centre, and in particular the roads, Pretoria, Botha, Colonial, and Churchill.

It so happened that weekend was a family get together. His aunt, as yet unmarried, which was a worry to the gossips in the family, was one of the family members at the get together. She was in the West Midlands Police, and head of the Bordesley Green Police Community Team, Selima Ahmad a sergeant, and in other gossip 'on the way up!'. So it was that Abu Muhammad was engaged in idle talk with his aunt, and the subject of his A levels, his geography and love of maps came up. He explained about his pin board map and the rumours about the non-attendees at the mosques. That he had plotted the mosques concerned. His aunt was interested, very interested. He fetched the pin board, which was duly photographed, and notes taken.

Selima Ahmad was well known to the elders of the mosques in question, to both the leaders of prayer, Imams, and others including the women. There was either incomprehension, or no one knew, or a reluctance to discuss the matter. As she was leaving one mosque a very old woman, whose English was good, tugged her sleeve and whispered, 'kafir Jinn'. She walked on, looking back as if to say, 'Follow me.', which Selima did. They walked into Blake Lane, turning left onto Bordesley Green Road then left again up Fifth Avenue, a row of Victorian terraced houses with very small front gardens. The woman opened the gate and placing her key in the door, opened it, turned, and beckoned. Taking her inside, through the tidy front room with an old but well-kept three-piece suite and into a back room. Selima guessed this was once the family home, and now as she saw a very old man in a chair, they were the parents of a family who had typically done well and moved on. And typically, despite their son having a fine house now in Four Oaks, the parents would not join them, preferring the community around them and the house they had worked hard to own.

There was a table with half eaten food, the man looked feeble, almost like he had had a stroke, he looked up out of grey eyes



and muttered ‘kafir Jinn’ twice, then covered his face.

Over the following weeks, slowly the community team with the help of the local community, its leaders, and doctors found this scenario was repeated across the Bordesley Green area. Where medical examination was allowed nothing physically wrong could be found. Some in the community became angry over the lack of progress in identifying the cause, whilst still others with a very racist agenda made a point of raising this ‘special treatment’.



CHAPTER THREE: THE BOYS ARE BACK IN TOWN

Things were obviously getting political, and action was needed. Chief Constable White, head of the West Midlands Police, its headquarters being Lloyd House in the city centre, took action, and it was clever in the choice. Detective, (now) Chief Inspector Ray Wood, and a Detective Inspector Rashad Mahmood, (now a DI) would join the Bordesley Green community team and investigate.

As they drove out of the underground car park from Lloyd House, Rash grinned at Ray. They were on first name terms outside of officialdom, after all they had been through, a remarkable adventure together. Ray in particular had since this adventure been an outstanding officer. The drive to the Bordesley Green team was through 'the green' to Stechford and the Stechford police station. The road was busy, and congested, Ray drove, both he and Rash were smiling. Rash broke the silence...

'So, when are you going to phone?' he said.

'Who?' answered Ray.

'Please!' responded Rash.

'Didn't have to,' said Ray, 'the Chief already has, Billy Taylor will be at Lloyd house in a couple of days.'

'Why days?' Rash asked.

'Well, he is somewhere in Australia.' Ray answered.

'So, what do we do?' Rash said.

'We meet and greet the locals and wait for the cavalry.' Ray said.

The cavalry, Billy Taylor, was once a copper also, when Ray was a DS, (Detective sergeant). He had left the force to study



comparative religion, did much field work, and was now by many academics considered an expert, and because of his help solving a crime, or rather for some in the force who remembered, he was also considered an expert. That this was only remembered by some in the West Midlands Police, Chief Constable White being one, Ray and Rash also, is a long and complex story. In simple terms Billy had solved a crime which then never happened. A crime which involved his special knowledge. The Eve Sharif affair. Though in this instance he maintained that he was not especially knowledgeable about ‘mainstream’ religions. To which those in the know didn’t believe. At least in terms of their knowledge.

Someone might wonder how these two professionals could seem so light hearted about such a serious matter with a potential for much social unrest. Well, it’s part of a coping mechanism that such people have to acquire, given some of the scenes and situations they are subjected to. When in the public realm they need to express a calm assurance in situations where no such attitude is reasonable. So, over the next two days Ray Wood, Rashad Mahmood together with Selima Ahmad and her team interviewed members of the mosques involved, visited the homes of those affected, where they were able to do so, though some of the local people were very reluctant to discuss the matter. They even visited Abu Muhammad, talked to him in detail, photographed his map, and talked about his ideas on the focus of these events, which seemed to be the three roads, Botha, Colonial, and Churchill. An incident room was set up in the Stechford Police Station, and a large map became the centrepiece.

Ray and Rash had visited The Central Birmingham Mosque in Belgrave Middleway where they had meetings with what were senior figures in Birmingham’s Muslim community. There was an initial difficulty, Ray was accepted without any concern, but Rash was a different matter. He was quick to spot this, maybe they thought him a non-believer. Without prompting he offered, ‘I attend the Mosque in Sutton Coldfield...’ Faces eased, ‘and two years ago went on Hajj,’ he continued. The mood became



relaxed. It is true Rash had always attended a mosque, when a child, but it did become more a tradition. But after the affair with Billy a few years back Rash and others would never doubt there was more in the world than just materialism. He was a devout Muslim ever since.

The evening of the second day Ray and Rash entered Stechford Police Station, the desk sergeant giving them an over friendly and knowing smile. Entering the incident room not only to find the map, Billy Taylor but also Abu Muhammad the student. Before they could speak Billy smiled, and pointing to the map said,

‘Abu has been doing some excellent work, we’ve looked carefully at the distribution of the sites and density of cases, and Abu has done some smart mathematics, it seems the focus is here.’

He pointed to the middle of Colonial Road. It was past 6, and after hand shaking, a hug and back slapping, much to the embarrassment of the student, Billy asked for a lift back to the Hyatt Hotel, and to drop Abu back home on the way. This was duly done. After dropping Abu at his house Rash was the first to speak.

‘How was Australia?’

‘Australia?’ replied Billy, ‘No no, I was in Medina for two days then flew direct to Birmingham.’

‘But...’ said Ray, ‘I needed to get some background...’ Billy interrupted.

‘And flew back Executive Class!’ Rash said, looking at a tag on Billy’s briefcase, an old and worn leather affair.

‘I always do these days.’ Billy said.

‘How come?’ Ray demanded.



‘Oh, it’s a deal with a Hollywood agent, they let me fly executive, and pay the hotel bills, it’s in return for advice.’ Billy replied.

‘What advice?’ Ray shouted.

‘Well, when the studios, you know the ones who make the adventure and Marvel things or the occult, well when they want names, or folk tales, magic stuff which sounds authentic, they ask me, and I provide, even help with plots sometimes, myths and legends, so it’s a perk.’

‘Wow!’ said Rash, ‘what films?’

‘Oh, I can’t recall them all, but for a joke they give me a credit, not for the advice, I’m sometimes one of the caterers or 2nd stunt or an accountant assistant in the end titles.’ Billy replied.

So that night Rash, to his son and daughter’s surprise wanted all their action films, and even more surprising he skipped to the credits, and every so often laughed and clapped his hands.

Ray was driving, as usual wearing his Ray Ban glasses, but no longer elsewhere in deference to his superiors. Both detectives were wearing the ‘uniform’ of dark charcoal suits and black shoes, though Ray’s suit was definitely something non-standard, a Paul Smith.

‘Well, the suit, Billy, very nice...’ Ray said. Billy was indeed wearing a suit, unlike his more casual look, a fine pin stripe. ‘so what is the SP there?’ Ray continued.

‘Well meeting these movie people, they insist on the English look.’ Billy replied, ‘So?’ Ray said.

‘Oh, it’s Anderson & Sheppard, and John Lobb shoes.’ said Billy. Ray gave a whistle, and Rash repeated ‘John Lobb?’ as a question to which Ray replied, ‘Not much change from two grand.’



The plain police car pulled up at the Hyatt Regency Hotel on the corner of Broad Street and Bridge Street, a tall glass slab of a building.

‘So, the WMP (West Midlands Police) are footing the bill for this 5 star.’ Ray said.

‘No no,’ Billy said, ‘this is on Walt Disney, well Marvel, I’m helping with a new film, I should say movie, but the Hollywood types really like me using the word FILM.’

‘Which is?’ asked Rash.

‘I really can’t say, but there’s a Norse angle.’

‘Ah! Got it.’ said Rash.

‘OK,’ said Ray, ‘we will pick you up at 9.30 tomorrow, have a good night.’

Billy took a walk around the canal basin at Gas Street. And down towards the canal’s junction, the Worcester, Fazeley and Wolverhampton junction, which is below the International Conference Centre, the Indoor Arena, and across from Sea World. There is the Malthouse pub, where Bill Clinton’s picture hangs, of him holding a pint. At a G8 meeting, both he and Tony Blair stayed at the Hyatt Regency. And the G8 was held in the conference centre.

Billy took a slow walk as evening came on. The lights in the bars and restaurants along the tow path of the canal glinting in the water, now also with the new apartment blocks. Once the heart of the industrial revolution, then a slow decline and abandonment, an embarrassment to the city, but from the 1980s a phoenix like rise.

Billy was looking at the lights reflected in the canal below The Mailbox, once Birmingham’s central post office sorting house, now a shopping mall, with a Harvey Nick’s, a hotel, apartments,



restaurants, cinema and the home of the BBC in Birmingham. It was a warm September evening, a gentle breeze, Billy sat overlooking the canal and had a couple of glasses of red wine before an evening meal, just a fillet steak, salad, followed by ‘La Hechicera’ a Rum Baba with pineapple, lime, crème fraîche Chantilly, and another two glasses of wine.



CHAPTER FOUR: COLONIAL ROAD

Next morning Rash and Ray picked Billy up from the Hyatt Regency hotel and drove straight to Bordesley Green, turning left off Bordesley Green Road and down Colonial Road, stopping in the dip halfway down. A road still lined with plane trees, many of the front gardens of the interwar houses now block pavements for family cars. Now predominantly Muslim families, but a couple of older Irish living in the Edwardian terraces.

Selima Ahmad and a colleague, both in uniform in a marked police car were waiting for them. To the police sergeant and constable, they were surprised at the well-dressed 'expert', they were more surprised, but not Ray or Rash, when Billy produced a pendulum. Swinging it in a circle it slowly began a right - left pattern, Billy pointed,

'There.'

Towards number 85, which looked odd, what was once a front garden was now a block pavement, obviously big enough for several cars, it looked odd because now it was empty. The officers and Billy walked towards the house. Selima and Ray approached the door, Ray taking off his glasses. The front of the house had a veranda with double doors. Selima pressed the doorbell, which could be clearly heard. And did so four times. A man's voice from the pavement outside number 81, dressed in an Arabic thobe spoke,

'They are not in, not in, haven't been there for six months.'

Selima and Ray walked towards the man, a Mr Ali but before anyone could speak a woman, probably Mr Ali's wife appeared and began talking.

'They gone, gone away, all of them, Hamid Zulfiqar and family, wife and 3 children, gone away 6 months ago, gone back to Pakistan, I have the key...'



She held up a bunch of keys.

‘I keep an eye out if you want to see around, I can let you in, I have their permission.’

The two officers followed the woman back to the doors of 85. Rash was standing with Billy and the constable, Ray beckoned to Billy, who seemed reluctantly to follow. The two officers and Mrs Ali entered the house. There was a slight musty smell, but all was clean. In the hallway a table, then a living room with a modern 3-piece suite, a large flat screen TV, and games consoles. A dining room with a table and chairs. A modern fitted kitchen. Bedrooms, one obviously a boy’s, the others maybe his sister’s and a parent’s bedroom. Bathroom with shower. All like the rest of the house lavishly fitted with decorations, and fine fabrics. Mrs Ali was holding cushions and fabrics, as if to demonstrate the quality. Stroking the curtains. In the bedrooms she opened the wardrobes, still with clothes hanging in them, she spoke.

‘See they left their clothes only taking a few in two suitcases.’

About this time, so engrossed by the tour, Ray asked,

‘Where is Billy?’

They went downstairs but there was no sign. Neither was he outside on the car park. There was no sign of him anywhere.

They re-entered the house and continued their tour. There was what once was a larder off the kitchen, now a small utility room with a washing machine and dryer. Like everywhere else most of the furniture and appliances looked almost new. Leaving the kitchen Ray noticed a door which opened to a broom cupboard. He switched on a light, the cupboard was square, again clean, and tidy. All was in order except he noticed a small hole in the plasterboard at the back of the cupboard, as if someone had accidentally knocked a hole with something, the broom maybe. Something about this disturbed Ray, but he couldn’t think what. Going outside he noticed a small door on the left of the front



doors. Selima gave Ray a questioning look.

‘A coal door, the cupboard off the kitchen which is underneath the stairs would once have been a coal store.’ Ray said.

Mrs Ali had stooped to pick up some mail, then closed the door. They were still looking to see where Billy was, when the front door opened and Billy stepped out. He looked at Ray and said,

‘Well, the first part is done.’

‘But the problem!’ Ray said. ‘And where have you been, we couldn’t find you anywhere.’

‘Well, the first part is done. But now we have a bigger problem.’ Billy replied, walking back to the car, as he did Selima’s phone rang, she had a conversation, but as soon as that call finished it rang again, and kept ringing. She handed her phone to the constable, a George Saunders, who with a baffled face continued to take calls. Selima spoke to Ray,

‘it’s people from the mosques, Imams and wives, the elderly gentlemen are fine, some already at their mosque, praising Allah and well, very well and joyful. Your friend is right, it seems it is over.’

The four officers looked at each other, bemused, then Ray turned to Billy,

‘Have you fixed this?’ he said.

‘Oh no, certainly not, not me, and no names but the praise I guess is directed appropriately, nothing to do with me. But we need to get Nigel over here as soon as possible, I hope he is around.’

Billy took out his phone and made two quick calls.

Billy said that they needed to wait a few minutes, which the



small group did.

Despite the bafflement there was nothing much else they could do. Ray's phone rang, it was White when the call finished Ray said,

'White the Chief, says Nigel is on his way.'

Rash put his hand on Billy's and said softly.

'A witness of the mighty works of Allah for the Dhimmi.'



CHAPTER FIVE: 85 COLONIAL ROAD

When Mrs Ali led Ray and Selima across the car parking space in front of number 85 Colonial Road, Billy was following. Mrs Ali, Ray and Selima entered the house. But Billy entered the house as it was in the late 1950s.

Billy had followed, crossed into the parking space, but it was now a front garden of lawns and flower beds with a central path. Missing its veranda and double-glazed windows. No sign of Ray, Selima, and Mrs Ali, just the original front door with the numbers 8 and 5 in the centre.

Behind him was a small wooden gate, painted a pale blue and either side a privet hedge of around five foot high. To his left was a tall flowerless shrub and beyond that a tree with white flowers. There was a path with a lawn either side, each having a flower bed, the one on the left having a few rose bushes. The garden had a fence of wooden palings either side made from split wood and wire. There was a single front door with small windows either side. To the left a large lilac tree, on the right a large brick single story building with two concrete apex roofs, an air raid shelter from the second world war he guessed. In front of this was a tall climbing rose. He walked down the path; he could now see they were in fact two air-raid shelters. At the back of these he could see they had two very rusty iron doors, he opened the first, it contained some coal, in the second there was an old push lawn mower. To the left of the front path was another small window, and a hatch which looked like it once was used to store coal inside the house. The ground beneath it was very damp, some horsetails were growing there, and there was a very strange feeling and a metallic taste in his mouth. He stood by the door for a while thinking.

‘This is not of the present time?’ he said to himself.

Billy walked back to the front door, as he expected when he pushed gently at the door it opened onto a hallway. To his left was a staircase, it had a stair carpet with runners. The shelf on



the window at the bottom of the stairs had some coins, he recognised old penny pieces and a threepenny bit.

Again, he spoke to himself, 'Old money, pre decimalization, which was when, 1970?'

The door to the right was a toilet. It had no handbasin, a quarry tile floor and painted gloss brickwork walls. The cistern was high up, with a pull chain to flush.

The hall had a small bamboo table with a cactus in a pot on top of it. The hall led to a door and another dog leg to the right. Down here was a living room, this had two windows and was empty. The floor was linoleum. The other door led into another living room. This had French windows onto the back garden. A fireplace on the right, two large red armchairs either side, and a small settee on the opposite wall. In the left corner was a large deep brown table with an old black and white television on it. Above this on a small shelf was a cream-coloured Bakelite radio. Opposite it was a bird cage on a stand with a budgerigar in it. To his left a door led to the kitchen. He walked into the kitchen noticing another door to the left, which he guessed was the coal store. Further on the left was a door to a scullery. It had a cold shelf for keeping food fresh, a few tins, and a small window onto the front garden. The kitchen had a butler sink, a large pine table covered in oil cloth, an old gas stove and a gas boiler in the corner for washing clothes. Like the toilet the walls were painted brick, but with linoleum stuck on the wall, around the lower part to about 5 feet, patterned with imitation tiles. He took all this in, and then turned to the coal store. Facing it was a small table, some make up and lipstick and a mirror. The door to the store opened with a latch. It was dark and very dirty. He stepped in and down, the store was underneath the stairs. The ceiling tapering down as he moved inside. His eyes adjusted to the light, but he saw nothing, so felt with his hands, moving what he thought was an old sack, he found the army pack in the corner containing the three photographs and drawings from 'The Place of The Tablets of Truth'. Bringing the pack out and onto the kitchen table he took out carefully the 3 photographs and the



drawings.

Looking around the kitchen, 'Probably the late 1950s?' he said to himself.

An old woman came into the kitchen, she was very thin with wiry white hair. She wore a dark dress and pinafore of dark maroon paisley patterns. She took a kettle from the stove and filled it with water, lit a ring on the gas stove with a flint lighter and waited for the kettle to boil. She took a teapot from a shelf and a packet of loose tea and poured in the water once it had boiled. She fetched a mug from the pantry and poured the tea into it. She went back into the pantry and fetched a bottle of milk. The thin neck of the bottle showed that it was sterilized milk. She poured this into the mug and gave it a stir with a spoon she took from the draw in the table. She placed the mug in front of Billy, then quietly left the room. Neither spoke, Billy just watching. He sipped the tea. Amongst the drawings and photographs was a map, on the back the inscription.

'The Tablets of Truth found 80 miles north of Yezd. The company came across a series of ruined buildings. Took 3 photographs and we made drawings of the others. There were 170 tiles. They are inscribed images on a thin metal like substance, each is $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches square. M. Thomas. 2nd June 38.'

Billy then began to look carefully at the first photograph. Then the drawings, lots of them. All drawn on thin semi translucent paper. He recognised some of the sigils and others not at all. There seemed to be the occasional eschatological symbol, but from widely different sources.

So, he pondered their significance, even their authenticity. After trying to read them, with some success, he placed them in a pile on the table, sitting on the chair, placed his head on them closing his eyes. The images drifted across his mind.



CHAPTER SIX: THE FIRST ESCHATOLOGY¹

They marvelled at their ingenuity. The structure only half built could be seen for miles across the city. A vast silver metal coil of laminated layers or sheets, which shone brightly in daylight. It was rumoured that though silver there was nothing metal about it. There were many surprising things about the structure, not only the materials that it was made from, how they arrived, and most surprising of all, no one actually seemed to know the purpose of 'The Machine.' as it was called. There was wild speculation, a source of infinite energy, a portal to another universe, a time machine, a super intelligent computer. Literally a man-made God, some did refer to it as 'The God Machine'. This caused it to be denounced by various fundamentalist religions, whilst new religions and cults arose, some praising it, other cursing and seeking to destroy it. The cult that thought it was being built by aliens had to alter their story when confronted by the obviously human workers on the site. Maybe at the instruction of aliens was their response. Security was tight, and when questioned as to the machines purpose the workers shrugged or smiled.

'Did even they not know...' some said.

After two years it dropped out of the media and public speculation. Other issues took its place. The economy, wars, terrorism, health, taxation, immigration. And popular entertainment, a revival of fashions, still the internet and competing social platforms. The AI bubble burst as the systems slowly polluted themselves in massive feedback loops. And there were several major accidents or disasters. An electric powered passenger plane designed by AI crashed, an AI designed vaccine caused thousands of deaths.

These incidents were at first hushed up by the tech companies who produced the AI software. They were after all making billions of dollars. Their hope was for a self-improving AI

¹ Eschatology, or the science of last things, end of things.



generating better more advanced AI. But with no ‘new’ input, and the failure of AIM, Artificial Imagination, no progress was made, in fact systems became more generalized, like mixing different coloured paints, reduced everything to a non-descriptive ‘brown’. Movies and books written by AI flopped. And as the numbers perishing from AI medicine, and when the sixth AI designed electric passenger plane crashed the whole project was abandoned by the general public. Some more ‘authoritarian’ governments continued, especially in defence. A relatively small totalitarian country created an AI army, but no great ‘Terminator’ event occurred. It was just the AI ‘troops’ were totally predictable, even in their unpredictability. When deployed in anger against another nation armed with human soldiers, thousands of these machines were simply wiped out. And the joke, in bad taste, was AI stood for Artificial Ignorance.

Societies reached a steady state, fashion and technology only changing in its look. Analogue became fashionable. Smart phones got big again, some like the very original ‘bricks’. There was talk of colonisation of Mars, nations placed men and women on the moon, but no further. Fusion energy was always 5 years away. There were bouts of plagues and famine and pop concerts to raise funds for aid.

Space telescopes produced ever more colourful images of stars and nebulae. CERN produced ever more exotic particles. But slowly the inhabitants of the world became bored.

Then the rumours started to circulate, ‘The Machine’ was complete!

It now resembled what some jokingly called a giant metal Swiss roll. Only with thousands of layers. And astonishingly though, still no purpose for ‘The Machine.’ had been established, but given the repetitive nature of the world, its boring steady state, it was seen as a remarkable achievement. It was almost as if it having no purpose made the achievement of completing ‘The Machine.’ even more remarkable.

I was walking down Fifth Avenue in Bordesley Green towards



Bordesley Green Road. The road consists of Victorian terraces except for a space where there is a block of 1950s maisonettes, three stories high. They mark the place of a gap made in the terrace of houses during an air raid in World War Two. No one remembered the night or any casualties, but the gap looked like even in a shelter there would be little chance of anyone surviving. The maisonettes stood a little back from the terraces either side, so had bigger front gardens. And unlike the privet hedges, they had a simple fence made from concrete posts and wire, only three feet high. In the distance towards Saltly 'The Machine.' could be seen towering on the horizon. A little old lady crossed the street smiling, and picked a little flower and offered it to me. My fingers holding it, felt small and I had the scent of the metallic smell of ionization. The lady continued to smile, as the horror of the truth of the machine swept over me. It was total annihilation. Small fragments of tiles began to fall from the sky, then everything collapsed.

It was night, from the top of Colonial Road I could see forked lightning over the Catholic church and seminary. Death.

Billy Taylor held the first picture, and then took out his Moleskine notebook. He wrote,

'Eschatology, or the science of last things? Were these thoughts the dreams or actuality of some history, or some future event? And why did this image of the tile relate?'

He then looked at the next photograph, he didn't recognise anything, it looked like a drawing of a tree. He closed his eyes.



CHAPTER SEVEN: THE SECOND ESCHATOLOGY²

In the land of cherry blossom, they created a germ, and this germ could grow very fast and mutate. It could live in the air, and feed on animal cells. Within weeks it had devoured all living things. It then too died.

² These events occurred prior to 2019.



CHAPTER EIGHT: THE THIRD ESCHATOLOGY

Billy looked at the last photograph, he was puzzled, and noticed the paper was now a little brittle. He smoothed it out on the table, it had a sigil which looked like that of the Hindu God Kali, the dark mother, a goddess associated with time, doomsday, and death. He again closed his eyes.

Billy saw a landscape, with mountains with roads bending around them, at their base were deep pine woods. There was a blue-eyed boy far away, he could hear a noise like the sounds of a vast ocean. Walking towards the boy, who was now in the forest, he followed the boy, he could hear wolves howling like a baby crying, the path shone and glittered in the rain. The path left the forest behind them and entered a small town, they walked past a blacksmiths. Some children were playing, one on a ladder shouting directions, over and over, many times, they were playing cowboys and Indians, an old game Billy knew well. It was now raining hard, the boy he had been following entered a tent, a circus tent. Inside were crowds of people laughing and shouting, together with the roar of lions and beasts. A band was playing, outside there was now thunder and lightning. There were performers, acrobats, clowns. People were eating hot dogs, while others looked on hungrier. The whole scene was in uproar, children crying and laughing. Just then a black dog ran in and terrified a pony which fell to the floor. All went silent. The clowns stood still, so did the acrobats and the fire eater. Everyone became very sad, and then some began muttering.

The boy ran out and through the town, past stores, the bank, the prison. It was a wild west town in America. He ran deep into the wood and disappeared. It was still raining, then in a clearing Billy saw the pony.

The black dog walked into the clearing, it sat and began to speak.

‘It’s strange that people think I’m depressing. I’m a dog and all dogs want is fun, but humans can be cruel, even to dogs, and



make them hate, love and hate, and frighten them. There was a dream, a very strange dream, like a vision, to symbolise the hate born out of fear, and of learning to love fear, it was a dream in black and white.'

The dog stopped talking and lay down looking at the pony.

The pony slowly stood up, bowed, and began to speak.

'I need to tell this story to prevent it happening.

There were two great peoples, and many lesser peoples. The two great peoples were very powerful and had discovered how to make fire. They unwisely thought they were very wise, and were jealous of each other and frightened, and also angry. They were called the Taíno, and the Guanahatabey. Secretly the Taíno used a lesser people, the Ciboney people to protect them from the fires of the Guanahatabey which they could use to burn them up. But they did not fear the Taíno who also had fire. The Ciboney were given fire secretly which could destroy the Guanahatabey. When the Guanahatabey discovered this, they completely burnt all the Ciboney people, and started to burn the Taíno, but they were not fast enough and the Taíno set fires onto the Guanahatabey. All were consumed by fire and the whole earth with it.'

The pony lay down not dead, and the dog getting up, led Billy out of the forest and out of the story.

Billy sat at the table deep in thought as if still lost in the forests. The image of the black dog was of depression. Then Billy woke up and whispered 'Cuba! The Cuba crisis...'

'Taíno, Guanahatabey, and Ciboney were tribes of Cuba. Of course, the Cuba missile crisis of 1962 was one in which the USA and USSR nearly went to war. A nuclear war, a type of war which had the acronym "M.A.D." Mutually Assured Destruction.'

But this war did not happen. So, Billy thought,



‘I need to tell this story to prevent it happening’, the pony said.

‘The story of the tablets contains a truth. Images of all truths that are unique. So, if the Tablets contain these truths then they are not in this world true.’

His thoughts continued,

‘So, what of the second tablet? This prevents a future pandemic destroying all life? And the first?’

He then looked at the rest of the drawings, over a 100 of them! He counted them. Carefully he placed these with the photographs into his briefcase.

The old woman came into the kitchen. She filled an old kettle with water and lit a ring on the gas stove. When the water boiled, she made tea. She placed another mug on the table. She spoke,

‘They were dreams of a boy who lived here, and you have a guest.’

Billy wrote in his Moleskine notebook ‘*Does the reading of The Tablets of Truth prevent the apocalyptic event!*’

And looking up he noticed a very old man, in traditional Muslim dress, had entered the room. The old lady had guided him to a chair, where he sat. His eyes tired and grey, he sipped the tea. Billy took out a drawing and slid it across the table to show the frail person. He looked for a while.



CHAPTER NINE: ANWAR HOSSAIN

‘Bees...’ he said. A strange remark given the image, made stranger still by the man’s voice. It was clear BBC English with no accent, also his speech didn’t seem to match his lip movements, his lips twitched and barely opened, yet the voice was clear and distinct.

‘Tell me about the bees.’ Billy said, and he noticed the strange look in the man’s eyes. He understood him, but it seemed more than that, he understood ‘perfectly’.

‘Bees...’ the Guest continued, ‘A fantastic hive of bees, and some are dancing. They are dancing directions! I can understand!’

The Guest was becoming animated.

‘I can understand! Look...’ The Guest fingered the drawing, ‘Nectar, in this direction it takes a minute to fly. Oh, my I can see where, its someone’s garden. And now they are fumbling in the flower petals, a wonderful sight, the colours and the smells. And flying back to the hive and making honey and constructing the beautiful honeycomb.’

‘And now they are feeding the new queen,’ he continued, ‘and the swarm is gathering, a host of bees surrounding the new queen. Off they fly and into a nearby tree, sending out “scouts” to look for a new nest. But none is found. They all must die.’

The guest finished, he looked very sad and very ill.

‘But,’ said Billy, ‘the drawing shows an alternative reality to the one that was real. They didn’t all die, in real life they, the swarm, were collected by a man in a suit and hat which covered his face, he shook the swarm into a box and then took the bees to a new empty beehive.’

The Guest thought awhile, then realising said,



‘Yes, I see now, the drawing,’ he looked at it and stroked it
‘shows the other reality, that was bad, and so the good is real!’

He beamed, smiled and his eyes sparkled with life and hope.

‘Praise be... and you my friend, you speak excellent Bengali’ he said.

‘And you my friend speak excellent English.’ replied Billy.

They shook hands and the man left.

Billy looked at the drawing, but it was no longer a paper image but a thin tile, of a silver material. He looked in his bag at the three photographs, the rest of the pages, they too were now thin tiles.



CHAPTER TEN: YASIR BABU AND OTHERS

The old lady entered the room followed by another old and weary looking man; she guided him to sit facing Billy. Billy slid over the next drawing. He looked at it carefully, sipped the tea the lady had placed for him, he stroked his beard, then spoke,

‘Bees...’ he said. A strange remark given the image, made stranger still by the man’s voice. It was clear English with no accent, he spoke as the man before.

And so, he told the same story, and Billy gave the same explanation, and the man became joyously animated.

‘So’ thought Billy, ‘167 drawings, two down so 165 to go, I think I’ll take a stroll.’

Billy walked out of the kitchen, he decided to look upstairs, He climbed the stairs which began by the front door, at the top was a large landing with a door to his right across the landing, two doors opposite, and an open door to the left. The door that was open he could see most of the room, there was a bed to the left, a table and on the right a window. It was open and a young boy of about 10 or 11 was at the window. He was wearing plastic sandals, short charcoal grey trousers and a white shirt under a fawn jumper, he had blonde hair.

He turned and spoke to Billy,

‘It’s a cable car, come and see.’

Billy entered and at the window saw the boy had made a long loop of string from the window which ran out and over the garden and down to a fence post. Attached to the string was a small carriage from a train set. The boy was pulling on the loop and the carriage slowly descended to the garden below.

‘Come on,’ the boy said. ‘I’ll show you around.’



Billy followed the boy, 'This is my bedroom.' he said, they walked out onto the landing, the boy opened the door to the right. It was a bathroom, sink and bath, but no toilet, green patterned linoleum on the floor. Next, he crossed and pointed to the opposite door and said, 'Grandfather's.' and then to the other door, 'My mother's.' He turned and went down the stairs, Billy following. They walked through the living room and out into the garden through the French windows. He took Billy down the right-hand path, passed flower beds on both sides. The boy pointed to the left bed,

'I dug for fossils there, I didn't find any, only some teeth.' he said. They walked past a gooseberry bush to where there was a small slab of dried cement, the boy again pointed.

'A launch pad made from cement from Woolworth's, I didn't know about sand and gravel, so it didn't work.'

The dried cement was broken and cracked.

Beyond this was a log which had nails that had been only partially hammered into it. 'That's a dinosaur.' the boy said. They walked back down the other path, which was of grass, the first path being made of concrete. By what was the kitchen window, above which was the boy's bedroom window, was a shed with a mangle in front of it. The boy opened a small door and took out something wrapped in oil cloth.

'It's from Quatermass.' he said, handing it to Billy, 'look inside.'

Billy placed the oil cloth on the grass and unwrapped the cloth, inside were three large pods, each about a yard long. The boy looked at Billy, and Billy realized something, so he wrapped the pods back in the oil cloth and handed it back to the boy who placed it back in the shed and closed the small door.

'I'll show you "The Swan Device" then we are done.' the boy said.



He followed the boy back through the living room into the kitchen and from there into the pantry. Underneath a meat slab of marble to keep meat fresh before refrigerators were affordable was a strange looking object made from what looked like some thin clear plastic.

‘That’s all really,’ the boy said, ‘I used to imagine armies fighting across the toilet floor but that was when I was little.’ With this he left the larder.

Billy followed but on entering the kitchen noticed another very old Asian man sat at the table with a mug of tea. The old woman offered Billy some tea. He sat and the man began his story, the Bee story.



CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE AEON

After around 25 tellings by successive visitors of the Bee story, Billy still interested, he noticed he thought something was strange about the old woman. At around 60 tellings it was obvious, she was getting younger. At 80 tellings she was a woman in her 40s, and so it went on.

As the last guest left in a state of great happiness, as were all the others, the now young woman, or what appeared to be a young woman, sat facing Billy across the table.

She began to speak,

‘Our guests might call me a Jinn perhaps, or an Angel, and you being a Metaphysician would perhaps call me an Aeon. So, for you I will be an Aeon, Elpis.’

‘Elpis, then “Hope”, an emanation from The One.’ Billy said.

‘Yes,’ said Elpis, ‘now bring me the pods.’

Billy rose, left the kitchen, and walked into the living room and out into the back garden through the French windows. He turned left and going to the small shed retrieved the three ‘pods’ wrapped in the oil cloth, returned to the table, and placed it in front of the Aeon.

Elpis (Hope) the Aeon, began to speak, as she did so she unwrapped the pods and placed them on the table.

‘These pods contain what were once what is called “Papilio”.’

She opened slowly each pod in turn.

Each contained a creature with human like features, but only the size of the pods, just over two feet. Their skin was dark and stretched over bone but retained a beauty. They were not alive. They had wings folded around them of a thin delicate nature like



those of a dragon fly.

‘These Papilio were originally from Antichthon and were probably part of some who came to earth when their world collided with yours, a very long time ago, much longer than Velikovsky thought, though he was kind of right. Do you follow?’

‘Yes, I follow, I know about Aeons, and Antichthon, and Velikovsky.’ Billy said.



CHAPTER TWELVE: OF HUMANS AND ANGELS

Angels appear in numerous religions as spiritual beings, in Zoroastrianism. In Judaism and Christianity names such as Michael, Gabriel, Raphael all ending 'ael', or 'iel' and so relate to God. Angels also appear in Islam. In Neoplatonism there is the interpretation of daemons as angels, Neoplatonism being associated with Gnosticism. Here from 'The One' there are Emanations – The Demiurge or nous, The World-soul, The Phenomenal world. However, there is in Neoplatonism a contrast to an idea in Gnosticism, of a botched creation.

The counterpart to an Angel is a Devil, a malevolent supernatural entity. The notion of devils, and the fear of the unknown goes back millennia. As do ideas of opposing forces.

Even with secular science this persists in the ideas of 'Energy', 'Matter', 'Time', 'Past', 'Present', 'Future' and opposites such as 'anti matter', and other exotic stuff, Dark Matter, Dark Energy. If mathematics is how secular science deals with these forces, in religions they often take physical form, that of the human, or animal or a combination of both.

In Hinduism in the Vedas, there are gods, deva, and demons, asura.

Some Jews deny the existence of demons, the Hebrew Bible mentions two classes of demonic spirits, the se'irim and the shedim.

Zoroastrianism had the belief in demons.

Examples in Christianity abound, categories such as Leliouria: The highest demons who inhabit the ether, beyond the moon, Aeria: Demons of the air below the moon, Chthonia: Inhabiting the land, Hyraia/Enalia: Dwelling in the water and Bypochtbonia: living beneath the earth.

In Islam demons try to lead humans astray from God, by



tempting them into sin, and sorcery. Jinn (Anglicized as genies) – are like humans, they are accountable for their deeds and can be either believers (Muslims), or unbelievers (kafir), depending on whether they accept God's guidance.

To take the idea of the 'Metaphysical' rather than 'Physical' representation of forces, those found in science, the Metaphysicians, such as Billy Taylor, can get a handle on such forces defined not by mathematics but human and animal phenomenal traits.

It might be worth examining how this is done and making comparisons. So, in cosmology following the Big Bang we have the generation of particles, of atoms, and then in the actions in stars the formation of the elements, and then of molecules, complex molecules, life, and human beings.

Here is an example of this process in the Aeons in Gnosticism.

The Ogload: Bythos - the Profound Aeon, Sige - the Idea, Zoe - Life.

The Decad: Henosis - Union, Hedone - Pleasure or Bliss, Synkrisis - Blending.

The Dodecad: Pistis - Faith, Elpis - Hope, Agape - Love, Synesis, Intelligence, Sophia - Wisdom.

And for each a negative aspect, discovered by Billy Taylor, who named these by replacing the first letter with 'X', Xenosis, Xlpis, etc. And this arose from his previous work helping the West Midlands Police.

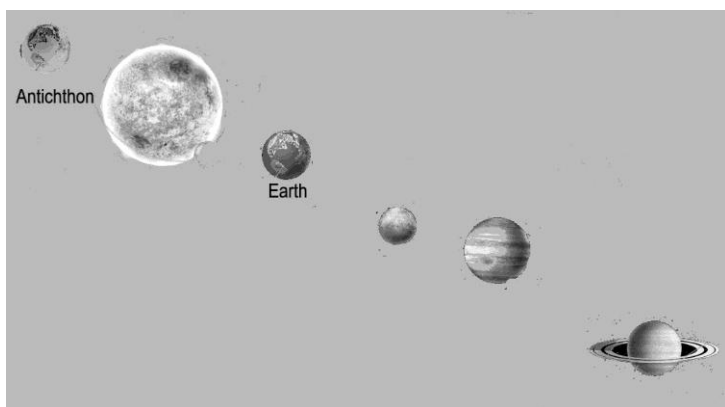
It was an event which involved Ray and others from the WMP, The MET, MI5, and even the CIA.



CHAPTER: THIRTEEN THE COUNTER EARTH - ANTICHTHON

The Counter-Earth is the idea that an Earth like planet is in the same orbit as the earth but always opposite, and so on the other side of the solar system and being on the other side of the Sun never visible from the earth. Antichthon was its name given by the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Philolaus.

In Philolaus' system, the Earth and Antichthon orbited an unseen Central Fire every 24 hours. The Moon's revolution was monthly, and the Sun's yearly. Aristotle argued that the Counter-Earth (Antichthon) explained the eclipses of the moon and their frequency. This idea was changed to one in which the Earth and the Antichthon both orbit the Sun.



In the Modern Era the idea has remained, and by some it is seen as the source of UFOs.

The 1968 Scientific Study of UFOs headed by Edward Condon at the University of Colorado included a Numerical Experiment on the Possible Existence of an 'Anti-Earth' as an appendix.

In response to such ideas is the lack of any evidence of this 'other Earth's' gravitational effects. It would also have been



visible to some space probes.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN: WORLDS IN COLLISION

Immanuel Velikovsky published 'Worlds in Collision' in 1950. The idea in the book is that around the 15th century BC, the planet Venus was ejected from Jupiter, passed near Earth, and changed Earth's orbit and axis, causing innumerable catastrophes mentioned in early mythologies and religions. It was an instant New York Times bestseller.

Worlds in Collision's premise is the planet Earth participated in celestial wars that took place in historical times. The evidence found in historical texts, classical literature, epics and sacred books from around the world. Also in archaeological finds, and geological and palaeontological material. The proposal is that Venus formed inside of Jupiter, and that in the 15th century BC it was ejected from Jupiter as a comet and passed near to the Earth. Changing the Earth's orbit and axial inclination, causing catastrophes which were identified in early mythologies mentioned above. It claims that 52 years later, Venus made a close approach, stopping the Earth's rotation for a while and again causing catastrophes. In the 8th and 7th centuries BC Mars made a close approach to the Earth causing disturbances and disasters.

These events led to several key statements:

It follows that Venus is still very hot, rich in petroleum and hydrocarbon gases, and has an abnormal orbit. Also, Velikovsky claimed Jupiter emits radio noises, that the magnetosphere of the Earth reaches at least to the Moon, that the Sun has an electric potential of approximately 1019 volts and the rotation of the Earth can be affected by electromagnetic fields.

Velikovsky identifies Zeus, whose Roman counterpart was the god Jupiter with the planet of the name, and the goddess Athena, Venus, again with the planet Venus.

The theory was rejected by the physics community, the cosmic chain of events proposed by Velikovsky contradicts the laws of



physics. His ideas had been known to astronomers before the publication of the book. Astronomer Harlow Shapley along with others instigated a campaign to stop publication.

Carl Sagan, the famous American astronomer, maintained that Velikovsky misunderstood the mechanism for the heat of Venus because he did not understand the greenhouse effect. Sagan also wrote that,

“Velikovsky’s idea that the clouds of Venus are composed of hydrocarbons is neither original nor correct.”

The idea of Jupiter’s radio emissions was also incorrect.

Astronomer Philip Plait has also stated that Velikovsky’s hypothesis is also falsified by the presence of the Moon with its nearly circular orbit. In 1974, the controversy surrounding Velikovsky’s ideas was such that The American Association for the Advancement of Science held a meeting, including Velikovsky himself and Carl Sagan.

Sagan argued against Velikovsky’s ideas, however stating “the worst aspect of the Velikovsky affair” was the attempts at suppression.

More recent material seems to indicate evidence for his ideas in Earth in Upheaval, are far too old to be used as valid evidence supporting the hypothesis presented in Worlds in Collision.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE STORY OF LIFE

About four and a half billion years ago the Solar System formed, the Sun and Planets. It was probable that early life formed on Earth and on Antichthon (Counter-Earth) around four billion years ago, life on Earth remained primitive consisting of floating sheets of slime moulds. Only three and a half billion years later did complex life appear which resulted in homo sapiens. What triggered this change were gamma rays from a nearby super nova.

Complex life began on Antichthon (Counter-Earth) almost immediately life first appeared, in a similar way to that on the Earth, by a burst of gamma rays from another nearby super nova affecting a change in the simple life forms. This event did not affect life on Earth, as the Earth at that time was the other side of the Sun, so shielded from the gamma ray burst. So, by three and a half billion years ago advanced life in the form of the Papilio existed on Antichthon, as well as high populations of other life forms. The Papilio being highly intelligent yet having a strange life cycle. Derived millions of years before from insect like life forms, they spend the first thousand years of their lives as grubs inside a 'pod'. Though after a few years in that state with a complex nervous system they could think in this 'dreamtime'. When they all emerged the planet Antichthon would suddenly have an entire population of Papilio in which complex mating took place, and after a relatively short period of a few days the eight billion or so Papilio would all be dead, and the next generation buried under the earth in their 'pods'.

Their 'civilization' being unlike that on earth, consisted of speculative thought, remotely similar to human philosophy. They had little in the way of technology, knowledge was transmitted by genetic inheritance. They lived as such for around a million years until they became victims to "The Life Harvesters".

The Life Harvesters were aliens from our galaxy who travel to planets rich in life. They 'skim' the surface of lifeforms from a planet when 'ripe', then move on. What life remains will begin



again the process of evolution and so the Life Harvesters would return once more. The result being that though life creation is abundant, whole areas of the galaxy will be devoid of advanced life for billions of years. Thus, explaining the Fermi paradox.

“The Fermi paradox is the discrepancy between the lack of conclusive evidence of advanced extraterrestrial life and the apparently high likelihood of its existence.”

In fact, sometimes over harvesting can remove or damage sufficient of the harvested planet to rule out the possibility of life returning if not completely, as in the case of Mars, then for billions of years as in the case of Venus.

But what happened to the planet Antichthon once ‘harvested’ of life. Firstly, the Papilio were not all harvested, only those on the surface, the grubs remained in their pods underground at a sufficient depth to avoid being harvested. Secondly why haven’t human scientists discovered Antichthon by its gravitational effects and from solar probes? This is where Velikovsky’s ideas are almost correct but misplaced by a few billion years. Somehow a passing comet like object altered the orbit of Antichthon and was responsible for a period of great disturbances in the solar system. Phaeton a planet that existed between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter was destroyed, creating the asteroid belt and the dwarf planet Ceres. The planet Antichthon collided with Jupiter and disappeared into Jupiter’s atmosphere creating The Great Red Spot, an anticyclonic storm, marking the collision point.

Though Billy knew of the ideas of Antichthon and Velikovsky’s all of this new information he assimilated from the Aeon Elpis (Hope).

This assimilation was silent, after which one question remained in Billy’s mind, which was ‘WHY!’.

The Aeon spoke.



'The Aeons keep the cosmos in balance, a cosmos in which this galaxy, this universe, is like an ant hill in one of many, in an infinity of forests. And through the balance the Aeons keep, is determinate and complete, it can only be established by the Aeon's freedom.

Now when this balance was altered by humans, and you Billy, and your friends helped to restore it, you were responsible for preventing a catastrophic imbalance when you saved the negative Aeons from destruction.

So now I'm here to help, as...'

She stopped and Billy said, 'The Harvesters of Life are returning to harvest all life on Earth.'



CHAPTER SIXTEEN: OUMUAMUA

Robert Weryk was using the Pan-STARRS telescope at Haleakalā Observatory, Hawaii, on 19 October 2017 when he became the first creature on earth to witness the passing of an interstellar object through our Solar System. It was named “Oumuamua”, meaning “scout” in Hawaiian, 3,000 ft long, and a thickness of 500 feet. At its closest it was a tenth of the distance of Mars from the Earth. There were limited attempts to see if it was transmitting radio signals, SETI Institute’s Allen Telescope Array produced no such results.

Voyager 1 was about 14.528 billion miles from the earth when Oumuamua’s path towards the constellation of Pegasus was altered to pass close to the earth. Harvesting The Solar System was not set for at least another billion years by which time Venus would be ready. Voyager 1 was launched on September 5, 1977, and is the furthest any human made device has travelled from the earth. It was clear evidence for the Harvesters that the slime mould mats on the early Earth had not remained so. That the SETI Institute’s Allen Telescope Array detected no transmissions from Oumuamua was for the same reason the Harvesters detected no radio signals from earth. They use a different method for communication. The Harvesters use the detection of micro ripples in gravity, an amazing technology, but in principle no different to two tin cans on either end of a tight string. Oumuamua reported back to the Harvesters that it gave a total biomass of the Earth as 550 billion tons, (of which humans account for only 100 million). This was more than sufficient to make a detour of the Life Harvesters in a particularly over cropped galaxy.



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: THE DEVICE

In the periodic table the element with the atomic number 85 is Astatine, the rarest naturally occurring element, much less than one gram is present at any given time in the Earth's crust. A solid sample of the element has never been seen, any Astatine would be immediately vaporized, via ionization, destroyed by the heat of its extreme radioactivity, its properties are not known, but it displays metallic characteristics similar to silver.

Billy was sat at the kitchen table, the Aeon, Elpis (Hope) was not there. He had spread out the silver tiles, 170 in all, over the table and was looking at them. Just then the boy walked in and looking at the patterned silver tiles said,

'These will do just fine, we can make the device in the back garden at the end by the big trees.'

The back garden had three massive sycamore trees at the end, a taller central tree, and two slightly smaller either side. They were probably once part of a field boundary before the city sprawled out eating up the farms and fields.

The boy fetched a sheet of grease proof paper from the larder, and with a carpenter's pencil began drawing. It was the structure from the first eschatology. A shape like a Swiss roll. Billy collected up The Tiles and followed the boy, who as well as his drawing now had a pair of scissors and a ball of string. They walked into the living room and out into the garden through the French windows, down the concrete path, past the apple tree and onto the lawn underneath the three sycamore trees.

They began making The Device, the first sheet was rolled as tight as they could, and so they built up the layers.

'A device like that in the first eschatology.' thought Billy.

As they completed The Device, the boy used the string to secure the whole object, now a solid cylinder made of the 170 tiles



wrapped around each other, $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide and the same height.

‘That will do.’ the boy said and walked back into the house. Billy looked around at the gardens, most had apple trees, and either side air raid shelters of brick and concrete from the war. He also walked back into the house, it was now empty. And so, he left via the front door. There was no garden, just the empty paved area for parking cars.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: ASATINE

Mrs Ali had stooped to pick up some mail from the floor of the veranda, then closed the front door of 85 Colonial Road, her neighbours house she was keeping an eye on while they were away. They were still looking to see where Billy was, when the front door opened and to everyone's surprise Billy stepped out. He looked at Ray and said,

'Well, the first part is done.'

They were now outside on the street and after Billy had made his calls they were waiting.

Ray spoke, 'First part done, sure those old folk seem to have recovered, but why first part and why do we need Nigel and where have you been, we looked for you in the house and outside.'

Billy said, 'Well I was in the house, but not this one here,' he said this pointing to the front of number 85. 'but one in another time and space, and sure the source of the problem with the faithful has gone but we have a much bigger one.'

'Which is what?' asked Ray.

'It seems we, that is all life on Earth, is about to be destroyed.' Billy replied.

Ray said nothing, just put on his Ray Bans.

The group from the house and the community police were now in the street outside of number 85 waiting for this Nigel. They were joined by a youngish man, wearing a beard and in traditional dress. He recognised Selima Ahmad, he was Muhammad Azam, an Imam from a nearby mosque. He exchanged a few words with Sgt. Selima Ahmad, who then introduced him to the others in the group, saying,



‘This is Muhammad Azam who works voluntarily in the local community, he is concerned about this activity and understands that the old and troubled gentlemen are now remarkably better.’

When Sgt. Selima Ahmad introduced Billy as ‘Mr Taylor’ a consultant, she was stopped, he should be introduced as Billy as he always insisted on first name terms. Muhammad Azam, now ‘Muhammad’ told Billy about his work in the community and also that his actual occupation was part of the student support team at Aston University. As they were speaking a police car pulled up and out got Doctor Nigel Summers, now working part time in the physics department of The University of Birmingham. And now having been awarded a second Nobel prize, which was from ideas he first formulated when working with Billy, Ray and others on the Eve Sharif affair.

Nigel was wearing his normal jeans and loafers, but, as Ray noticed, taking off his Ray Bans, a rather smart white shirt, ‘Turnbull and Asser?’ he thought, ‘Nice, and £400 a piece...’. And a tweed jacket, ‘very nice’ thought Ray, ‘Harris tweed, handmade, very nice...’.

They all were now looking at Nigel, Nigel ignoring this looked at Billy and spoke,

‘In the periodic table the element with the atomic number 85 is Astatine, the rarest naturally occurring element! And less than one gram in total, in total on the earth! Apart from that it’s incredibly dangerous, radioactive and both it and you would be immediately vaporized! As would most of the area! But well, Billy, you after all are Billy, and no matter what I know, if you say so, then here I am, with these.’

He opened a small bag,

‘A Geiger counter, and this thing which will give us a clue.’ he said.

He took out the Geiger counter and scanned Billy,



‘As I thought nothing... so let’s go inside.’

He looked towards the parking area.

‘Wait!’ Muhammad Azam began speaking, ‘This sounds serious, I think I should be involved.’

‘Of course,’ Billy said, ‘and anyone else?’

‘Don’t worry,’ Nigel said, holding up the Geiger counter, ‘it’s all safe.’

Sgt. Selima Ahmad and Rashad Mahmood were looking at Ray, who being the senior policeman in charge, shrugged,

‘OK, you can go, wherever, I’ll keep guard here.’ he turned and spoke to a couple of officers then sat in his car, putting back on his Ray Bans. Then getting back out of the car,

‘No, I better come too, it would look bad if anything happened, you guys stay.’ he said looking at the other police officers.

So, the five, Ray, Nigel, Muhammad Azam, Sgt. Selima Ahmad and Rashad Mahmood stood looking at Billy, with an expression of ‘Well?’

‘Oh,’ said Billy, ‘I’ll open the gate and let you through.’

Before anyone could say ‘What gate!’ they saw Billy opening a gate to a front garden in between a privet hedge.

Mouths opened, ‘Well,’ said Billy, ‘through you go!’ And they all did.



CHAPTER NINETEEN: UNSEPTTRIUM

The six were now in the garden of 85 Colonial Road, where once a few seconds ago there was no garden, now there was a garden and a path with a lawn either side, each having a flower bed with roses. The veranda had gone, now there was a single front door with small windows either side. To the left a large lilac tree, on the right a large brick single story building with two concrete apex roofs, in front of this was a tall climbing rose.

They stood in amazement, some more than others, for obvious reasons. Ray, Nigel and Rash quickly came round, they were after all with Billy and had encountered such before. Muhammad Azam and Sgt. Selima Ahmad were not.

Billy spoke to these two, 'Don't worry, and no I can't explain, yet.'

Nigel was looking at the Geiger counter,

'No reading' he said, 'None at all, that's strange. There should be a background reading, but not nothing.'

'So is this,' Billy said pointing to his watch, a rather odd time piece, a large Diesel DZ7332, a time piece with no fewer than four faces, the larger dial having a second hand to which Billy was pointing, 'No time!' he said. Thinking how those 170 stories occurred in 'No Time'.

'It seems where we are now there is no time.' he added.

Ray looked at his Omega, a fake watch a friend had got for him, Muhammad Azam looked at his Samsung Galaxy watch, the others looked at their watches. All agreed, nothing was showing, and no seconds were ticking by.

Billy walked down the path, the others following looking around. Ray was pointing to the air raid shelter,



‘Shelter from the war.’ he said.

As they went through the front door and down the hall and into the living room Ray continued, looking at the TV and furniture. He was giving a commentary, maybe for himself or the younger members of the party.

‘I remember rooms like this, it’s like in the museum a room of the 1950s.’

‘Or early 60s.’ said Billy.

The six walked through the living room and out into the garden. Nigel looking all the time at the Geiger counter. They approached The Device. Still no sounds from the Geiger counter. They stood in a circle around the strange shaped roll of metallic material. Nigel now had some object in his hand which had a read-out and a long aerial like thing with which he touched The Device.

‘Oh, this thing gives the atomic number.’ he said.

Ray gave a look.

Nigel answered the look, ‘Yes, I invented it.’

‘Well, it’s not Astatine.’ he continued. He was looking at a read out that had begun with zero and was slowly incrementing. It got to 119 then stopped.

‘No known element,’ laughed Nigel, grinning and looking at Billy, ‘I might have guessed.’ he laughed.

Billy was talking to himself. ‘85, the house number, half 170, the number of tiles. So, what is significant of 170?’ he muttered.

‘Nothing.’ said Nigel. ‘Now if you have 173 and then you really have something.’

‘173?’ said Muhammad Azam, ‘Why?’



‘Well,’ began Nigel. ‘It’s a Prime, a deficient number, an odious number, a balanced prime... and other maths stuff... but that’s not important, oganesson has the highest atomic number of 118, it’s why my machine stopped there, but!’ he shouted ‘173!’ Switching back on his machine it climbed, 119, 120, 121... and at 173 the counter stopped and started to blink. Nigel let out a roar, ‘Unsepttrium’. He repeated this several times and danced up and down, the others looked on with various expressions. Only Billy and Ray showed little or no expression.

‘Can you explain?’ asked Selima Ahmad?

Nigel began, ‘Unsepttrium is the name for an element whose atomic number is 173, and well Feynman relativistic Dirac equations had problems, also instabilities that may hint that the periodic table ends soon after the island of stability at unbihexium, at number 173 unsepttrium, sure upsets ...’

‘Wait,’ said Selima, ‘in English?’

‘Oh,’ replied Nigel, becoming calm, ‘It’s like the most highest number possible and even then it is fantastic, and if made it would exist for nano seconds as a single atom, and here is a load of it, and we are not dead!’

‘Comforting.’ said Selima.

‘Well, if time was here, it would have immediately decayed, and us with it.’ laughed Nigel. ‘We can’t take it outside into the real world therefore...’

‘Comforting.’ said Selima.

‘Can we go outside of this and sit and talk.’ said Muhammad Azam.

They agreed and left the garden and the house. Back outside



Muhammad Azam spoke to the neighbour, asking if he might offer the group hospitality, a place to sit and talk. Mr Ali and his wife would both be delighted he said. So, the group adjourned to number 81.



CHAPTER TWENTY: THE MURKOWSKIS

Katie Murkowski and Hope Murkowski were twins, when their mother was told she was expecting twins she said she hoped for a boy and a girl, so when Katie was born, she was named after her grandmother, the girl that followed was called Hope. An ironic name that might have helped explain their comparative natures. Hope far out shone her sister. She went to both Harvard and M.I.T. eventually becoming a senior scientific advisor to both the US military and Government. Her sister Katie joined the CIA and rose in its ranks only to quit to become a painter. An abstract expressionist artist, painting in the style of the late Jackson Pollock. She had a studio in Chicago and was reasonably successful. She quit the CIA after being involved with Billy and the others in the Eve Sharif affair.

Hope had paid her sister a surprise visit. She had flown from Washington in a Lear Jet owned by the Department of State. Since quitting the CIA, Katie had taken up smoking again, and probably drank too much, unlike her sister. They ate out at a local Italian, had food and wine and then returned to Katie's studio. There they drank more red wine. And finally, Katie said.

'There's something on your mind. Tell me.'

And so, Hope did.

'It's that thing from outside our solar system that flew through, Oumuamua it's called, Ha! meaning "scout" in Hawaiian. I hate the name. You see we thought it could be alien, you know ET paying a visit, but nothing until, well until. LIGO,'

Katie frowned.

'LIGO, gravity wave detectors, they detected merging black holes and the like, back in 2016. Well, some guys from the Breakthrough Listen Project, the search for intelligent extraterrestrial communications in the Universe...'



She waved aside Katie who was about to ask another question.

‘... has this astronomer Avi Loeb of Harvard University, an adviser to the US government, and he had his PhD students looking at the LIGO data, and a couple found very small anomalies in the gravitational noise and traced it in our solar system to, you guessed it, ET, Oumuamua. They plotted a line back some 14.528 billion miles, and it originates close enough to where Voyager 1 was. The probe we sent out back in the 60s.’

Katie nodded.

‘Well, the Fhit hit the San, The James Webb and other, you know, or rather you don’t know, and no one F-ing knows, other than out there, there are 5 objects about the size of France, of perfect symmetry. And now I’m going to throw up and then sleep.’

Which she did, Katie gave her the mattress she had in the studio, Katie smoked and drank some more, wrote a note, and put it in Hope’s bag, then she too slept.

The next morning Hope woke early and left her sister sleeping, leaving a note saying ‘Tell no one, good to unload, love H.’

On the Lear jet back to DC she found Katie’s note in her bag.

It read simply ‘Billy Taylor Gnosticism / Neoplatonism!’

On arriving back in DC Hope visited The Carnegie Library of Washington D.C. and using certain authorities managed to remove a copy of “Neoplatonism and Gnosticism”, edited by Richard T. Wallis and Jay Bregman. At her office she instructed two of her assistants to find a Billy Taylor and get his resume. She then made calls to the Pentagon and Langley in Virginia. Also sent emails to the “scout” group, a team of experts advising both Government and military on the Oumuamua problem. After this she phoned her sister and thanked her for understanding and asked about this Billy Taylor. They talked for quite some time on the matter. And Hope noticed one phrase which occurred a



few times,

‘I don’t think he could read minds, but he knew stuff before we knew stuff.’

The next morning there was a dossier, and CV on Billy Taylor on Hope’s desk. And from Langley his current location, Birmingham, but not Alabama, his cell phone signal showed some place called ‘Little Bromwich’.



CHAPTER TWENTY ONE: WASHINGTON DC

In 81 Colonial Road in the lounge of Mr & Mrs Ali, sat Billy Taylor, Ray Wood, Nigel Summers, Muhammad Azam, Sgt. Selima Ahmad, and Rashad Mahmood.

Billy interrupted the conversation, 'Sorry I have to take a call soon, Ray can I use your car?'

Ray gave Billy his keys, said smiling,

'Message from your Púca?'

'Maybe, could be my Yekyua or Yaoguai... or?' Billy replied.

Billy made his apologies to the group, and the Alis, then he left the house and walked to Ray's black Ford Mondeo, opened the passenger door, and sat and waited. The uniformed police were still standing outside, and the two marked cars were still parked, the police, who were bored, looked at Billy, maybe something was about to happen.

His mobile rang, he spoke immediately,

'Hello Hope, nice to hear from you, time is of the essence as they say, so no, Katie hasn't been in touch, and yes, I can come to the scout meeting the day after tomorrow. Can you arrange transport and accommodation, and I'd like to bring Dr. Nigel Summers, for obvious reasons. You can get back to me as soon as possible.'

Her reply was 'Oh...?'

'Don't worry.' said Billy and ended the call.

On re-entering the Alis, he spoke to those assembled,

'We make a good group, but for now I must leave for Washington, and Nigel, could you tag along? I think we might be



leaving tonight.'

Nigel was now expecting the unexpected, as were the other three. Ray looked disappointed in not also 'tagging' along, but the 'group' thing sounded good. So, the meeting ended, they thanked the Alis and went their ways. Nigel back to his apartment, Ray drove Billy to the Hyatt. It was late afternoon, and Billy said,

'Would you like an early evening meal?'

Ray said 'Sure, you order, I'll have what you have.'

They entered the restaurant of the Regency Hyatt and were directed to a table. Billy ordered 'A good bottle of red.'

He picked up the menu, as he sipped the wine.

'We will both have the same,' he said, the waiter, waiting, 'to start Louët-Feisser oysters, Bloody Mary datterino tomato, celery, vodka. And then Beef Wellington, confit Roscoff onion, red wine jus.'

The waiter whisked away.

The food as always was excellent, Ray now becoming mellow, started his third glass of wine.

'I'll leave the car and get a taxi.' he said sipping.

Dessert was Apple tart tatin and Madagascan vanilla ice cream, salted caramel sauce.

They finished the second bottle of 'A good red', and Billy left Ray walking to his 'Taxi', a Police patrol car parked in Bridge Street.

Around 9 o'clock Billy's phone rang,

'This is Major James of the US Army, am I speaking to Mr William



Taylor?’

‘No,’ was the reply, ‘you are talking to a Billy Taylor.’

‘Sorry sir,’ in a Texan accent, ‘can you be ready in one hour?’

‘Yes.’ replied Billy.

The phone went dead.

A similar call was being made at the same time to Dr Nigel Summers, with the same response.

So, at about 10.20 PM Billy met Nigel at Calthorpe Park about a mile from the city centre. From there a helicopter to RAF Mildenhall, despite its prefix it is a US air force base in Suffolk. Billy had made this trip before, Nigel hadn’t. Nigel asked one of the air crew if it was a UH-60V Black Hawk, they were impressed at Nigel’s knowledge. Speaking over a head-set Nigel was talking to Billy,

‘Upgrade performed by Northrop Grumman, a centralized processor with a partitioned, modular operational flight program.’

By 11.30 they were in a US Army Lear Jet over the Atlantic, Billy asleep, Nigel wide awake. After arriving at an unspecified air base near Washington DC they were driven in the usual black SUV to a hotel. They had lunch and a sleep before an evening meal.

Billy and Nigel agreed to meet in the morning for breakfast. At breakfast they were joined by Hope Murkowski, they both recognised her as the twin of Katie. She was dressed in a neat suit, and carried a brown leather briefcase.

‘I’m only joining you for coffee,’ she said, ‘hope you can amuse yourself today, the “scout” meeting is tomorrow morning at ten, I’ll send a car.’



Nigel realized they had entered the U.S.A. with no checks on passports or anything. They agreed to meet at eight in the evening, and until then ‘do their own thing.’ Billy spent most of the day in the National Gallery of Art, as he had never been before. He was a big fan of Abstract Expressionism and field paintings and post-painterly abstraction. There was also a fine early Picasso, *The Family of Acrobats*. At the National Air and Space Museum Nigel’s interests included Apollo 11, The Space Shuttle Discovery, The Lockheed SR-71 Blackbird and the Bell X-1. The first manned supersonic flight flown by Captain Charles, “Chuck” Yeager. Both had a good day. A good evening meal, and after breakfast the next day, they waited for their SUV. When ‘it’ came ‘it’ was four, they were in the third.

They drove across the Potomac River into Arlington County, Virginia, and The Pentagon. Once inside they entered a spiral driveway, via three sets of blast doors, which descended many feet, and eventually came to a large parking bay, again after another three large blast doors. They were met by Hope Murkowski with two aids, and two others who looked CIA.

Hope clipped IDs to Nigel and Billy’s lapels, they passed through several automatic doors and were obviously being watched on CCTV. The corridor led to a large meeting room, with an illuminated ceiling of artificial daylight. There was a central dais, with a screen and desk, white board, flip charts, a projector with a service man who was obviously tech support. A semi-circle of 20 desks and chairs, occupied by 15 people. Built post 911 thought Nigel.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO: THE SCOUT TEAM

Hope introduced the guests and ushering them to the dais went back to her seat.

Billy stood and began.

‘Hi, I’m Billy Taylor and I need to cover quite some ground, and this is all very urgent, Nigel here will answer anything technical regarding the physics. Most will not believe what I will say but I’ll put down some markers you can check.’

He wrote these down,

- There are ten not five objects, all perfectly symmetrical, alien intelligence. The ten objects, each around the size of Texas, check there are a hidden five.

- Voyager 1 is now no longer. (Destroyed)

- Some low frequency, obviously intelligent, comms is coming from the Red Spot on Jupiter.

- You’ve found a ‘fossil’ on Mars which looks like this, he drew a sketch of the Papilio.

There was much looking at each other between the members of the “scout” team.

Billy then launched into his talk. He covered the Tiles, their history, their finding, the elderly Muslims. He briefly mentioned the Aeon, but only as a source of information. Then in more detail, The Counter-Earth, Antichthon, Immanuel Velikovsky’s, ‘Worlds in Collision’ and the fate of it and the Papilio. The solution to the Fermi Paradox and The Life Harvesters.

He mentioned the building of The Device, though he thought it best to leave out the boy. He then asked Nigel to talk about the nature of Unsepttrium, an element whose atomic number is 173,



and Feynman relativistic Dirac equations.

Billy then said that The Device was ineffective because 3 tiles were missing.

Then Nigel answered some very technical questions, using the whiteboard. Finally, Billy said,

‘Well, you’ve a lot to take in and check, what I’m proposing is to get the three missing tiles, and assemble The Device. I think it will stop The Life Harvesters. I’ll be doing this anyway, obviously, but thought you guys might like to know and maybe send someone along when we get the three missing tiles.’

‘Where do you think they are?’ Hope asked.

‘Persia, or now Iran, some 80 miles north of Yezd.’ Billy replied.

This caused more looks.

‘Can we meet back, maybe here tomorrow afternoon, say three, and get your thoughts.’ Hope said.

She then thanked the two, and they were escorted out, as the doors closed, they heard the pandemonium.



CHAPTER TWENTY THREE: AT THE WHITEHOUSE

Nigel just looked at Billy, and Billy looked back. They smiled at each other.

For the rest of the day and night the “scout” team were talking, emailing, and having mini conferences. The things Billy had pointed to as markers all checked out, no doubt. The Papilio drawing matched the fossil found on Mars. The tech guys re-examined the data on the 5 objects, and yes there were actually another five, all super symmetrical, and all roughly the size of France or Texas.

Someone questioned the size? Asking, maybe a tad larger. To which they got a ‘yes’.

Voyager 1 had stopped transmitting data. Also, there were rumours from ex agents about the Eve Sharif affair.

Nigel’s physics was spot on. The thing he used to find the atomic number of the material out of which The Device was made was his invention and was in general use.

The massive problem was Iran. At breakfast Hope Murkowski once again joined Billy and Nigel, only she looked like she hadn’t slept. Again, she only had coffee,

‘OK the real problem is Iran!’ she said, ‘How can we get into Iran?’

‘We are not going to Iran’, Billy said, ‘We are going to Persia.’

Hope frowned, Nigel said, ‘We?’

Billy said, ‘If you want to join me, Nigel?’

‘Sure thing!’ was the reply from Nigel.

‘And you, Hope?’



‘Me!’

‘Yes you.’ said Billy.

‘Well,’ said Hope, ‘I’ve another meeting, in the meantime I’ve arranged a tour of the Whitehouse for you.’ She looked towards the doors and beckoned in a Major General in full uniform.

‘This is Major General Robert Blythe, if you wish he will be your guide, and get you back to the meeting for three, what do you think?’

Billy looked at Nigel, and visa versa, they both spoke at the same time, ‘Sure’.

The tour was interesting, first in how they, under the patronage of Major General Robert Blythe, were allowed quick access and seemed to be seeing more than most visitors to The Whitehouse are shown. Then the ‘why’ this was so became apparent. Walking down a corridor from seeing the Oval Office, they saw, who Billy recognised, but Nigel did not, Lois Griffin, The United States Secretary of State. Major General Robert Blythe did the introductions, Billy correcting him, not William, or Mr Taylor, but Billy.

‘Billy,’ she said, ‘could you and I have a quick word?’

‘Certainly.’ replied Billy. So, she showed him into her office, or an office, the Major General and Nigel waiting outside. After just over five minutes the two re-appeared smiling.

Nigel and the Major General caught the end of a sentence, Lois Griffin was speaking,

‘So not Iran but Persia. That will be OK.’

And now they were shaking hands, the Secretary of State walked away. The Major General took them for lunch then back to their



hotel. A car will pick you up at 2.30, he said, leaving them. As before, but this time a limo with a black SUV in front, and one in the rear. It took them back to the Pentagon.

Back in the meeting room the semi-circle was again arranged with now room for Billy and Nigel. Though in a suit, an obviously military guy spoke.

‘We consider your story a viable threat, so the resources of the United States will be at your disposal. Despite our protests Hope Murkowski would like to join your team.’

As the meeting broke up Hope whispered to Billy, ‘So you met Lois,’

‘Yes,’ Billy replied, ‘and did she tell you our destination will be Birmingham England in the first instance, and then to Persia.’

‘Yes, she told me,’ replied Hope, ‘the reason I was allowed to go with you, Iran would be out of the question, but why Birmingham?’

Billy just smiled, and Hope could hear her sister, ‘wait and see!’.



CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR: THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

On the flight back to the UK Hope Murkowski introduced Billy to a Ben Heart, who ‘Will be your “go to” person.’

‘Hi Ben,’ said Billy, ‘there is myself, then Nigel, and now Hope, can you contact these others via Chief Constable White,’ he handed a sheet with the names, Ray Wood, Sgt. Selima Ahmad and Rashad Mahmood. ‘And see if Muhammad Azam is interested. If they are can we meet around mid-day in the Stechford Incident Room. Please stress they must be volunteers.’

Hope was staring at Billy, eventually she spoke, ‘Billy, Katie told me not to ask, but how did you know all this stuff, the ten alien craft, the state of Voyager, and so on.’ Billy said nothing, Nigel just smiled then whispered to Hope,

‘He may have danced, dreamt, used a pendulum or seen these things in the tiles, and Ray mentioned a puka, or something both of us would think impossible.’

They landed at Mildenhall around midnight, by one in the morning Billy was back at the Hyatt, Hope had accommodation in a house in Edgbaston, which was probably some US asset? Nigel was back in his apartment. First thing in the morning Ben began chasing, the three in the West Midlands Police were no problem, they all were very keen to join the team. Chief Constable White gave them extended leave and told them to meet in Stechford at 12. Ben tracked Muhammad Azam down to his place of work. He was very keen to join but worried about his job. Ben said to leave it with him, an hour later a Vice Dean telephoned Muhammad, gave him extended leave, and wished him luck. He had time to telephone friends and family, and the mosque. His cover story was a fact finding visit to London on a counselling course. He walked through the city centre, down to New Street station and caught a train to Stechford. Nigel was on the same train; they met and recognised each other outside the police station. Hope arrived driven in a black SUV. Sgt. Selima



Ahmad had already been on duty, but quickly drove home to change into civilian clothes. Ray Wood and Rashad Mahmood had driven from Lloyd House, first picking up Billy from the Hyatt. Billy still in another of his Anderson & Sheppard suits. Ray and Rash still in standard CID suits. Selima and Muhammad were more casual.

Muhammad dressed casual for work, jeans and tee shirt, faux leather jacket, as some days at work his student counselling role was often across all faiths and none. Ben Heart was also at the station. Billy did some introductions for Ben and Hope. He introduced them as 'advisors', and that Hope would be an 'active member', Ben the anchor man.

'So,' Billy said, 'how to get the three missing tablets, well back to 85 Colonial Road, and then not to Iran but to Persia.'

Ben had been at work, there were three unmarked cars with drivers, not in uniform, and a fourth police marked car from the Bordesley community team.

'I will be in Edgbaston on this number.' Ben wrote it on the whiteboard.

'Well not much point, we will be well out of contact, in both time and space.' Billy said.

Hope looked puzzled, the other three gave a knowing smile. They arrived outside 85 Colonial Road, Muhammad asked Billy if he should get keys from Mrs Ali at 81.

'No need,' said Billy, 'stay close, I'll lead the way.'

Obviously, the others sort of expected what would happen, all except Hope. She was shocked to see the gate, a privet hedge and a garden where once seconds before there was a block paved parking area.

They entered the house, Ray was speaking to Hope,



‘This is the house, which was the centre it seems of the disturbances, where these tiles of truth had been lost. It looked like some accident exposed them or their effect somehow. All this seems like it’s the late 1950s or early 60s but look at your watch.’

He showed Hope his fake Omega, she checked her Apple watch. No time.

They filed down the hall and into the living room. The boy was present, his back to them. Sat on a chair near the TV table was the Aeon.

‘You might want to sit.’ Billy said. Billy stood in front of the fireplace, Ray stood by the hallway door. Next to him stood Rash. Hope and Selima sat on the sofa, Nigel and Muhammad in the armchairs.

‘I should introduce you all to the Aeon, Elpis, whose name translates to hope,’ he looked at Hope Murkowski. She was thinking, ‘My god my nutty sister was actually as sane as anyone could be!’

‘and,’ continued Billy, ‘the boy whose name I don’t know, but is responsible for The Device.’

The boy turned and looked at Billy.

‘The problem is you see,’ Billy was now addressing the boy, ‘we are three tiles missing.’

The boy gave a slight frown.

‘But we can go find them,’ he said looking at the Aeon.

‘The thing is physics limits our movements, but not the thing we are in...’ he said continuing to look at the Aeon. Those sitting suddenly stood up as if about to fall.



CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE: PERSIA

They found themselves near a shallow sea, it was warm, and beyond the shore in the distance they could see the remains of dead trees.

‘This doesn’t look like Iran – sorry Persia, I checked this out, this should be fairly uninhabited desert.’ said Hope after looking around for some minutes, as were the others, though not the Aeon.

‘Yes, this is Persia, only I think in the late Carboniferous. The reason you all feel so well is the amount of oxygen in the air.’ Billy said after another long wait.

‘What!’ exclaimed Hope.

‘The late Carboniferous, Earth about 300 million years ago.’ He added.

‘Not to worry, no large predators, I think we are in the late Carboniferous period extinction event.’ said Billy.

Just then Rash was looking up into the pale blue sky, ‘Look!’ he said, ‘it’s a meteor’.

High in the sky was a white object tumbling with a long tail, whatever it was, it was breaking up, and three large fragments had broken off and seemingly ‘bounced’ back higher into the atmosphere.

‘Meteorite I think.’ said Muhammad watching with the others as the main body of the object descended into the shallow sea. There was a splash and a few seconds later a dull boom.

‘I think we have seen the site of the 170 tiles, and a clue as to where the other three might be.’ Billy said.

They all stood looking out to the sea for a long while, except the



Aeon who was looking at Billy.

Then Muhammad Azam spoke, 'Where then are the three missing tiles?'

'Venus, Mars and Antichthon.' replied Billy.



CHAPTER TWENTY SIX: VENUS

‘So, three sites, and here we are, us two.’ said Nigel.

‘Seems so, but where is here?’ asked Selima.

‘That is a very good question,’ said Nigel, ‘not Mars I think, just looking at the ground, sandy but not red, and there is a dense atmosphere so possibly Venus, but not as it is now, I’m afraid my astronomy is not that good.’

‘Yes, I did get into astronomy a bit as a teenager,’ Selima said, ‘but never heard of Antichthon.’

‘Or have I until now.’ Nigel said.

The air was stale around them, there was an unpleasant smell, the sky a dull grey. The landscape was sandy with patches of what looked like moss. Seeing some structures in the distance they began to walk towards them, but it was with some effort.

‘So, what are we doing, and going to do?’ Selima asked.

‘Find the tile and bring it back?’ answered Nigel.

‘Oh, but wait, the original tiles that Billy found in the house were three photographs and the rest drawings.’ Selima replied.

‘You’re so right!’ Nigel said, ‘maybe then we should do the same.’

‘Sounds good to me.’ Selima said, and taking out her smart phone took some pictures. ‘I also have my police notebook.’ she added, showing Nigel both the photographs from the phone and her pocketbook.

‘Dam,’ Nigel said, ‘should have taken some back in Persia in the late Carboniferous.’

‘I did,’ Selima replied, scrolling through pictures and a short



video of the object breaking up.

‘Brilliant,’ Nigel said, ‘You must send me copies when we are back home, I don’t think we will get a signal here somehow.’

They both laughed.

They found the ground had become even and strewn with what looked like ash. ‘A road?’ said Selima.

They followed the road, they came upon low walls and rubble, with weak looking plants, the air was not only hard to breathe but very dry. They were obviously in the ruins of a town or city.

‘At a guess would you say this place was once inhabited but has ceased to be habitable because of something like global warming?’ Selima asked.

Nigel looked at the dull sky, the plants, but couldn’t see any other forms of life.

‘The air feels stale, maybe through heat and an excess of carbon dioxide, and there is that smell, I think it’s maybe methane.’ he said.

‘It’s certainly unpleasant.’ Selima replied.

They walked on through what was once streets with buildings, now only low walls and rubble, no signs of life except for the sickly-looking plants. Some of the low walls indicated that they were once part of larger buildings than the others. They walked for hours, this was then not a town, but a city, maybe a major city. How long they walked could have been longer than they thought, they looked at their stopped watches, they walked in no time, on and on.

‘Selima,’ Nigel asked, ‘Are you tired, because I think we’ve been walking for it seems very many hours,’ he raised his arm to show his stopped watch, ‘and I don’t feel a bit tired.’



‘Nigel you’re right, me too, I don’t feel at all tired.’ she replied.

The two continued this conversation as they walked further into the city. Not realising that they were now on first name terms. They remembered Billy had said listening to the 167 accounts of the same story of the Bees that he never lost interest, got bored or even felt tired.

They approached what was a clearing, some open space, maybe a town square, Selima pointed to walls which had images on them, like the shadows of people.

‘I’ve seen this before,’ she said, ‘on walls in Hiroshima after the atomic bomb, something dreadful here must have occurred.’

As she said this an intense light flashed nearby, quickly they backed off behind a low wall where they could see the square. The surface was dusty like everywhere else but where they had walked, they could see that the floor had inscriptions. Looking to their left was a tall wall, probably once part of a large building.

‘I think this square wasn’t a square but some large building, hall or something.’ Selima said.

‘Or a church, a cathedral or a mosque.’ Nigel added.

On the wall they could see a large inscription, and underneath a square sheet of silver.

‘The tile!’ Selima shouted, and moved towards it, but was pulled back by Nigel as the light once again swept by.

‘That was close!’ she said, and thinking took a small stone and threw it towards the tile. The ray swept across the empty square and the stone was vaporized. ‘We have to see if the image on the tile is the same as the larger one above it.’ she said.

‘Without getting vaporized like that stone and maybe those



creatures whose shadows are burnt onto the walls.’ said Nigel.

They both had the same idea, took out their phones and zoomed in.

Then Selima was making a sketch in her notebook, she looked up at Nigel and said, ‘To be sure, we have to be sure that the image is of the tile!’

And putting the notebook down she handed Nigel some small stones, ‘And to be sure!’ she said, ‘Cover me!’ And ran out into the square, before Nigel could stop her, he threw the stones, the ray flashed, he kept throwing.

Selima ran close to the tile photographing as she ran, even stopping briefly then jumping back behind the wall just as the beam skimmed it. She sat panting, then looking at her phone and the image of the tile. Picked up her notebook.

‘You fool,’ Nigel said, ‘you could have got killed.’ He gave her a hug, after a moment they looked at the picture of the tile on her phone, ‘Same!’ they both said, and at that instant before they were aware they were of a sudden back outside number 85 Colonial Road.



CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN: MARS

'This is Mars.' Rash said. 'The Red Planet,' Ray said, 'what else do you know about it?'

'Well not much,' Rash replied, 'other than it's supposed to have little atmosphere, and this does.' Looking up at a cloudless blue sky.

They were in a hollow of red and orange rocks.

'Look,' Boss, said Rash. 'Not Boss here.' Ray replied.

'Then look Raymond! plants.'

And sure enough there were plants, with blue fern like leaves.

'OK,' said Ray about to correct and insist his first name was Ray, but seeing the plants himself continued,

'I thought there was no life on Mars, as in the Bowie song. "Is there life on Mars" is the lyric, and yes it seems so, lets climb out of this hollow.'

As they climbed out of what was a hollow on the side of a tall hill the two saw a vista below them of canals, crisscrossing a flat plain, some must have been very wide, these were straight and ran into the distance. From these large canals ran many smaller canals. There were what were obviously boats moving along all of these, and either side of the canals there were tall buildings. Also, what looked like fields, not of grass on the Earth because they were blue like the plants in the hollow. The hill itself was covered in thick blue grass waving gently in a cool breeze.

The two were silent for minutes looking at the scene, then they looked at each other and laughed. Then together singing the Bowie song's famous lyric,

'Is there life on Marrrrrrs....YES!'



Rash took out his phone and started taking shots, Ray soon followed.

They sat on the grass taking in the scene for quite a while. They could see clearly the craft carrying all kinds of unidentified objects. There were figures on the boats and in the streets around the buildings. From this distance they couldn't see clearly but they certainly looked human like.

Rash broke the silence, 'I suppose we better find the tile; shall we go and see if the natives are friendly?'

'Well let's hope so.' Ray replied.

Getting up the two detectives looked down at the grass, losing sight of the vista for a moment. When they looked up, they had a shock.

'What the F.' exclaimed Ray.

The sky was now red, and boiling with clouds, the landscape also red, and one of many volcanoes, some with tongues of flames. There was still life on this Mars, tall Gothic like spires stretching high into the boiling red sky. And giant machines, like metal insects only walking on three long tripod legs.

'It's from "The War of the Worlds", fucking hell, the War of the Worlds, H.G. Wells!' Ray cursed.

'War of the Worlds?' Rash said, 'Not the film with Tom Cruise?'

'No, no you idiot, the book, the bloody book!' Ray replied.

'OK, let's calm down and try to work out what's happening.' Rash said.

Ray was now filming the dystopian scene. 'Because no one will believe this, I doubt even Billy.' he said.



‘Ray, we need to think this out.’ said Rash, looking at Ray who had stopped filming and was putting his smart phone back in his jacket pocket. Ray looked up wide eyed, and said,

‘Oh, it’s gone and changed again!’

Rash looked round, the sky now was black, a barren landscape of hills and craters. In the distance some structure and below them some kind of rover with a trailer on which were solar panels, its track from the “hab” clearly shown in the Martian sand.

‘It’s from “The Martian”,’ Rash said, ‘directed by Ridley Scott, with Matt Damon.’

‘Great film.’ said Ray, ‘I think someone, or thing is pulling our chain.’

‘I preferred the book though.’ said Rash.

‘Well, you should read the H.G. Wells story, it’s a cracker!’

The two detectives were now back to their well-known double act which infuriated some of their superiors, delighted the lower ranks, they were even liked by the guys on traffic, and from the top, Chief Constable White’s comments were simple, ‘Good for morale, and a friendly human image to the public, and please stop calling them Laurel and Hardy!’

Whilst they were looking at the scene Ray said, ‘Any other Martian films or books?’

‘Total Recall with Schwarzenegger.’ Rash shouted.

‘Close your eyes’, said Ray as he closed his, ‘now open.’

They both closed, then opened their eyes.

‘That’s the pyramid from the film!’ Rash said.



They were looking at a red desert and a large red pyramid.

'The one where the guy goes to find his father, what's that one?' said Ray.

'Ad Astra,' shouted Rash, 'with Brad Pitt, Tommy Lee Jones.'

'And Donald Sutherland!' Ray added.

'Close,' said Rash, 'now open,' there was a pause, 'I think that's the rocket launcher on Mars that Brad Pitt hijacked.'

The two then began playing the game of closing eyes and trying to name the film or book. Ray didn't do so well, Rash was a keen movie sci-fi buff, he got "Doom", "The Last Days on Mars" and "Life". Then came two movies neither at first got. Ray spoke.

'That previous scene was from a film I saw as a kid on VHS, it was an East German film called "First Spaceship on Venus", in it the Mars spaceship doesn't go to Mars, but to Venus. And the one we just saw was "The Illustrated Man", from a book by Ray Bradbury. He also wrote "The Martian Chronicles", it's getting it wrong.'

There was a sudden flash and then as their eyes adjusted, they were on a flat red plain, with of all things a little girl standing in front of them.

'I know you!' Rash said.

'You're the little girl at the end of the TV series "Life on Mars". The girl from the BBC 2 test card.' Ray finished.

The girl frowned, and then said, 'You seem to have beaten me, I suppose you want a picture of this.' She held out a tile from its edges.

The two detectives photographed it several times before they



were of a sudden back outside number 85 Colonial Road.



CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT: ANTICHTHON

Hope looked at Muhammad and said, 'Well this doesn't look like Mars or Venus, it looks very like Earth, in fact it looks very much like some woodland I visited in England.'

They were in a wood of mixed trees, birch trees, and sycamore, some pine, or rather trees like these. The ground was grassy, there was patches of bracken, and swathes of blue flowers. The air was warm, sunlight sparkled through the thin leaves of the birch like trees.

'Yes, said Muhammad, it reminds me of some countryside near Birmingham, a place called Lapworth. Only you don't see these things.'

They were Papilios, very much alive, about 4 or 5 were floating through some birch trees, they stood, or rather flew, vertically, though having wings, these delicate dragon fly like wings were wrapped around their bodies, each of them only about two feet tall. Human like, but with perfect white skin and silver hair.

Muhammad continued, 'They look like I imagined angels to look.'

'Muhammad,' Hope began, then faltered, 'Sorry how should I address you?'

'In the mosque I use Muhammad, peace be upon him, but at the university with some students and friends I use Azam or even Az, you can use Az.' said Az.

Hope began again, 'Az, do you think these are actual angels?'

'I doubt it as they appear in the Holy Koran, these seem to be real and not spiritual beings. It's puzzling me, why I don't feel shocked by this sight.' Az replied.

'Yes! Me too.' said Hope.



As they spoke a group of deer like animals wandered past them.

‘Strange,’ Az said, ‘they show no fear, they seem calm like we do. But maybe we should explore if we are to find the tile?’

‘Good idea,’ Hope said, ‘The ground seems to rise over there, we might be able to get a better view.’

So, the two walked through the woodland, which was slowly rising, the trees thinned and there was less bracken, and now only the birch like trees. These in turn thinned and became smaller, and they felt they must be on a hill. Eventually they were just walking on grass. As they walked more deer wandered by, and some rabbits. There were birds, or bird like creatures, and animals like squirrels. All showed no fear and they saw a few more Papilios.

Finally, they reached the summit of the hill, it looked out over a vast sea of trees. So it wasn’t like rural England, or maybe as it might once have been. From across this vast sea were clouds of Papilios rising in massive spiral columns.

‘There must be millions of them!’ Az said, ‘like swarms of gnats, but this looks beautiful.’

As they watched the tops of the columns inverted and Papilios flew down inside the spiral, then out into the trees disappearing from sight.

‘They are certainly not angels,’ Az said, and after a minute, ‘I think they are mating!’

They watched the scene for hours, the sky darkened, and a moon rose, full. The last of the Papilios disappeared. Neither Hope or Az were tired. So, waiting for the dawn they sat and talked, of many things, from family to religion, their work. Hope was very interested in Islam. They discovered they both had degrees in Physics, though Az had not gone further, instead studying Islam, and learning Arabic. He had then also studied



psychology and counselling. He explained he was concerned that not only some Muslims but also many other students whose families were not from middle class backgrounds could find university life difficult. This is why he worked in the university. Hope explained that she had a PhD and was an advisor, though she didn't say to who and at what level. And so still not tired they waited for and watched the dawn.

'Let's explore.' Hope said.

They descended the hill and re-entered the forest. As they walked, they noticed the ground had been disturbed by literally hundreds or more of little heaps of soil, like mole hills.

'These look like mole hills,' Az said, 'My uncle in Four Oaks has this big house, he's a solicitor, and they, the moles ruined his lawns.'

'They are the Papilios,' Hope replied, 'Billy briefed us about them, well I didn't believe they existed but obviously I do now, that Billy is an odd fish, he seems to read your mind, and tells you incredible stuff which then you see is true! Well, he said they live most of their lives underground in pods. Let me think, he said for a thousand years, which I can't believe, but now I know I probably should. Like they emerge, mate, then a new generation is created, but what happened to all those we saw yesterday?'

'I think they are probably all dead,' Az said, he was crawling on the ground and examining bits of what appeared like fine wings, 'this seems all that remains of them.'

'Crazy.' Hope said.

'Fantastic!' Az said.

After a few moments they walked on, sometime, of no time, Az spoke, 'What would you think would be the most weird thing now?' he asked.



‘I’ve really no idea.’ replied Hope.

‘What about a very old man with a beard, painting a picture?’

‘Unbelievable.’ Hope said.

‘Like that guy?’ Az said, pointing.

There was precisely what he asked, a very old man, standing at an easel painting a picture of the woodland.

Hope froze, completely losing her cool, ‘It’s a very good painting,’ Az said, ‘I’ve seen similar in galleries.’

‘You have! It’s in the Impressionist style, and the guy is a dead ringer for Claude Monet!’ was Hope’s reply.

They approached, ‘Bonjour Monsieur Monet’ Hope said in her best French, not being able to think of anything more ridiculous. The Man replied ‘Bonjour’. As they looked, in a weary move, he put down his brush and looking at his pallet said ‘Ici’. It was a square of metal of about 9 inches. He turned it over to reveal the image on the tile. For moments neither Az or Hope moved, the man gave a long sigh, and once again said ‘Ici!’

As if waking from a dream Hope took out her iPhone and took several pictures. Az caught on and did the same before they were of a sudden back outside number 85 Colonial Road.



CHAPTER TWENTY NINE: NO TIME

Billy and possibly Ray were the only ones who didn't look shocked.

Selima asked one of the constables, a member of her community support team, 'How long have we been gone?'

'Gone, you haven't gone, you haven't even gone into the house.' was the reply.

Ray was now sitting on the kerb, 'I'm knackered,' he said, 'and this kind of thing happens when you're with Billy, we still have the photos.' he was looking at his phone. On hearing this the others did the same, and like Ray were all exhausted. Az looked at his watch, 'Yeh,' he sighed 'half twelve.'

Billy addressed the group, 'You six better get some rest, could you let Hope have copies of your pictures. Hope could you sometime get hard copies of the tiles, nine and three, quarter inches,' she was leaning on a wall, but nodded, 'and could we meet at midday as before?' he continued.

'Can we make that at the Hyatt in the Clinton suite, I got Ben to block book it and set up comms.'

'Sure,' said Hope.

Billy continued, 'Now you all need some rest, but first Muhammad can you in the morning see if anyone knows of three very ill and elderly who have not been to a mosque or wanted a visit from an Imam. Do it after you've rested.'

'It's Az now in this group, and yes I know of one personally.' he replied.

They left in the cars they arrived in.



CHAPTER THIRTY: THE CLINTON SUITE

As each arrived the following midday they were escorted by an obvious security guy in the lift to the Clinton Suite in the Hyatt Regency Hotel, located in Birmingham's city centre. In the case of Ray, he arrived with Rash. Outside the entrance to the suite stood another guy, with a colleague sat at a table reading a newspaper. The New York Times, giving a clue as to who these guys were working for. Or their organisation. That and their welcoming question,

'Are you here to meet Ms Hope Murkowski?'

The Clinton Suite is situated at the top of the glass slab of a building which gives panoramic views of the whole of Birmingham, and out beyond to the countryside. Inside is opulence, a profusion of exotic cut flowers, tables laden with confectioneries, and drinks of teas, coffee, mineral water, and others.

Hope welcomed each arrival and offered drinks. The layout was informal armchairs and sofas with low tables, yet there was the ubiquitous whiteboard, flip chart, and wide screen TV. Billy was the last to arrive but first to bring the meeting to order. He refused refreshment, sitting in a high back chair he smiled and asked a member of each of the three groups to tell their stories, though suspected some might already have done so. Which they duly did. The post global warming scene of Venus, the strange versions of Mars and the surreal finale of Antichthon.

'So,' he said, 'there is a pattern,' no one else could see one. 'the three adventures become more bizarre, good. Az, did you track down the other two people?'

'Yes, I have their names and addresses.' he replied.

'Good,' said Billy, 'and Hope do you have the hard copy of the tiles?'



Hope Murkowski said nothing but handed Billy a small folder, he looked inside and seem satisfied.

‘OK,’ he said, ‘obviously we need to visit these three poor men and see if we can help them, and now we have the missing tiles.’

‘Then we can complete The Device.’ Nigel said.

Billy replied hesitantly, ‘Well no, I think it best to wait and see what happens next.’

‘Next?’ said Ray.

‘I think the boy is central to things.’ continued Billy.

‘The boy, why?’ Hope said.

‘It’s all about imagination, the three scenarios are nothing like what any Aeon would come up with, but a boy, well yes. And so we should wait, The Device might be dangerous, in the first eschatology I saw the end of the world was due to something called “The Machine.” a giant construction but identical in its look to the Device the boy made in the garden of number 85. And I now know that this Device is nothing to do with the future destruction of the Life Harvesters.’

‘So, what do we all do?’ Ray said.

‘Well take the rest of the day off, and try to get back to normal, and I’m sure we will meet again. Err, except, Hope, I need after Az and my visit to Bordesley Green to travel back to Washington with you.’ Billy said.

‘Why?’ asked Hope.

‘Your guys will want to know what’s coming out of Jupiter’s Red Spot, you can give them a teaser, it’s a heartbeat.’

Hope looked puzzled, as did the others.



‘Ray, Rash, can you drive us to Bordesley Green?’

They did so and they waited in the unmarked police Ford Mondeo while Az and Billy visited the three sick men. The scene was similar in each case, they saw the image on the tile, described the story of the bees’ demise, which was their terrible sickness, and as before as Billy explained the darkness lifted, they sat up, then got up, and was soon, despite family members advising rest, wanting to pray in their mosque for their cure. Each wanted to thank Billy, who in each case affirmed it was nothing to do with him. Az looked at Billy, and the thought came to him of ‘The Bee’. The last man was known to Az, or now the Imam Muhammad Azam, who travelled with him and his son to his mosque to give thanks.

Ray and Rash drove Billy back to the Hyatt, and shook hands, Billy having the images of the last three tiles now in his bag.

He went into the Hyatt, and up to where Hope was waiting in the Clinton Suite.

‘OK,’ she said, ‘it’s a heartbeat, very slow, they heard this and now they want to know what is actually emerging?’

‘A finger.’ Billy replied.

‘I can’t tell them that, that Jupiter is giving the finger!’ Hope said.

‘Not a finger, fingers, part of a hand attached to an arm which is attached to a body, a being is emerging from Jupiter’s Red spot, the size of a planet, the planet Antichthon .’

Hope looked at Ben, and said ‘Billy and me, Washington asap!’



CHAPTER THIRTY ONE: THE ÜBERMENSCH

The Robert C. Byrd Green Bank Radio Telescope (GBT) is in West Virginia and currently the largest fully steerable radio telescope in the world, the Effelsberg 100-m Radio Telescope in the Ahr Hills Germany is the second, and the Lovell Telescope at Jodrell Bank Cheshire the third.

It was from these three radio telescopes that the ‘heartbeat’ coming from the Red Spot was first detected, and luckily for the world’s population it was only these that could detect just what was emerging from Jupiter’s Red Spot. Radio telescopes cannot detect light, but radio waves, and these come in various sizes and strengths. Luckily then that the mass panic that would follow never occurred as it was only detected by these three telescopes, and ‘seen’ as a visual image by less than 100 people. Though various descriptions were given to a wider field of a few thousand, such as an alien force...etc.

Back in the conference room deep under the Pentagon Billy Taylor addressed some of the elite 100.

‘What you will see if you plot the shape of the source of the radio signals will be a finger, well it will look like a human finger, then fingers, then a hand, arm, and eventually a humanoid shape, only it will be huge, planet sized, the planet is Antichthon which disappeared into Jupiter millennia ago, producing the Giant Red Spot storm.’

Question: ‘If we can believe this...’ here the questioner was stopped by another one of the 100 elite, it was Dr James Dean, (he never forgave his parents for that Christian name!) head of the Green Bank observatory and in continual communication. He whispered in the questioner’s ear,

‘We can detect it is likely a finger shape, we see detail in the shape, what looks like a finger nail the size of Sicily.’ The questioner coughed took some water and continued.



‘Mr Taylor...’

Here Billy interrupted, ‘Call me Billy please.’

Then Hope spoke, ‘John,’ The questioner was known to Hope, and in a stern voice, outranking John. ‘It will be Billy!’

The questioner coughed again and took some water.

‘Mr... no please, Billy, what is this creature?’

Billy replied, ‘It’s made from the planet Antichthon by its inhabitants, the Papilios. These highly intelligent life forms survived The Life Harvesters billions of years ago as they were pupae buried deep in the planet in their pods, however other life on the surface did not survive, or did life on Mars and Venus. The Life Harvesters ignored the Earth, just slime mould floating mats, but they seem to have been alerted to the fact that this is no longer the case.’

‘The Oumuamua, Voyager 1 exchange?’ came another voice.

‘Yes,’ said Billy, ‘so now we have ten objects each the size of France heading for the Earth, The Life Harvesters. However, it seems that the evolution of the Papilios took a different route and over the three or so billion years being the only life forms left on Antichthon have consumed their planet and become a single entity.’

From another questioner, ‘What are your sources, how the hell do you know all this?’

Billy replied, ‘Strictly speaking I don’t know, and I have many sources, but not standard ones, many myths and religions, dreams, use of things like dowsing. I know you have to be careful with seeing beyond the trivialization of these. But in this case mostly from the Papilios fossils found in Birmingham, though the dead can’t literally speak they can leave documents. And you know of the Tablets, they contain not just one set of images on



them.'

'And,' he said under his breath 'the spirit of the Papilios and others.'

From yet another questioner, 'Why the Papilios are now transformed into a human shape, and what is this emerging creature made from?'

Billy, 'I really don't know but can guess, The Life Harvesters are it seems wanting to harvest the Earth's 550 billion tons of biomass, and though humans make up next to nothing, we gave them the "hello". So, it might seem an appropriate shape. Also, they do have a debt to pay for having all life on their planet harvested, save themselves. And so they, or rather now a single it, seems to be aware of the approach of The Life Harvesters and might want payback.'

He paused, then continued,
'As for the material the thing is made from, your physics guys can tell you. What amount of energy would the total matter of an Earth sized planet produce if converted into pure energy. And before you ask how, they were as intelligent as we are now, or more so, 4 billion years ago, so who knows how?'

The questions went on for most of the day. After Billy left for his hotel it was decided to ask him to stay for the duration. He accepted.

Some in the elite called the emerging thing 'The Dasein', after the philosopher Heidegger's 'pure Being'. It was called 'The Übermensch' by others, after the philosopher Nietzsche's Superman, or Overman.

Some in the elite found the emergence of the Being painfully slow, but it was pointed out that the emergence of such a size was 'quite fast'.

Some wit in the elite said that if the Being was the Übermensch then Billy should be called "Nietzsche".



Another wit mimicked Billy, ‘No no not Nietzsche, but Freddie’.

And finally, ‘No the prophet of the Übermensch was Zarathustra.’ someone remarked.

All this was not without use as in all intelligence code names are often used. So, Billy Taylor became “Zarathustra”, Hope Murkowski became “Lou Salomé”, and Dr James Dean “The Tight-Rope Walker”. And more from the same sources, the name for people outside of the group, those outside of the elite, were referred to as “The Last Humans”, the alternate of “The Herd” was rejected.



CHAPTER THIRTY TWO: THE BATTLE

The physicists within the elite, there were ten, found the calculation as to the energy from the mass of a planet the size of the Earth as simple, using Einstein's $E = MC^2$. After giving the sums, they were asked by a politico,

'Can you put that in Layman's terms?'

For which the term describing the amount of energy was "Huge!" When asked the likely outcome of a fight with the ten objects the size of France, the answer was likewise technical, so when again asked by the same politico the outcome in Layman's terms. They gave-

'The Life Harvesters will be totally annihilated.'

or

'The Life Harvesters will be TOAST!'

Much of science is boring and repetitive, so those in the elite found being from a science background the passing days not so difficult. The military and politicians found it very difficult. The intelligence group had work monitoring any information leaks. As part of this several conspiracy theories were released. Reports of alien sightings, strange lights on the west coast of the USA flying out to sea. A plan was drawn up to arrange for air force one to go missing for 8 hours in the event of a major leak. This wasn't needed. Others were diversions like letting NASA have funds for some project, sending humans to Mars, or a Moon base. Generals were made to move around, and carrier groups sent here and there. It was known that Lois Griffin, The United States Secretary of State was in the elite, she turned up occasionally at the daily briefings. Higher up from her, the two others, what did they know? It could be they were in a position of knowing what they did need to know, and no more, and not wanting to know more.



Like a special phone call on a special phone would have a conversation such as,

‘Hi, Lois it’s me.’

Lois, ‘Don’t worry “me”, it’s OK.’

The data from the telescopes, now classified, was processed in the larger group, once this was done the graphic was created by a small team now working in a secret location under the governance of The Tight-Rope Walker.

By day three one could clearly see two arms. By day 5 the front of a naked male figure was clear. Someone remarked,

‘If this got to the general public what the fuck would happen!’

Another made the obvious answer, ‘They simply wouldn’t believe it, I mean do we?’

The someone thought it might be a ‘copy’ of Michelangelo’s David.

Billy was at this meeting, and unlike the others knew something of Art.

‘No,’ he said, ‘it’s obviously more like the second most famous sculpture of David, that of Donatello, sans hat! and in a different pose’.

Someone in the science elite had to be told the story of David and Goliath. The difficulty was the sheer eroticism of a figure and the androgynous features of a feminised boy. Not the muscle-bound Greek God hero in a loin cloth many imagined.

The arms and legs became animated as the Übermensch emerged from Jupiter. Again, the slowness of the movement annoyed some, it was pointed out that an arm movement from



vertical to horizontal was several thousands of miles, the ‘finger tips’ would be travelling ‘quite fast’.

Maybe the androgynous features represented all of humanity, but it was obviously a white male European.

This created a huge argument in one meeting about racial stereotyping.

‘Maybe then it’s not about racial stereotyping, or a preference for Western Renaissance art, although the Donatello is considered a great work, but it looks very much like the Papilios.’ said Billy.

A picture of a fossilized Papilio was displayed, some clever graphics ‘removing’ the wings was performed, and yes that was what it was, a giant Papilio.

‘So, it never was a human, I was mistaken, we all were.’ said Billy, but thinking to himself ‘or it is a copy of the Donatello as a Papilio about to slay Goliath?’

The uproar ceased. Now there was the growing tension as to what would happen next.

By the tenth day the Übermensch, now referred to as DAVID was turning towards the position in the sky where The Life Harvesters were. And then it began to run. No one knew how long the run would take. If the scientific opinion was correct, for it to run the distance, if it could run at the speed of light, would take no time at all for it, they were wrong on the next bit.

‘At the speed of light, it would take from our perspective 14 years.’

At ‘14 years’ there was a groan from the rest of the group.

Someone was saying ‘Keeping this thing a God-damn secret for 14 years, impossible!’



Billy spoke, 'Before we break up to resume in 14 years time can we just wait here a while, say 50 minutes?'

Another argument broke out, the conclusion was from the scientific elite, that was how long it would take for signals from Jupiter to reach the earth, which was stupid. Hope, was at that time the most senior present, even over the military, said,

'We will wait an hour.' She now knew a thing or two about time! She thought from being out of time, being in no time, and being 300 million years ago, and she was beginning to understand why her sister had clued her in to this 'crazy' English guy, Billy!

At precisely 50 minutes signals were received from Green Bank, Effelsberg and Jodrell Bank.

Someone from the Military said openly, 'Game on!' Many thought so silently. The atmosphere was electric. Three displays marked the site of The Life Harvesters, another was showing images from the James Webb telescope.

The Tight-Rope Walker said, 'The James Webb won't detect DAVID, but will be able to detect and show The Life Harvesters, albeit very dimly. Likewise, the radio telescopes won't detect The Life Harvesters but will locate and be able to image DAVID. And from these two sets of different images, it looks like DAVID and The Life Harvesters are in contact.'

After a few minutes the radio telescopes showed DAVID disappearing, the next update brought the comment from the military,

'Not contact, total annihilation! TOAST!'

Successive images showed hot spots of fragments, which were once 10 machines, each the size of France. The scientific elite were calculating the energy release until one said,



‘Fuck it, total annihilation!’

At that moment a cheer went up and everyone was hugging, and despite the rules some cigars were lit.

After about 20 minutes things cooled down in the hall, but not 14 billion miles away. What those on earth could only imagine.

DAVID had the energy to immediately vaporize The Life Harvesters, that it did not is a mystery, but Billy thought it was probably a sign. ‘Look at me and tremble!’ The Life Harvesters were split into millions of superheated particles releasing heat energy that the James Webb telescope picked up. At its maximum brightness creating a ‘whiteout’. And then these were totally annihilated. Forbidden by modern physics. This fact annoyed the science fraternity. Though once they contacted a certain Doctor Nigel Summers, the idea was not so difficult once the aesthetics of ‘Nothingness’ was explained to them, but this is another story and another Nobel Prize.

As for the guards outside the conference room deep under the Pentagon, the soundproofing was total, they heard none of this , but they were shocked at the people’s faces, some still patting each other on the back as they left, the following day was to be a summary session.



CHAPTER THIRTY THREE: POST MORTEM

The following day's meeting was brief, the scientific elite were now happy with new lines of work after talking to Dr Summers. The politicians were also happy. As for the others they too seemed happy with the result. Hope thanked Billy and asked if he had any closing remarks. He had.

He got out from his chair and stood in front of his audience. He began,

'For our members of the security services, you might like to allay any future leaks of what occurred, can I offer that you leak what actually did happen in such a way as to provoke the fringe conspirators a field day. Any actual leak would be lost in the nonsense. You could wrap it up with crazy Antichthon and Velikovsky stories.'

Someone said quietly 'Excellent.' And this is what took place. One result was a reprint of Velikovsky's book, which again became a best seller.

'Also, we don't know what happened to DAVID, AKA The Übermensch, AKA the Papilios. Where is it, what are its intentions and are there other things like this out there. Maybe an avenue for quiet study under a SETI badge.'

More agreed mumbling.

'I think that's about all, it was fun working with you guys, at times, thank you.'

Laughter and a round of applause.

Later in a meeting with Hope Murkowski the fate of The Device at 85 Colonial Road was discussed.

'I'll keep the three copies for now, and also we now know there is the actual set of 173 tiles, some 170 may be buried in Iran, and



three out there somewhere?’ Billy said.

‘Interesting?’ was the reply from Hope, ‘and can we ship you first class civil flight back to the UK?’

Billy replied that he had some work to do for the Disney studios in L.A. which she couldn’t quite believe, but anyway wished him well. The flight to L.A. was fine, business class as always. The hotel great, even the room full of stuffed Mickey Mouses, Donald Ducks and Tigers.

He had three daily meetings at the top of a skyscraper with the studio senior executives, their aids and minions, and countless yes men and yes women and yes diversity people.

The input Billy considered was minimal. The Norse myth became a Siberian shamanistic myth, the studio had a problem with ethnic diversity so blond-haired Norsemen were out. At each new idea from ‘The ideas people’ the yes men and yes women and yes diversity people remained silent, as the ‘powers’ frowned and said simply.

‘No.’

Billy then suggested the Native North American Indians, they have had a raw deal, and then mentioned Cahokia. There was silence, he wrote the words on his pad and showed it to the assembled. The powers looked cautious. Minions were tapping C a h o k i a into apple macs and pads.

The wiki entry appeared and was flashed on several screens...

“Cahokia was the largest and most influential urban settlement of the Mississippian culture, which developed advanced societies across much of what is now the Central and the Southeastern United States, beginning more than 1,000 years before European contact.”

Pictures of earthworks appeared. The head of the studio stood



and pointed to Billy, she spoke,

'You, you have a gift, a gift, I get rubbish and then this from you, you have a gift, a fucking gift.'

She read, "Developed advanced societies!" And repeated 'Developed god damned advanced societies, what with cars, aircraft, maybe space travel!, time travel!., more than 1,000 years before European contact.' and repeated, 'MORE THAN 1,000 YEARS BEFORE. Indigenous smart Americans! This my friends is a super box ticker! You have a gift; we have a thousand years of history to write. I want scenarios by next week!'

She clapped Billy and gestured him to stand, there was uproar. 'Spaceships' he thought, 'oh well'.

He turned down the party to celebrate saying he needed to get back home. The head of the studio laughed -

'Look at the guy, nice suit, buy him some more, and get him on my jet to take him home, you have a gift,' then to a dumbfounded aide, 'are we paying this guy enough?'

His flight back to the UK was fine, apart from three things which were nagging both his sleeping and waking hours.

One, the nature of these Übermenschen, sods law, there must be more.

Two, what of the other tiles? The actual tiles, not the drawings and photographs.

Three, what would a completed Device at number 85 Colonial Road do.

He had a fourth but couldn't even name it, it was to do with hierarchies in Neo-Platonism, and what, the idea of a rhizome, and what else?



He skimmed through a copy of New Scientist; he had noticed Nigel's face on the cover with the letters T.O.E.?

And read, "If Dr Summer's Aesthetics of translation. is true then it provides a method of translation between SR/GR, QM³, and variances in empirical data. An Australian team has now shown by a reversal the output could be the production of new physical states. Thus, opening a new field of synthetic physics."

'If so, we can make actual new universes? Fabricate new realities. I must talk to Nigel.' thought Billy.

³ Special Relativity, General Relativity and Quantum Mechanics.



CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR: TO FAIL TO PLAN IS TO PLAN TO FAIL

Billy Taylor shares a large late Georgian house in Woodbridge, Suffolk. He shares it with Catherine Mulberry a professor of comparative religion at The University of Birmingham. They have been colleagues for years and also share the hobby of bird watching. In the past they had often used Woodbridge as a base. The house was acquired by the two pooling funds, but the major capitol came from Billy's work for the Hollywood Studios. A mitigating factor in the mutilation of ancient myths and legends by such corporate capitalism.

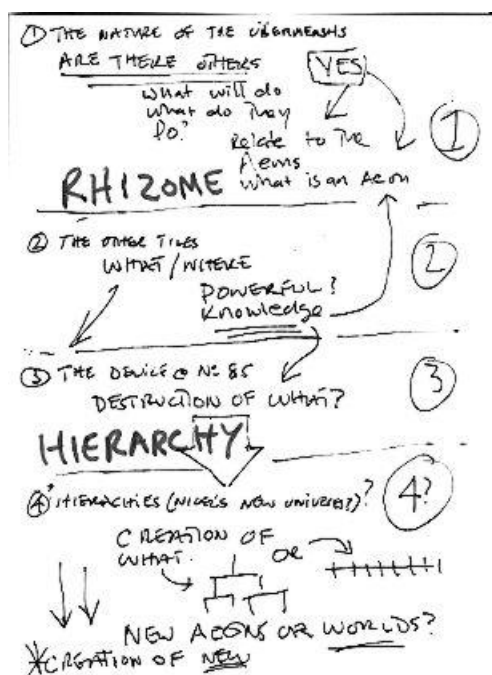
Their relationship is platonic and friendly, they live in separate parts of the extensive house, though do at times share meals, and visits to Snape Maltings for concerts. Catherine Mulberry does not any longer share Billy's interest in Modern Art.

Billy has a large work room, separate study, and three bedrooms. They share a large kitchen, the large library and the extensive gardens. Catherine has her own study, a morning room, reception room and three bedrooms. There is a small cottage in the gardens which served for visiting guests.

Catherine was a keen sailor, Billy was not, but enjoyed his rowboat on the pond in their garden.

After arriving back from L.A. and a short period of recovery he set to his task, which was in his large work room on a wall to produce a summary of his concerns, this was his method. Often in the past Catherine would walk in and scan the wall, not usually making any comment, but showing what she thought by gestures and facial expressions.





Catherine Mulberry was looking at Billy's plan very carefully.

She said, 'First how are you going to find out about these Übermenschen, and what are they?'

'Beings that have transcended the physical. Maybe Aeons or like Aeons.' he replied.

'West Kennet,' she replied, 'if you can't contact the non-physical, you can contact the opposite, the spirits of the land, get packed I'll drive, we can stay at the Avebury Red Lion.'

Within half an hour they were driving in Catherine Mulberry's classic Wolseley car of 1950, its deep worn leather seats making long journeys more bearable. Not a great distance from Woodbridge to Avebury, the village near by the Long Barrow of West Kennet, but East to West travel is difficult in England, and



in the Southeast, London is almost impossible to avoid, which is why they did not. Billy had kept his London flat in Blackheath, it was a small one bed affair, a basement flat in Blackheath Park Road, useful for both Billy and Catherine Mulberry when working in London, often at the British Museum. Despite being in London Blackheath retained a village feel. It has a High Street with shops and pubs. The heath itself lies to the south of The A2 Dover Road, and to the north is Greenwich Park, the Royal Observatory, and the river Thames. The heath makes for fine walks. They followed the A12 around Colchester and Chelmsford and all the way to Poplar, then the Blackwall Tunnel, through which was Greenwich. Stopping at the Hare and Billet on the Heath for supper.

For starters.

Catherine Mulberry had Pressed crispy lamb belly, caramelised cauliflower, caper & raisin puree, mint jus. Billy the Salmon tartare, wasabi pea & cucumber salad, preserved lemon, Melba toast.

Mains.

For Catherine Mulberry, she had Dry aged rack of lamb, braised shoulder shepherd's pie, carrot puree, mint jus. Billy had Venison haunch, roast heritage beetroot, pomme anna, maple parsnip, bramble jus.

Finally.

Catherine Mulberry had Orange & ginger steam pudding, vanilla custard. Billy had Dark chocolate mousse, honeycomb, coffee salt.

They shared a bottle of red.

And then onto Blackheath Park Road and the flat. Billy had the sofa bed in the small living room, which had French windows on to the Garden. The flat being part of what was once a large Victorian Mansion.

In the morning, they set off for the M4, first having breakfast in



the high street, hacked through Richmond and eventually found the M4. This would take them past Slough, made famous by Sir John Betjeman's poem.

Slough

Come, friendly bombs, and fall on Slough
It isn't fit for humans now,
There isn't grass to graze a cow
Swarm over, Death!

Come, bombs, and blow to smithereens
Those air-conditioned, bright canteens,
Tinned fruit, tinned meat, tinned milk, tinned beans
Tinned minds, tinned breath.

Mess up the mess they call a town —
A house for ninety-seven down
And once a week for half-a-crown
For twenty years,

And get that man with double chin
Who'll always cheat and always win,
Who washes his repulsive skin
In women's tears,

And smash his desk of polished oak
And smash his hands so used to stroke
And stop his boring dirty joke
And make him yell.

But spare the bald young clerks who add
The profits of the stinking cad;
It's not their fault that they are mad,
They've tasted Hell.

It's not their fault they do not know
The birdsong from the radio,
It's not their fault they often go



To Maidenhead

And talk of sports and makes of cars
In various bogus Tudor bars
And daren't look up and see the stars
But belch instead.

In labour-saving homes, with care
Their wives frizz out peroxide hair
And dry it in synthetic air
And paint their nails.

Come, friendly bombs, and fall on Slough
To get it ready for the plough.
The cabbages are coming now;
The earth exhales.

Now past Reading and then onto Marlborough, still a pleasant
Wiltshire town, from there they took the A4 west a few miles,
through West Kennet and then the B road to Avebury, in time for
lunch.

The whole area has a strange and deep feeling. Avebury itself
has a fine stone circle, the largest of the stone circles, near by a
line of megaliths leads to the mysterious Silbury hill, the tallest
prehistoric human-made mound in Europe. From the top of the
hill can be easily seen the line of megaliths, the Avebury henge,
and West Kennet Long Barrow. A burial chamber built 100 yards
long and used for burials five and a half millennia ago. The whole
site is managed by English Heritage, but the Barrow is still
privately owned. Billy had visited the site many times, as well as
Catherine Mulberry.

She would be spending each night asleep in the Red Lion,
Catherine Mulberry had arranged with the owners of the Barrow
for Billy to be spending 7 nights inside the Barrow, awake.



CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE: WEST KENNET LONG BARROW

As the evening fell Billy walked to West Kennet Long Barrow. From Avebury he walked south down the stone avenue of megaliths towards Silbury Hill, the B4003, then west along the A4 towards the hill, north of the road. Before the hill is the track on the south side that leads to the Barrow. The track runs through wide sparse fields with thick trees and hawthorn in the hedgerows. And across a small stream or brook, the river Kennet, and then onto the Barrow itself. It was a clear night, there would be stars, but Billy would not see them from inside the barrow.

Long after the barrows were used for burial all kinds of myths grew around them involving angels, devils, spirits, and in recent times that they mark the place of ancient spacecrafts, the shells gone, leaving only the remains of their crews.

None of this was important, as Catherine Mulberry had known, if the Übermenschen, the Dasein, DAVID, was pure energy and now far away or in another dimension, contact was impossible. And yet, and so, its negative would reveal it, like a footprint in snow, or the bird prints, or the tracks of cat's paws. And the Barrow was located in a part of England where the land, the material nature of the land, was evident and why those ancients recognised it, and made contact with it, and it with them. So it was inside the barrow that Billy sort this "negative footprint".

The first night:

Stars shone outside in a moonless sky; inside the barrow the blackness was physical. Billy could feel it. It spoke.

'I am in decline, I lived for ages, still and silent, but with the coming of mind-life my days were no longer infinite. I am in decline. There are no stars here, there are no mountains, no horses. This is my future; you beasts will bring me into darkness. This is my end, my doom, I gave birth to you as matter, and you grew and changed.'



This, the 'being of darkness of matter, of the earth', it repeated all night until the blackness of the sky became grey.

Billy sat in the barrow as its features started to form out of the blackness of the night. Slowly the grey grew lighter, he took out his Moleskine notebook and wrote down 'The Darkness of Matter, of the earth's words'. He then stood and left the Barrow, as the sun rose over the downs. He walked slowly down the track, across the stream which was the river Kennet. Stopping on the bridge, watching the water which flowed across the North Wessex Downs towards the river Thames and the sea. Then a slow walk past the megaliths and into the village and The Red Lion. He had a full English breakfast, which varies as to what 'full' means.

In this case bacon, sausages, eggs, baked beans, tomatoes, mushrooms, toast, fried bread and tea. Not coffee, not hash browns, not black pudding. One expects black pudding in the North of England, and when he was in Scotland a full Scottish would of course have haggis. The best 'full' breakfast he had ever eaten was a full Welsh breakfast in the Penhelig Arms, Aberdovey in Wales.

Catherine Mulberry joined him, she ordered her usual scrambled eggs and smoked salmon, after some fruit and yoghurt. The best scrambled eggs she ever had was also at the Penhelig Arms, Aberdovey. It was so good that she asked about the milk used, and was told it was not milk, it was fresh cream. The other notable feature was the quality of the salmon, excellent, and the portion, huge, she had to miss lunch.

Billy related the events of the night and showed Catherine Mulberry his notes. She said that she would visit the Barrow herself and Silbury hill that morning but drive to Marlborough for lunch. Billy slept after his breakfast in his room until midday. In the afternoon Catherine Mulberry and Billy drove to Marlborough, after eating lunch they visited an antiquarian book shop they were familiar with, and good customers. There would



be supper at the Red Lion, and then Billy would take his walk to the Long Barrow for his second night.

The second night:

Billy took the walk down the avenue of megaliths, across the stream and into the Barrow. The sky had patchy clouds, unlike the clear sky the night before. As dusk turned to black night 'The Darkness of Matter, of the earth' spoke.

'You have found ways to bind me and found ways to consume me. You scatter me across the void faster and faster and still faster since you came into being. I was once well, now I fall ill, but my pain is less as the void consumes me. Will you make me nothing or will you make me infinite? Will you become the centre of everything will all else fly away at infinite speeds.'

As before this was repeated until the darkness gave way. An almost indistinguishable point when the philosophers of Islam would note the moment as a white thread could be discerned as different to a black thread. As before when the light was sufficient Billy wrote in his notebook.

Catherine Mulberry was already at breakfast eating her fruit and yoghurt. Billy joined her. Over breakfast he read The Darkness of Matter, of the earth's latest speech. She said she thought she might drive the 40 miles to Cerne Abbas. Billy raised an eyebrow; Catherine Mulberry gave his hand a gentle slap.

'I'm not tired, I'll join you and be your chaperone!'

Catherine Mulberry laughed.

At Cerne Abbas is the Cerne Abbas Giant, or 'rude' man. A 'drawing' of a naked man with an erect penis wielding a club cut in the chalk, a figure some 180 feet in length. Its origin uncertain. They both had visited before, there was much folk law and some cults which related to such works and legends such as those of The Green Man.



So, they set off for Dorset, driving east to Marlborough then south down the A338 to Salisbury, from there the A354 to Blandford Forum. Leaving the A road at Puddletown, then B roads and finally narrow country lanes and steep hills which made the Wolseley work hard, in particular Piddle Lane, a narrow lane of bends, with views across open vistas of Dorset countryside, and then to twist and descend into deep woodland, they finally arrived at Cerne Abbas. There is a viewpoint by the A352 of The Rude Man. They parked the Wolseley, and then they climbed up the hill into the pasture where the giant was.

Billy frowned and looked at Catherine Mulberry, and said,

‘I suspect a hidden agenda for this whim of a visit.’

‘What do you mean?’ she replied.

‘Well, the first note on my wall was about the nature of the Übermensch, that we called DAVID.’ he said.

‘Go on,’ she said, ‘you can’t possibly think The Rude Man has anything to do with that.’

‘Not this,’ he said pointing to the figure etched in chalk on the Dorset hill, ‘or the Nazca Lines in Peru or The Face on Mars in the Cydonia region. But maybe they are sigils, or signs, or a trace of actual Übermenschs, pointers to where they are and what they are.’

‘What a clever idea.’ she replied smiling.

He laughed and said, ‘You should write a paper on Ancient images of the Übermensch.’

They looked around at this primeval Dorset landscape, and both knew something of its secrets, maybe more now than anyone living.



They gave their adieus to The Rude Man and the land. They drove back, stopping in Salisbury for lunch and a brief visit to the Cathedral. Billy had a thing about Gothic cathedrals unlike Catherine Mulberry who had a thing about tiny churches. At one point Billy was looking at some of the stone floor, and its scratches.

In the afternoon back at the Red Lion Billy took a nap.

The third night:

At dusk Billy walked to the Barrow, it was a clear night, the first stars showing and Venus shining bright in the west. Night came and ‘The Darkness of Matter, of the earth’ spoke.

‘You will cease being matter and consume me, you will expand to limitless space, you will become limitless space devouring everything. And then in your mighty power your force will grow, it will tear all things apart, and tear apart what is torn. Nothing will remain untorn. Everything will be torn and overcome, even gravity. Your force will overcome all other forces.’

Again, this continued until the very beginning of dawn, and as before Billy wrote all this in his notebook.

At breakfast Catherine Mulberry was speaking to Billy.

‘Billy,’ she said, ‘our visit to Salisbury Cathedral yesterday, I know you have a thing about Gothic cathedrals, and you know...’

Billy interrupted, ‘You have a thing about tiny churches, and I have a thing about cathedrals, and you assured me it wasn’t something just counter to this.’

‘And it’s not,’ she said, ‘but you did light the spark, and we were lucky in Woodbridge to be close to St. Mary’s Mundon, St. Peter-on-the-Wall, Bradwell, and St. Peter’s Cambridge.’

It was at Cambridge that Catherine Mulberry’s love affair with



small churches began. She had lost interest in Modern Art, from circumstances too complex to explore here, so whilst Billy was re-visiting Kettle's yard, an Art gallery of Modern Art in Cambridge, she noticed the tiny church and found she could borrow the key held by the gallery and look inside. Her feelings were complex yet simple, unlike the logic of her work and her approach to it, and unlike Billy's who would practice rather than think, as he was doing nightly in the Long Barrow. The word for the feeling she had in such a small sacred place was 'colloquial'. And so began Catherine Mulberry's hobby.

'And?' said Billy.

'Well, there is St. Laurence's, Bradwell-on-Avon and Bremilham Church Malmesbury, quite near, and some others, but I think these two will do for today, are you interested?' was her reply.

Billy was thoughtful.

'I've got the landlord to make up a packed lunch, we could have a picnic, the weather is good, and maybe some wine, red wine, I could have a glass but no more.' she said.

Billy's nocturnal work had meant no large evening meal accompanied by good wine.

He beamed and said, 'You're on, I do so love a good tiny church.'

Catherine Mulberry smiled.

The sky was clear blue as they set off in the Wolseley. St. Laurence's, Bradwell-on-Avon was small, but more importantly a rare Saxon stone church that had survived being altered and added to or replaced by the arrival of the Normans. It managed to get lost amongst other buildings of Bradwell-on-Avon until Canon Jones in the middle of the 19thC rediscovered it. And tiny it is, having just 5 wooden chairs, it is very dark with small windows. Billy was impressed by the feel of such an old and unchanged place of worship. It had echoes of the Long Barrow.



Certain places had this. And here too Billy noticed certain scratches on the stone floor. This time he drew them in his Moleskine notebook.

They picnicked on the footpath near where it crossed the Bristol Avon, the footpath being dead straight, part of what once was the Fosse way, a Roman road that linked Exeter and Lincoln. At times now just a mark on a map, or a footpath, lane, minor road and at others an A road like the A429.

Bremilham Church is near Malmesbury and was a contender for being the smallest church, being 13 by 11 feet. Not only is it small, it's also located in a farmyard with other buildings, a small hotel, and the Cowage Farm Business Centre. Its use always in doubt, though built in the 12th century due to the sparse population, so it has in its time served as many other uses. It was blessed by a bishop in the 1980s and is used as a place of worship, but only once a year on Rogation Sunday. The Christian Rogation derived from the Roman procession, Robigalia, at which a dog was sacrificed to the deity of agricultural disease.

The fourth night:

'The being of Darkness of matter, of the Earth', repeated all night until the blackness of the sky became grey.

'You will attract everything, draw everything to you. You will attract all the major stars and then all the minor stars. They will pour into you and disappear, and you will pour into yourself and disappear. And the disappearance will pour into itself and disappear. And disappearance will be everything.'

At breakfast Billy spoke, 'I think The Being of Darkness of matter, of the Earth is telling me Ending stories. Eschatologies.'

There was a long pause, then Catherine Mulberry returned to her scrambled eggs and smoked salmon, and Billy to his 'full English'.

Eventually Catherine Mulberry spoke, 'St. Mary of the Angels,



Brownshill and Odda's Chapel, Deerhurst.'

St. Mary of the Angels is unusual even for small churches, firstly it is Roman Catholic, secondly it was built in the 1930s by two men who converted to Roman Catholicism and was encouraged to build the chapel by the Bishop of Clifton. It was built in the Romanesque style of the 12th century. It lies along a very narrow and picturesque lane by the river Frome. And overlooking a hill called Blackness.

Odda's Chapel competes with St. Mary of the Angels in being unusual, it is notionally Roman Catholic, and has similarities with St. Laurence's, Bradwell-on-Avon as it too had once disappeared and is Saxon. Being attached to a black and white timbered manor house it was once thought to be just part of the house and not a chapel. When in 1885 repairs removed some plaster and revealed the lost Saxon Chapel.

The fifth night:

'The being of Darkness of matter, of the Earth' spoke.

'When giants who were devoured by jaguars, the world was destroyed. When men were turned to monkeys, hurricanes destroyed the world. The rain of fire made us birds. The flood turned us into fish. Two escaped and were turned into dogs. The world will be destroyed by the stars causing earthquakes.'

At breakfast Billy said, after he read the words of The Being of Darkness of matter, of the Earth. 'I know this, it's the Aztec Five Suns.'

Catherine Mulberry gave Billy a look, comparative religion was also her field, then said 'St. Oswalds, Widford and All Saints, Shorthampton.'

St. Oswalds, Widford near the river Windrush stands on the footings of a Roman villa. It has medieval wall paintings and underneath the flagstones of the church still remains the Roman



mosaic floor.

All Saints, Shorthampton is a gem. Inside it has box pews but what makes it special are the wonderful medieval wall paintings. The effect on Billy was quite profound, such are the secrets of small buildings.

The sixth night:

‘The being of Darkness of matter, of the Earth’ said.

‘You empty that which is empty, you empty that which is empty. You decay that which is decayed, and without forewarning all is destroyed. The mountains are destroyed, the rivers are destroyed, the seas are destroyed, the moon and stars are destroyed, the sun is destroyed, I am destroyed. And yet that which is far away at infinite distance and speed you cannot reach.’

‘I think the Übermenschen, the Dasein, DAVID, pure energy are the sources of these eschatologies, and that links us back to the Tiles of Truth, the story of the bees and the other eschatologies, The Device and 85 Colonial Road.’ Billy said at breakfast.

Catherine Mulberry gave an expression of thoughtful approval and said ‘All Saints, Billesley. The last one I think.’

Billesley’s population by 1428 was just 4, and though All Saints was built in the 11th century it now looks like something from the 17th, because Bernard Whalley remodelled it and made it into his private church on his manorial estate. The church claims to be the venue for the wedding of one William Shakespeare of Stratford-Upon-Avon to Anne Hathaway.

The seventh night:

‘The being of Darkness of matter, of the Earth’ just chanted all night.



‘I will return, you will return.’

Billy saw Catherine Mulberry at breakfast the following morning but before sitting down he said, ‘Won’t be long I need to check something out.’ And went to his room. A few minutes later he re-appeared and sat down. Before his breakfast arrived, he read from his notebook,

‘Dark energy is what drives the universe, it is what animates the universe. It dominates the universe; it is its life.’

He paused, then read.

‘Cosmologists estimate that the acceleration began roughly 5 billion years ago. Before that, it is thought that the expansion was decelerating, due to the attractive influence of matter. The density of dark matter in an expanding universe decreases more quickly than dark energy, and eventually the dark energy dominates. Specifically, when the volume of the universe doubles, the density of dark matter is halved, but the density of dark energy is nearly unchanged.

From the web,’ he said.

‘The Übermenschen, the Dasein, DAVID, pure energy are DARK energy! And 5 billion years ago, is roughly the creation of the solar system.’

He paused and drank some tea.

‘The being of Darkness of matter, of the Earth just chanted all night. “I will return; you will return.” it’s The Eternal Return of the Same.’

‘Nietzsche.’ said Catherine Mulberry.



CHAPTER THIRTY SIX: HOME

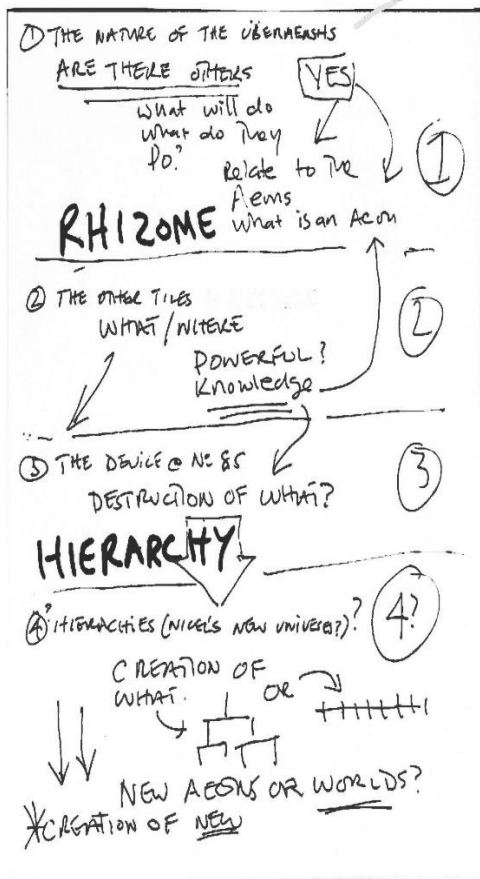
Catherine Mulberry thought now there seemed less urgency so a drive across country would be preferable, at a reasonable pace for the Wolseley. They spent a day in Oxford, staying two nights at the Randolph. Not engaged in any serious work, visiting the Botanical Gardens, there is a fine Victoria water lily there, and the Pitt Rivers Museum. Catherine Mulberry thought for symmetry they should stay two nights at the University Arms Hotel in Cambridge. They visited the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the Sedgewick Museum, and of course Kettle's yard and St. Peters Church. Billy welcomed the 'normality' compared to his 7 nights in a tomb. He also enjoyed the evening meals, the red wine and a good night's sleep. They made the last leg from Cambridge to Woodbridge, as always leaving the A14 as soon as possible and driving through the pretty lanes of East Suffolk. A route taking them through the village of Coddanham, and the Hamlets of Clopton and Burgh.

After a night's sleep in his own bed, and a morning walk along the Deben, the Godwit's were hard at work 'drilling' for their breakfasts in the estuary mud, on returning he set to in his work room. He used Wikipedia's 'end of the universe' entry. It seemed to work, all but the Aztec eschatology and the fourth, stars eating stars. He telephoned Nigel who suggested the Lambda-CDM model, which he looked up, but he couldn't follow any of the equations, but it certainly was about stars.

He drew up a summary sheet and placed it on his wall. He decided the Papilios in becoming a single entity of powerful energy were not alone, and that these powerful beings, called Übermenschen could be a source, or the source of destruction of the physical universe. And there were various scenarios, 'The being of Darkness of matter, of the Earth' had given him 7, mostly scientific? But he had also 4 other Eschatologies, and possibly 173 in all from the tiles of truth. His next step would be to locate the other tiles, the tiles themselves, the 170 in Iran, and the three elsewhere.







CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN: THE OTHER TILES

Billy looked at his diagrams and thought...

'From Venus, Mars, and Antichthon 3 tiles, and from the meteorite in ancient Persia 170 tiles. So, we know there were 173 actual tiles, and 170 were at the site in Persia, now Iran, back in 1938, 80 miles north of Yezd. We don't know where the other 3 are or for that matter we don't know for sure where the 170 now are.

And why 173, well we saw that Nigel discovered the tiles are made from Unsepttrium, which has the atomic number of 173. Nigel reckons no form of physical matter can be higher. So, we have absolute matter in the tiles and absolute pure energy in the Übermenschen. That's got to be significant. Ying Yang stuff.'

Catherine Mulberry had entered the room and sat in a chair, she was watching Billy walking up and down in front of his diagram.

She spoke. 'So, you need to find the other original 173 tiles.'

'Yes,' came the answer, 'but it seems an impossible task, Iran for one, and then Venus and Mars, and now Antichthon doesn't even exist!'

'By the way,' Catherine Mulberry said, 'you have three of the tiles made from the photographs from Venus and Mars, and Antichthon?'

'Yes.' Billy replied.

'And you reckon that Nigel said the element...' she paused.

'Unsepttrium.' Billy said.

'Unsepttrium, and a small amount would immediately decay into fierce deadly radiation.' she said.



‘Yes.’ Billy said.

‘And you have three tiles made from it over in your desk?’ she said.

‘No, photographs, but I think with the same power.’ Billy said.

‘And we and the good folk of Woodbridge, and East Suffolk are not dead?’ Catherine Mulberry finished making her first point.

Billy walked to his desk, took out the photographs of the tiles, or now they seemed to be photographs on thin metal sheets.

Catherine Mulberry beckoned with her hand; she looked at them.

‘They are really quite beautiful, why do you think the real tiles didn’t immediately decay?’ she said.

‘Hmmm,’ mused Billy, ‘maybe they were not in our material world or not completely in our world. And maybe these are likewise. You have an idea.’

‘Yes,’ said Catherine Mulberry. ‘If they are not actually in this world they are not actually in Iran or anywhere else.’

‘You’re a genius’ Billy said.

‘I know.’ was the reply.

She continued, ‘And how many other worlds does science know?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Billy. ‘Just this one I think, I’ll phone Nigel.’

He telephoned Nigel Summers, Nobel prize winning physicist. There was a long conversation.

After it finished Billy said. ‘He was very non-committal, but when



pushed said he had no idea, one or an infinity, and then he told me not to get him onto that topic.'

Catherine Mulberry raised an eyebrow, 'Get him onto the topic of infinity'. Billy said.

Catherine Mulberry raised the other eyebrow, 'It seems there are lots, some bigger than others.' Billy said.

'My word,' said Catherine Mulberry, 'and how many worlds do we know in comparative religion?'

'Thousands, 7 comes up often and so does infinity.' Billy said.

There was a long silence.

'I think I need another walk.' Billy said.

He put on his jacket and left the house.



CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT: A LIGHT LUNCH

When he got back, he found Catherine Mulberry in the kitchen. On the large pine table there were two plates, a quiche, and a bowl of salad. Two wine glasses with red wine in them.

‘We will eat and you will talk,’ she said. ‘from the start.’

‘OK,’ Billy began, cutting a piece of quiche and taking a helping of salad. ‘In 1938 some tablets, called the tablets of truth were found in Persia, what is now Iran. It seems they arrived on earth from a meteorite around 300 million years ago, from where I don’t know. 170 tiles in total, part of the meteorite broke, so three ended up on Venus, Mars, and Antichthon, Antichthon being a mirror earth. Around just under 4 billion years ago there was primitive life on earth, but advanced life on Venus, Mars and Antichthon.’

He paused and took a sip of wine.

‘The advanced life on Antichthon being the Papilios. Highly intelligent, and beautiful creatures probably evolved from insect like animals. Around that time the solar system was visited by The Life Harvesters, the name says it all. All life on Mars and Venus was harvested, but not on Antichthon because the Papilios spend most of their long lives deep underground. A cosmic event caused planetary upheaval and, in the process, Antichthon plunged into Jupiter, creating the giant red spot. The Life Harvesters in destroying life on habitable planets explains the Fermi paradox, that is with all these stars and planets why we don’t see a universe, or at least our galaxy, teeming with life.’

Catherine Mulberry gave a certain look.

‘The Life Harvesters explain the apparent lack of intelligent life in our Galaxy?’ she said, he gave a nod, and continued.

‘So now somehow three photographs and drawings of the 170 tiles found their way into a coal store in Birmingham and were



lost from view until now. Disturbing them caused a situation in which I became involved.'

Catherine Mulberry gave a knowing smile; she knew this part.

Billy continued, 'The photographs showed 3 Eschatologies, the 167 drawings another one relating to bees. We obtained pictures of the missing 3, which also contained the Bee Eschatology. These drawings and photographs became a metal, Unsepttrium, the most complex matter possible. Myself and a boy at 85 Colonial Road, where the drawings were found, built The Device in the garden of 85, missing the last 3 tiles. But not 85 Colonial Road as it is now, but how it was sometime in the late 1950s, early 1960s.'

He paused to cut another slice of quiche, and topped up their glasses of red wine, and continued.

'Why that date, and the boy I don't know. And now we have, or I do, pictures of the missing three tiles.'

'The ones from your desk.' Catherine Mulberry said.

'Yes, that you are holding now.' said Billy.

'And now they seem to be silver Unsepttrium, yet you, I, and Woodbridge are still here.'

'Yes.' Billy said. 'But moving on, now these, The Life Harvesters seemed to think our Solar system is now quite dead, maybe from the planetary upheaval and would have passed us by if not for coming across the US space probe Voyager 1. So, they sent a scout, scout or Oumuamua in Hawaiian. It probably reported back that the Earth was rich in life, 550 billion tons.'

'Yummy!' exclaimed Catherine Mulberry.

'Well, it looks like that is what The Life Harvesters thought as they seem to have altered course for our Solar System. But



meanwhile on Antichthon, inside Jupiter, the Papilios had evolved over the 4 billion years into a single organism of pure energy. We called it the Übermensch, or pure being, Dasein, or in this case DAVID because it resembled Donatello's David. And this DAVID, now a single giant Papilio simply destroyed The Life Harvesters and has disappeared. Not being able to contact pure energy I tried to contact pure matter...'

'In the Long Barrow.' said Catherine Mulberry.

'Yes,' continued Billy, 'and it gave me 7 different eschatologies.'

'A couple of points?' asked Catherine Mulberry.

'Go on.' said Billy,

'How did the tiles which broke off get to the three planets?'

'I don't know, they travelled across space I guess?' said Billy.

'But not just space but also time?' said Catherine Mulberry.

'Why travelled across time?' asked Billy.

'Well, the tiles arrive 300 million years ago, and the meteorite breaks up, shedding three tiles, but the 3 tiles seem to get to the three planets 4 billion years ago, way before they broke off?' she said.

'Right,' replied Billy.

'But time? Didn't you say for the tablets time was odd?' said Catherine Mulberry.

'Right,' replied Billy, 'that could explain it, also if they are outside of time they won't immediately vaporize.'

He paused – saying 'And'.



‘7 different eschatologies, or 173?’ said Catherine Mulberry.

‘So, I think I need to aim at finding the original 173 tiles because of the nature of matter and the element number 173, is the most complex. Maybe 173 possible eschatologies? But how to find them?’

‘You need a Tile Harvester.’ Catherine Mulberry said.

‘Very good,’ said Billy, ‘Life harvesters, Tile harvester, very good...’

There was a long pause, Billy was looking at his empty wine glass, then said,

‘You really are a genius.’

‘I know.’ was the reply.



CHAPTER THIRTY NINE: LA MARIÉE MISE À NU PAR SES CÉLIBATAIRES, MÊME'

'I need to create a Tile Harvester a fabulous machine, a fabulous machine?' Billy repeated 'With all 7 eschatologies from The Long Barrow. It must somehow represent these. It needs to be a thing, a thing like in the boy's imagination.'

He left the kitchen and walked into his work room and looked at his notes, the 7 eschatologies.

- 1.) The Heat Death
- 2.) The Big Rip
- 3.) The Big Crunch
- 4.) The Black Hole Era
- 5.) The Aztec eschatology
- 6.) The Big Slurp
- 7.) The Eternal Return

'A machine like in Deleuze?' he thought, 'no that's a concept, I need matter, it must be something physical, that can be destroyed, like the "Object to Be Destroyed" by Man Ray, a metronome with a picture of an eye stuck to it, a joke.'

He smiled, then said aloud.

'The Glass, The Glass, The Great Glass' he shouted and ran from the room, almost colliding with Catherine Mulberry.

He had the Duchamp book and opened it to the section where the work that is known as 'The Great Glass' is pictured. It is a kind of summary of Duchamp's work and thoughts up to its creation, completed in 1923. It supposedly shows a bride, and uses images



from his previous work, some of which employed randomness. Its proper name, derived from Alchemy is 'The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even', in French 'La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même'.

Billy found paper and made a copy, looking at the various 'objects' pictured in the glass. The upper portion the Bride, the lower her Bachelors. The upper a cloud, 3 random sheets of paper, obviously the 3 tiles that went missing, and so on. The 'chocolate grinder' The Big Crunch, 'Malic Molds' Aztec animals and so on. He looked at it and then took it into his work room and pinned it to the wall with the other notes.







'So how are you going to make this machine, this Tile Harvester?' Catherine Mulberry said.

Billy was deep in thought. He had the design, based on the great glass, but that was flat and painted on glass. He needed to construct a thing.

'Meccano!' he shouted, and rushed upstairs, pulled down the attic ladder and climbed up it and disappeared. He descended minutes later with a box, an old set of Meccano, a child's metal construction kit made of metal bars, and plates which could be bolted together.



Though meant for children in its heyday of the 1950s and 60s adults would also construct things like giant cranes. It was also popular with 'inventors'. Billy had a small set, not from his childhood but when he copied the models made of aircraft and WW2 control towers by the inhabitants of islands in the Pacific. Part of his 'study by doing' of 'Cargo Cults'.

During the war the local islanders were exposed to modern US culture, aircraft bringing strange items, Jeeps, strange food, like ice cream. Then just as suddenly as they came, they left, taking with them these incredible devices, foods, clothes and machines. So, some of the islanders began to make control towers and craft them from palm leaves and wood, a kind of 'sympathetic' magic. Billy had tried to do similar a few years back, eventually buying some 'Meccano' from eBay. Nothing much came of this, and the small set was stored in the attic when he and Catherine Mulberry moved to Woodbridge.

He set to work. Catherine Mulberry checking his progress and bringing in tea and biscuits or coffee. By 7.30 an exhausted Billy had finished the two parts of his 'sculpture'. Catherine Mulberry came in and before she could say 'Stop', Billy spoke,

'Done, just need some dowel to support the top piece, I'll get some tomorrow from Jewsons.'

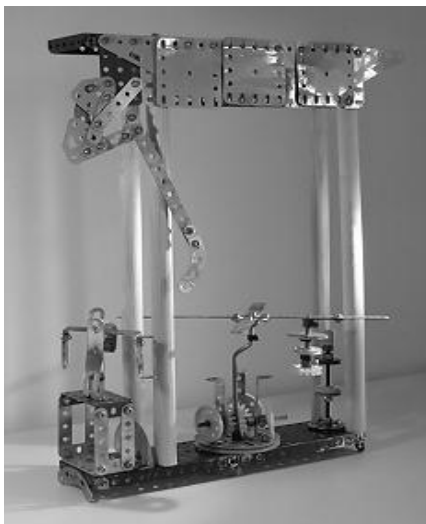
'And now you, we, must eat, I think a curry from Shapla's.' So, the two left the house and walked down Cumberland Street, turning left at the crossroads, and then a short distance up Church Street to Shapla's Indian restaurant.

They ordered a bottle of red wine, and some Plain Popadums with mixed pickles, for starters Catherine Mulberry had Tandoori Chicken, Billy had Sheek Kebab. For mains Catherine Mulberry had Prawn Madras, Billy had King Prawn Vindaloo, sides of rice and Kulcha Nan. For desserts they both had ice cream.

During the meal Catherine Mulberry admitted she was quite impressed by his efforts with the Meccano. Billy added that it



should be completed by the next day. And the next day after visiting Jewsons for some dowel, the model of the Great Glass, now the Tile Harvester was complete. He placed it on a table in his work room.



Catherine Mulberry said a drive and a walk by the sea would be good, so they took the Wolseley and were walking on Aldeburgh beach within 25 minutes. More pebbles than sand, but a wonderful scene walking between the North Sea and the town. The walk made them hungry, so they had a light lunch, browsed the second-hand bookshop, and bought some lamb for the evening meal from the Butchers, Salter and King, 'Craft Butchers'.

On arriving back, they found in Billy's work room the model of the Tile Harvester and under it a tile.



CHAPTER FORTY: TILES

Billy examined the tile found underneath the Tile Harvester. He took out the three that were made from photographs of the teams that visited Venus, Mars and Antichthon. It matched the first one, from Venus.

‘But,’ said Billy, to a watching Catherine Mulberry, ‘look, it’s reversed, where the image on the Venus tile, and like all the others, were incised grooves, the image here is made by raised ridges. They are opposite, or complementary.’

‘What does that mean?’ asked Catherine Mulberry.

‘Absolutely no idea.’ Billy replied.

They checked throughout the rest of the day, no new tiles, until the following morning, and there was the Mars tile. Again, the negative, or perhaps better the positive of the photograph produced tile. The following day gave Antichthon, and the day after that the rest of the 173 tiles.

That evening Catherine Mulberry and Billy Taylor were enjoying a meal of cold lamb, the left-over from the excellent joint from Salter and King, together with home-made pickles, cheese from the Woodbridge Deli. After opening the second bottle of red, Catherine Mulberry asked a question.

‘Billy, why if the tiles are called “The Tablets of Truth”, jaygah alwah haqiqat, when you said the ones, you found in Birmingham contained false eschatologies?’

‘I’ve been thinking about that, and I’m worried. It looks like what we created from the photographs and drawings were the reverse of the real tablets, that’s the only way it makes sense. That knowledge is power, and ignorance is bliss.’ Billy replied.

‘As an academic I’d have to take issue with that.’ Catherine Mulberry said.



‘And yet,’ said Billy, ‘Imagine using knowledge as a weapon.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Catherine Mulberry.

‘Well, we worry about AI and the end of the world, but what about HI, human intelligence, we see so called primitive societies living in harmony, not increasing in their knowledge and power, and the alternative, increased knowledge, power, pollution, better weapons, more wars.’ Billy added.

‘Go on.’ she said.

‘Well, the place of “The Tablets of Truth”, jaygah alwah haqiqat, was forbidden by the locals, maybe for good reason.’ Billy said.

‘Go on.’ she said.

‘Well, if we say the 170 tiles arrive on earth around 300 million years ago, maybe they will give the potential knowledge for any evolving intelligence to completely destroy itself. Like in that movie, The Forbidden Planet, a 50s Hollywood science fiction film.’ Billy said.

‘As an academic I’d question the veracity of your sources, but as I’m unfamiliar with such, please elucidate.’

‘It stars Robbie the Robot,’ Billy said.

Catherine Mulberry groaned.

‘and had a breakthrough sound track using electronic music. It’s based on Shakespeare’s Tempest,’

Catherine Mulberry raised an eyebrow and groaned again.

Billy continued, ‘the thing is aliens built a machine which would give them massive knowledge and power, but when asleep their sub conscious minds, the Freudian ID, unleashed the basic drives



and they annihilated themselves.'

'I think Jean-Luc Goddard made something similar.' Catherine Mulberry said.

Billy laughed and drank some wine.

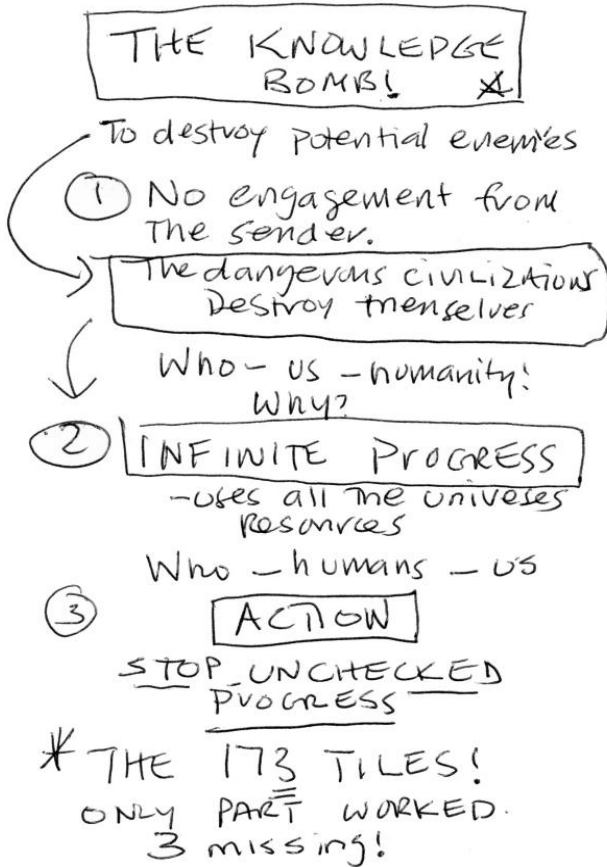
'But it could be like what the guy in the movie Contact said, aliens fax us a machine, we build it and it annihilates us all. Only in this case it didn't quite work, 3 tiles were missing.'

'I really must talk to you about your sources.' Catherine Mulberry said. 'And?'

'Well, we have 173 dangerous Tiles of Truth, and their opposites.' said Billy.

He fetched some note paper and made a rather garbled note, then pinned it to the wall in his work room. Returning to finish the wine with Catherine Mulberry.





CHAPTER FORTY ONE: THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

The next day Billy Taylor spent in his work room with the original tiles he had downloaded with the Tile Harvester. Catherine Mulberry had spent the day in Norwich shopping. She had an early meal before catching the train back to Woodbridge, changing at Ipswich. Billy had eaten little, a few biscuits and tea. Reading her paper on the train she noticed something of interest in the TV section, Film on 4 and smiled. She arrived back at their shared house to find Billy sat at the large pine kitchen table finishing his evening meal. It had been cod and chips with mushy peas from the Cumberland Fish bar. And two bottles of Morland's Old Crafty Hen Beer.

She looked at the kitchen clock and said, 'Come and join me for a drink in the Garden room, there is a film you might like to watch, and bring some wine and two glasses.'

It was a film, the film, 'The Forbidden Planet'.

Billy had made up his mind, he was in no doubt, you might say he had seen the future. And in one sense he had. So, the future is determined, but though it seemed determined he realised that with knowledge it could be changed, that and just being awkward could defeat any determinism.

'I'm going to Birmingham in the morning.' he said to Catherine Mulberry.

'If you wait two days I can give you a lift in the Wolseley, I have work to do at The University.' she said.

'Thanks, but this I think can't wait.' he replied, the temptation of the knowledge contained in the tiles might prove too much he thought.

So next morning he caught the train to Ipswich, and then the Norwich train to London Liverpool Street, a taxi to Euston, and so on to Birmingham New Street. As usual he checked into the



Regency Hyatt. After checking in, he took his briefcase with the tiles and hailed a taxi to take him to Colonial Road. When he arrived, he asked the driver to wait and entered the garden of 85 Colonial Road.

The boy was sitting on the sofa in the living room, no one else was around.

Billy said, 'We have to rebuild The Device, it is missing 3 tiles, and we have another 173 to add to it.'

The boy said nothing, he went into the kitchen and came out with a pair of scissors and a ball of string. He opened the French window and walked down the path past the apple tree to where The Device was. A spiral made from 170 tiles layered like a Swiss roll. They both sat by The Device. The boy cut the string and separated out the tiles.

'We have to pair each tile,' Billy said.

This took quite some time to begin with, but obviously less as they matched all 173. The two sets being 'opposite' when placed together each ridge of the original set matched the groove of the copy.

'Effectively removing the image, and any positive or negative powers.' Billy thought.

Once they had the new pile of 346 tiles, they then began the process of rolling them over and over, finally the boy used the string to tie the spiral bundle.

The boy showed little emotion but seemed if not pleased then calm. They went back into the house. The boy went into the kitchen to put away the string and scissors, came back into the living room and sat back on the sofa. He picked up a copy of The Eagle, a comic, and began reading. Billy left, not saying anything. As he expected, for the taxi driver no time had elapsed, not the hours or so spent matching tiles in the garden. He drove Billy



back to the Hyatt.

He was planning to stay in Birmingham and drive back to Woodbridge with Catherine Mulberry, so he spent the rest of the day wandering around the city centre. He visited the Museum and Art Gallery, the Ikon, a gallery of contemporary art, then at around five o'clock decided to get back to Woodbridge immediately by train. He felt a strange calmness, unlike certain beings elsewhere.

At Woodbridge Station rather than walk up Quay Street and home he took the footbridge over the train lines and stood on the top, overlooking the Deben Estuary. The tide was near full, yet still left some mud and silt for the remaining waders. They were joined by a few mallards and the usual collection of black-headed gulls who occasionally screamed at each other. Opposite was Sutton Hoo, the burial place of a great Saxon King. The trees were golden and orange, to the west the sun was slowly setting, picking out wisps of clouds in pink. The evening was drawing on and merging with the calmness of the world.

'It is the end of the world,' Billy thought, 'as we know it'.

Billy had messaged Catherine Mulberry about his early return from Birmingham, and she had replied that she would be at the cinema in Woodbridge till late.

He decided to walk along the estuary footpath, he could then walk up Brook Street and get some food and drink from the CO-OP. The estuary by the station is where a ferry once ran across to Sutton Hoo, now occupied by an assortment of house boats, ranging from the smart purpose-built ones, effectively floating luxury caravans, through to the numerous conversions of Thames and Dutch barges, a canal narrow boat, and even an ex-navy patrol boat, which sports a fake gun on its bow. Many of these now had lights on. The path took him past Whisstocks Quay, which again had a line of house boats. He turned left up Tide Mill Way, the Tide Mill, which was behind him, is now a museum, but still mills flour using the tides as a source of power.



Crossing Quayside, he turned up Brook Street, a narrow lane with a row of cottages, with neat gardens, some with illuminations. This would bring him into the car park and the CO-OP supermarket. He found a baguette, some ham, and tomatoes and three bottles of Old Crafty Hen. Once home he made himself a ham and tomato baguette, opened a beer and poured himself a glass. He sat at the kitchen table and opened his laptop and began to type a long email to Nigel Summers.



CHAPTER FORTY TWO: HELLO GOODBYE

'To Nigel@bhamngauge.org

Subject: End of Science- sorry!

Nigel Hi...'

The email finished, 'sorry again but for the best, Billy.'

The email detailed the scenario that the real 'Tablets of Truth' was in fact a weapon, with which humans in acquiring knowledge would make better and better ways of destroying themselves and everything on the planet. That the very tiles had confirmed this acceleration of knowledge to a very soon fatal end, and that the copies allowed himself with the boy to neutralize this and prevent the acceleration to a technological singularity, which becomes uncontrollable and irreversible.

Billy looked at his watch, still no sign of Catherine Mulberry, he had finished his last beer, so he went to bed.

In the morning the telephone woke him a 7.30. It also woke Catherine Mulberry who was first to the phone. It was Nigel for Billy.

She handed Billy the telephone, and said, 'Nigel for you.' yawned and went back to bed. Why Nigel didn't use Billy's cell phone not even Nigel knew. What he did say was that he needed to talk urgently to Billy, in confidence, so could he come over to Woodbridge? As there were more than enough guest bedrooms, the cottage, and Nigel was an occasional visitor, it would be fine. The occasions being that Nigel was fascinated by Woodbridge, well actually the Ipswich to Lowestoft train line. Apart from being one of the world's leading physicists Nigel was a keen railway modeller, in N gauge. He had planned to model the line. He followed Billy's route the previous night, though he travelled standard class.



By midday Nigel, Billy and Catherine Mulberry were in the garden sat around a table enjoying a chicken salad. Nigel though seemed nervous, and explained he had to respond to the email in confidence. Catherine Mulberry started to leave her seat,

‘No, you should hear this also.’ Nigel said. So, she sat saying,

‘Nigel, if it’s physics, then for idiots please?’ Nigel smiled and began.



CHAPTER FORTY THREE: THE APPLIANCE OF SCIENCE

‘Well,’ said Nigel, ‘to keep it short and simple for Catherine, it doesn’t really matter if this world changes for better or worse as now we can make new ones, new universes actually. Well not me, I’m fond of this one, and think that Billy is right, about the Tablets, we needed to slow down our ever-increasing knowledge and try to reach a steady state. But others have, well, taken my work and created synthetic physics.’

Catherine Mulberry frowned.

‘Well,’ continued Nigel, ‘Physics has in the past concentrated on describing this world, like analysis. This new physics can make whole new worlds, with different parameters, and synthesize them. And are doing so. And why this is in confidence, such a project is expensive, but there are certain very very rich people who see this as the true singularity, and the prospect of “designer” worlds. Say ones in which you don’t age, or can fly, who are effectively Gods. They see themselves as “The Select” and have poured billions into this.’

‘And you think they will make these?’ asked Catherine Mulberry.

‘They already have created new worlds on a small scale.’ replied Nigel, ‘Just haven’t yet created a whole new universe, and so The Select haven’t yet departed to become Gods. There are some problems with communication between worlds, so they, The Select, have not yet left, they want to be sure these designer worlds are safe. Also as yet, as I said, not a whole universe as such, I think they are experimenting with this.’

‘Where?’ asked Billy.

‘Australia.’ was the reply. Nigel continued - ‘Billy, I should say well done by the way, I agree with your synopsis, I guess your work will slow things down. So, when the de-acceleration of progress and technology that The Device will cause becomes detectable, I guess those running the Australian project will try



to speed things up. These super rich desperately want to be Gods in their designer universes. Hence, I'm here in confidence, they wouldn't take kindly to being slowed down or stopped in their ambitions. I guess email would not be secure.'

'And your involvement?' asked Catherine Mulberry.

'None,' replied Nigel, 'I just wrote the paper on the possibility of synthetic physics. Some others picked this up and saw a potential for making it real. Of course they needed vast funding, more than even the US government would risk. So, they approached the super-rich. And I've very bad feelings about this. Had them similar in the Eve Sharif thing.'

'Interesting,' said Billy.

After a while, Billy spoke, 'Tell me about The Select and Australia.'

'I know there is a vast site, vastly larger than The Large Hadron Collider at CERN. It's somewhere in the Australian desert, I think in old mine workings, The Select own the land and have put in the money and resources. They represent some of the richest people in the world. I mean the LHC cost a few billion, my contacts reckon this thing they are building in the Australian desert was more like a trillion dollars.' said Nigel.

'Your contacts?' Billy asked.

'The original work was begun in Australia based on some of my work, I knew some of the original team, some stayed longer but most dropped out. It seems the teams now are multinational, and the whole thing secret. A rumour is that Governments might be involved.' Nigel replied.

'I can see how governments might be interested, for one territorial disputes could be solved by making new worlds, and things such as global warming solved. So, the super-rich fit the bill for their private worlds, and certain governments get a fairly



free ride.' Billy said.



CHAPTER FORTY FOUR: THE CREATIONS OF NEITH

Patjarr is a small Aboriginal community with a population of around 40. It is in Western Australia, about 100 miles to the north of this community lies a concealed air strip and the entrance to the complex referred to as Atum⁴. Inside the complex are living quarters, research labs and even a park with an artificial beach and sea. At the centre of the complex lies Neith, the machine for creating new worlds and possibly whole universes. The LHC is some 5 ½ miles in diameter, Neith is 20 miles in diameter and descends into the earth as a spiral.

The first experiments created small worlds. Even so vast amounts of energy were required. These being generated by several nuclear reactors and stored in super cooled batteries. These were charged for months, then the energy released at the base of Neith. At its top is a void and an inspection platform. As the energy pulse rises through Atum various devices synthesize a novel form of energy using the equations from the work of Dr. Nigel Summers.

The first ‘worlds’ were small, about the size of a shoe box, and the synthesis programmed to create an environment to sustain matter of the type found in our universe. The first object placed into the ‘void’ created by Neith was a teacup. And someone had the idea of tying a piece of string to the handle. Despite some general laughter, it worked. The teacup disappeared, but was pulled back into this universe. Each ‘shot’ took 3 months to prepare. Various devices were sent into these ‘new worlds’, and eventually a mouse. The mouse was fitted with a harness, was retrieved and was still alive. Larger worlds were created with not only breathable air but soil and plants.

The creation of worlds was then possible, with attributes, air,

⁴ Atum is the self-created, primordial god of ancient Egypt, associated with creation, the setting sun, and the completion of cosmic cycles. Neith is an ancient Egyptian creation goddess where she is said to spin the universe into existence. Ptah was revered as a creator deity who brought the world into existence through the power of thought and speech.



and basic atomic elements. These themselves could resemble those on earth, and in our universe or be entirely novel. This was performed by the neural computer network which covered the surface of Neith, it is known as Ptah. As larger 'worlds' were created the 'worlds' could have similar or identical physics to our universe or have widely different physics. More importantly, how time and space existed could be configured. Space could have any number of dimensions, they even created the two dimension universe of Flatland. A fiction created by the English schoolmaster Edwin Abbott. Though written pseudonymously by "A Square". Time could be made to run backwards, forwards, at different speeds or oscillate.

Eventually Ptah calculated the parameters to create a world with a singularity. A singularity similar to the one that caused the Big Bang and creation of our universe. At the second attempt after a few minutes a probe was sent into the void. Again, these voids, acting as entrances could be held open for minutes with sufficient power. The probe returned showing they had created a Big Bang and from this an entirely new universe. The project was a success.

The rate of progress was remarkable. This was mainly due to Professor Nancy Kominsky's idea of creating a copy of Atum in a new world, with a different time and space function. The void kept open just long enough to receive data that would take months and years to calculate in our universe.

About the time of the assembly of The Device at 85 Colonial Road this process and the functioning of the Neith started to fail. And this failure was exponential, getting faster and faster. At about the time Billy, Nigel and Catherine Mulberry were having their chicken salad in the garden at Woodbridge the first of The Select jumped into a "universe" created for them where they could be God. Essentially a God like being. Immortal, all powerful, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. Two others of The Select followed before Neith was shut down. The remaining dozen or so of The Select were at first furious. It was pointed out that the shutdown was not of those controlling



Neith, but from outside. It was in fact The Device. However, those controlling Neith would have done so anyway because of the consequences they soon saw in creating these new universes! And when told this all the members of The Select that remained in this universe quickly left Atum and Australia for undisclosed locations.



CHAPTER FORTY FIVE: THE NEMESIS OF NEITH

It was now mid-afternoon in Woodbridge, and in the garden of the house shared by Billy and Catherine Mulberry they were talking with Nigel Summers the Nobel Physics laureate, or rather Catherine Mulberry was now recounting her most recent visit to The Amazon. She was a little annoyed when both Nigel's and Billy's phones rang. The first surprise was that they were hearing the same speaker. It was Hope Murkowski, senior scientific advisor to both the US military and Government, she was saying.

'Nigel, Billy, something very very big has come up and we can't hide it this time, there's a Black Hawk heading for Woodbridge airfield and a police car heading for your house to take you to rendezvous. You must get here ASAP, I'll say more on a secure line once you are over the pond. It concerns Nigel's work and a certain group.'

There was an 'OK' from both. Nigel hadn't yet unpacked, Billy packed quickly. Soon a local police car with two rather excited constables had rung the door bell, asked if a Billy Taylor and Nigel Summers were present and that they had orders to take them to the now abandoned Woodbridge airfield, once a strategic airfield of the RAF used in the cold war.

The gates of the airfield had been opened by two US service men, who saluted the police car, then pointed to the middle of three Osprey tiltrotor aircraft.

'Not a Black Hawk then,' Nigel said, 'Boeing V-22 Osprey tiltrotors, faster I guess.'

The two embarked on the centre craft and were strapped in, one of the accompanying Ospreys already airborne. Leaving behind the other to secure the airfield and guide the astonished PCs off the runway.

At Mildenhall 15 minutes or so later, Nigel and Billy were in a military Lear jet flying north to the USA. After they had settled,



the screen in front of them came to life with a picture of Hope Murkowski,

‘This is the problem we can’t hide!’ she said, talking whilst a satellite picture was showing Australia. And where the Gibson desert was, there were three large black circles. ‘They are each 100 miles across, voids, we have no idea where the few people down there are, but we know what these black holes are from, Project Atum.’

Nigel spoke, ‘So they completed the machine, and some idiot went the full hog without testing?’

‘Sort of,’ Hope said, ‘three of the sponsors jumped as the thing was being closed down, by what, not us, but we should have closed it, looking at this mess.’

‘The Device’ thought Billy, ‘and just too late, but it could have been much worse.’

To save precious time Nigel continued conversations with other physicists, some in The Facility deep under the Pentagon, others still in the now shut down Atum complex.

‘So,’ said Nigel to Billy, ‘they managed to create small new worlds without much of a problem. Creating a universe is another matter, they created singularities, but they begin as infinitely small, and infinitely hot points. Uninhabitable for about a billion years. Well, the people providing the main funding are a group of the super-rich who want effectively to be Gods in their own universe. Here is the problem, you make the universe and even speeding things up to create a stable universe requires a hundred or so years, no use to these rich sponsors. So, the bright idea was to create a near ready-made universe with a “ghost” singularity. Before one could be tested, which would be catastrophic, the Ptah – the computer network that controlled the synthesis was breaking down. Three of the sponsors managed to jump before close down, or before the “ready-made” universes were complete. Doing some quick calculations



such a void would be about 2,000 miles across, destroying the whole country of Australia. And wait for this, possibly throwing the earth out of orbit.'

'Oh!' said Billy, 'So say if this happened 4 billion years ago...'

'To Antichthon!' said Nigel, 'maybe a similar event, caused by escaping Papilios from The Life Harvesters. Trying to create new worlds, so maybe Velikovsky was right, just got the cause and the timings wrong.'

'And so, The Device in Birmingham saved the world.' said Billy.

'Seems so.' said Nigel.

'And the voids?' asked Billy.

'Will be common knowledge within 12 hours, once other satellites scan that area.' said Nigel, 'We go straight to The Facility at the Pentagon, so best try to sleep.' he continued.

The cabin lights were dimmed, and each of the two passengers reclined their seats and were soon asleep. About 20 minutes later Billy woke with a start.

'No, we don't.' he said, loud enough to wake Nigel.

'What?' said Nigel.

'We don't go straight to The Facility we go straight to Birmingham, and from there we gain access to the voids.'

'How, who?' said Nigel.

'The boy in a dream.' replied Billy.

The procedure for this remarkable change of plan was in part due to when asked by Hope should the plane be diverted back to Birmingham, her sister said, 'Just do it'. Adding to this was some



more data from the observations of the three voids. So, Hope contacted Nigel and relayed the news, he spoke aloud,

‘The voids are growing, but only millimetres,’ his voice calm, ‘exponentially, oh.’ his voice fell.

As he spoke, he felt the jet beginning its turn. So, the jet with Billy and Nigel began its flight to Birmingham airport.

Hope’s problem was to arrive at Birmingham airport when Billy and Nigel did. At such levels, her direct boss was Lois Griffin, The United States Secretary of State, who arranged a lift in an F15.



CHAPTER FORTY SIX: THE VOIDS SPEAK

It was dark when the US F15 Eagle twin seat tactical jet fighter landed at Birmingham Airport and taxied to an old set of buildings, but some enthusiasts listening to the control tower guessed something was odd, and then the military Lear jet touched down. It too taxied to a remote part of the airport. Hope was already out of her flying suit, met Billy and Nigel and they walked to the awaiting Range Rover, as they did Billy asked,

‘OK who were the three, I need to know.’

She replied ‘■■■■■ - ■■■■■, ■■■■■ - ■■■■■■, and ■■■■ ■ - ■■■■■.’ (redacted, CIA)

A plan was to evacuate the area around 85 Colonial Road under an unexploded WW2 bomb rouse. This was abandoned in favour of a more clandestine approach. Just their Range Rover, others nearby, and unmarked backup, even some SAS. Being dark when they arrived and fairly late there was no problem. On entering the front garden of number 85, Nigel was surprised it was still daylight. Hope Murkowski still couldn’t quite believe this. No block floored parking space, but a path running between two lawns with flower beds. The air-raid shelters, and wooden palings. It was day, maybe in June, and as again she walked into the house but was prepared for the late 1950s look, though it seemed even more dull and shabby than she had remembered.

In the period living room the boy was sitting on the sofa. Hope noted the 1950s television, the Bakelite radio on a shelf above it. The bird cage with a budgerigar in it.

The boy said, ‘You have to follow three paths, I’ll show you.’

He got up and walked down the hall, the three following. He left the house turning immediately to his left, with the air-raid shelters on his right. Two joined together, each had a steel blast door, now of orange rusting metal.



‘We have to go here.’

He pointed to the gap between the shelter and the fence to the house next door, a long narrow gap, he led the way. ‘It’s a game he plays’ thought Billy. The others were just baffled. Emerging onto a front lawn the boy turned and walked towards the house, then turned right and pointed to the furthest of the iron doors.

‘Go inside.’ he said.

The three did, Billy guessed and pulled the door closed.

‘Who is that!’ said ■■■■ - ■■■■, his voice in a tremor.

Hope recognised the voice, ‘It’s Hope Murkowski, chief scientific advisor, and Dr Nigel Summers, physicist, and Billy Taylor.’

‘Where am I!’ said ■■■■ - ■■■■, obviously terrified.

‘I think you are in a void.’ said Hope Murkowski.

‘No, you are an actual void.’ Billy said.

‘No, I’m ■■■■ - ■■■■.’ said ■■■■ - ■■■■.

‘You are a Demiurge!’ Boomed another voice.

‘No, No I’m ■■■■ - ■■■■.’ said ■■■■ - ■■■■.

‘We need to think,’ Billy said quietly, let’s leave for a moment.

‘No please, please don’t go.’ said ■■■■ - ■■■■.

‘We will be back soon.’ said Billy, opening the door to daylight.

As they left Hope looked at her watch, she had forgotten, a force of habit.



‘Don’t worry about time,’ Nigel said, ‘there is none here.’

The boy was waiting, he led them to the other side of the front of the house where there was a large lilac tree. More a giant bush with a hollow centre.

‘Another secret place, a den.’ Billy thought. The three followed the boy into the ‘den’.

After a few moments he led them back to the shelter and the door. They entered as before and a similar conversation followed, this time the name and voice were different.

By the third time the party of three expected what was to happen, just the route was different. The boy led them through the house, out into the back garden, down the path to the lawn at the rear. Hope and Nigel noticed The Device. The boy turned right down an alley way which led around the house next door and onto the street. Colonial Road as it was in the late 1950s. Still tree lined, the streetlamps still gas, which intrigued Nigel and puzzled Hope. Back along the street and through the gate and into the front garden of number 85. And then to the shelter door, and a similar confrontation with one of the richest people, the third richest they guessed, in the world.

When they left the shelter this time the boy was not waiting.

Billy said, ‘We need to talk.’ and led them back into the house, through the hall and then into the living room, he took the door to the left which led into the kitchen, the three sat around the old pine table, which was covered in oil cloth. Hope looked around noting how primitive things looked, a kitchen as this, seemed to her medieval. A round boiler thing in the corner, a butler sink and a gas stove, some shelves and a small wooden cupboard with a metal grill front to it, a table, some chairs, and that was it.

As she looked at the cupboard Billy noticed and said,



'It's a meat safe.'

She was none the wiser.



CHAPTER FORTY SEVEN: THE RETURN OF ELPIS

As they were talking the Aeon, Elpis came in and began to make tea.

‘Aeons are part of Gnosticism...’ Billy began.

Hope Murkowski interrupted and said,

‘I know, when I was given your name from Katie I did some background reading. Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, by Richard T. Wallis and Jay Bregman.’

The Aeon finished making tea, poured three mugs, gave Billy a look, and walked out of the room.

They sipped their tea, and then Billy said, ‘Oh, maybe we need to ask who the three – who were called Demiurges by something, who their proper names are.’

So, the three left the house and repeated the three walks the boy had taken them on, and in the darkness of the shelter Billy asked, ‘What is the name of this Demiurge?’

He got three different replies. These were:

‘Yaltabaoth.’

‘Saklas.’

‘Samael.’



CHAPTER FORTY EIGHT: THE NAG HAMMADI

When they re-entered the house and they sat again at the kitchen table. Only now it had a book on it, old and leather bound. Billy looked at it and gave a slight ironic smile. Hope and Nigel's eyes flicked from the book to Billy. He reached into his well-worn brief case and produced a paperback. Both books had the same title, 'The Nag Hammadi codices.'

'Found in 1945. All date from the 2nd or 3rd Century CE. some key Gnostic texts.' said Billy, but first, Nigel, please outline the possible scenarios for the creation of the universes likely used by those three of The Select.

Nigel began, 'Well creation of a Universe from a singularity would require time, possibly hundreds of years for it to be anything like sustainable for life, so the idea was to create a "ready-made" universe with a virtual Big Bang. This The Select could move into immediately. But it seems as they entered, they became voids.'

'Well,' said Billy 'what occurred in these universes at the point of their Big Bang's and after in the virtual period?'

'I've no idea.' said Nigel.

Hope's eyes darted between the two, she knew all this she thought.

'OK', said Billy, 'very briefly, and I know Hope knows this far better than me, outline our universe's opening scenario.'

Hope began,

'The Big Bang, possibly a virtual particle or false vacuum?'

'Grand Unified Force.'

'Inflation, inflation of the universe. The four fundamental distinct



forces appear.'

'The separate particles form.'

'The Cosmic Dark Age and first stars.'

'The Galaxy epoch - and then more or less a habitable universe. I've vastly simplified it and it's not my field.'

Billy was writing at each stage, '6 stages'.

Nigel looked at the note, 'More probably.' he said, Hope was nodding in agreement.

'But this didn't happen with these three ready made universes, for real?'

'No.' Hope and Nigel said.

'OK,' said Billy, 'let's look at this from an anthropological way. We have a virtual scenario for early creation, and anything can account for this, so what of the most primitive ideas in humans?'

'God!' Hope and Nigel shouted.

'Dam! I see it, the most primitive of human ideas filled the void,' she paused, 'until the three entered and filled it!' she paused again, 'but there were these virtual scenarios, and in primitive religions the believers anthropomorphize nature's processes.'

'Yep!' said Billy, 'and for example in Gnosticism,' he tapped the books, 'we have emanations from the one descending lower and giving separate attributes,'

'I know this,' Nigel said, 'from the Eve Sharif case!'

Hope said, 'Yes I recall bits from the background reading.'

Billy wrote in his notebook, 'Primal Being Bythos creates → Sige -



the Idea, Zoe → creates Life → The Decad: Henosis - Union,
Hedone - Pleasure or Bliss → The Dodecad: Pistis - Faith, Elpis -
Hope, Agape - Love, Synesis - Intelligence, Sophia - Wisdom.'

'And in some cases, a botched final creation by a demiurge!' he
said, and as he wrote read aloud,

'Who has three names, Yaltabaoth the False god, Saklasthe, the
fool, and Samael the blind god.'

'Oh.' Hope said, 'So these three, each of The Select, have jumped
into a universe ready-made, but with ready-made virtual
precursors, who are, to use a technical term, pissed at these
idiots joining them without an invitation.'

She paused, 'And these three voids in Australia are ■■■■ - ■■
■■, ■■■■ - ■■■■, and ■■■■ - ■■■■.'



CHAPTER FORTY NINE: SACRIFICE

After a long pause. Hope said, 'Well what are we going to do?'

After another long pause. Billy said, 'Talk to the Hierarchies.'

'The Hierarchies?' she asked.

'Those beings as in gnosticism, which exist and descend from a higher being to lower ones, and finally to one being, the demiurge, who some gnostics identify with the creator of the physical universe.' Nigel said, remembering the Eve Sharif affair.

'It won't be Bythos, the depth of profundity, or Sige, Ennoia, Alethia, truth, Zoe, life or Sophia.' Billy said.

'It will be Yaltabaoth, Saklas, and Samael in the voids, or ■■■■■ - ■■■■■, ■■■■■ - ■■■■■, and ■■■■■ - ■■■■■. And yes trapped In the voids, become the voids.' Billy said, and continued, 'I'm borrowing names from Valentinianism, but I guess there are structures like that or like "virtual particle", "false vacuum", "Grand Unification", "Quark", only by giving them humanistic or animalistic form we can talk to them.'

'OK let's go.' Hope said, then looked puzzled.

They followed the first path the boy showed them and entered the shelter.

'We need to talk to that which wants to create the demiurge and reject this one, to Aeon, Archon or Sophia?' Billy spoke to the darkness.

'Aeon will suffice.' came the reply.

The blackness grew pale, a pale void with no walls, and in front of them a figure whose form was human but ever changing and gently mutating. And in front of that figure a naked man, ■■■■ ■ - ■■■■■, was lying in a foetal position. One of the three



richest men in the world.

‘This creature is not my idea,’ Aeon said pointing to ■■■■ - ■■■■, ‘and it seems my idea was ignored, and now we have this imposter. A selfish greedy imposter.’

‘The imposter will destroy my world.’ Billy said.

‘And not allow the creation of mine.’ Aeon said.

‘Can I take the place?’ Billy said.

Nigel and Hope looked shocked.

‘Some of your soul can as a willing unselfish sacrifice.’ Aeon said.

‘So be it.’ Billy said.

All went dark. They left the shelter, and before Hope or Nigel could speak Billy said,

‘I’ve a strange feeling of déjà-vu which seems to be passing.’

Whatever it was they were going to say Billy continued,

‘And so, to the next.’

■■■■ - ■■■■ now released from the void was naked and sitting in the desert where once was the centre of a hundred mile void. It was early morning. Clear, still a slight chill from the night, soon to be very hot. He saw a figure coming towards him, naked like himself, but no, the figure had a loin cloth, and was carrying a spear, an aboriginal. The aboriginal spoke,

‘See yer not dressed mate!’

No reply.

‘So I was in this black hole, like you, ay mate?’



‘No, I was the black hole.’ was the reply.

‘Phew, that’s some heavy magic, some heavy... but what now?’

‘No idea.’ was the reply.

‘Well, we seem lost, and soon that sun will burn us up.’

The aboriginal turned and listening and looking, spoke,

‘Maybe not, you hear that?’

■■■■ - ■■■■, shook his head, and said ‘No, what?’

‘A chopper, miles away but a chopper coming, you have friends!’

The aboriginal grinned.

Hope, Nigel, and Billy used the second path the boy had showed them. They entered the shelter and as before Billy spoke.

‘We need to talk to that which wants to create the demiurge and reject this one, to Aeon, Archon or Sophia?’ Billy spoke to the darkness.

‘Archon will suffice.’ came the reply.

The darkness turned a pale grey, they could see Archon and the naked form of a man.

The offer was made again, but Archon replied,

‘You have already given; you will not suffice.’

‘What of me?’ said Nigel.

‘You will suffice.’



‘So be it.’ Nigel said.

All went dark. They left the shelter, and Nigel said,

‘Yes, a strange feeling of déjà-vu which seems to be passing.’

And Hope said, ‘Now my turn’. And so, it was.

■■■■■ - ■■■■■■, and ■■■■■ - ■■■■■ found themselves likewise in the centres of what once were voids in the Gibson desert. They had no company and had to wait half an hour before they heard the distant sounds of a helicopter.

Three of the richest people in the world were rescued from the Gibson desert. The Atum complex was closed down, and generous funding given to the Patjarr Aboriginal community, and it was rumoured that a certain ■■■■■ - ■■■■■ joined this community. What of the three noble sacrifices, Hope, Nigel, and Billy? They too received somewhat generous gifts whose sources were three grateful and very rich businessmen. The three noble sacrifices also had occasional strange dreams.

And incidents. Or rather non incidents, they kept in remarkable health. Hope survived a fatal crash of a Chinook helicopter whose drive shaft, which should have failed, did not. Nigel didn’t accidentally receive a heavy dose of ions from a faulty lab experiment. Billy joined Catherine Mulberry on sailing trips, his fear of drowning had vanished.



CHAPTER FIFTY: THE THREE NOBLE SACRIFICES

Perhaps none but the three noticed the slow world. It was gradual, still conflicts, but less and less fierce, still new inventions, but more to do with style and looks, but no breakthroughs. The universe with The Earth in it was entering a steady state. As Fred Hoyle had predicted.

Nigel decided to no longer work on problems of physics. He took to reading works on Neoplatonism. With the funds he had received from rich benefactors he bought a large old Victorian Mansion in Edgbaston, Birmingham, and moved in with his cat. He built the N gauge model of the Ipswich to Lowestoft railway line. He took an interest in tropical marine fish. Had his own collection, and then funded a large aquarium in the nearby Botanical Gardens. He also funded a department of ancient religions at the University of Birmingham. His garden was large, and despite the light pollution he had a 24 inch reflecting telescope built in it, 'just for fun'.

Hope Murkowski quit her job. She had no idea what to do so joined her sister in Chicago. She funded an Arts project and several community charities. She learnt the Saxophone but gave that up. Tried poetry, and was considered good, but again no spark. She visited Nigel, another platonic friendship. And from this caught the Astronomy bug. She avoided the light pollution by buying a small piece of Canadian real estate, enough for a cabin and a 40 inch reflector, as well as a heli-pad. And then found herself sculpting bronzes of mythical figures.

Billy sailed around the world as part of a crew with Catherine Mulberry.

What of the three noble sacrifices' strange dreams? They were first waking dreams which took no time at all. In their part of the creation of three other 'worlds', the creations were of harmony not strife, because of their sacrifice, and a selfless act, these worlds had a harmony. But the tune was repetitive and never new, an infinite loop.



CHAPTER FIFTY ONE: BILLY AND THE DREAMERS

This is an account of what came from the three's shared such waking dreams.

Billy was now on a sailing boat with a crew of 6 in the South Atlantic, and though no longer scared of sailing he was now profoundly bored.

Hope Murkowski who was at first engrossed with her bronzes also soon tired of making them.

Nigel Summers was happy, but once the construction of the N gauge model of the Ipswich to Lowestoft railway line was complete, he too was bored, but also had what he would have once called an 'itch'.

They were at the kitchen table in 85 Colonial Road.

They were discussing, and assumed this was in a waking dream, their boredom, and when Nigel mentioned 'An itch.' the other two agreed that was a good summary. Something was out of joint.

Billy was talking. 'Given we are becalmed at sea and I'm bored, an odd thought, Nigel can I ask you about the simulation hypothesis?'

Before Billy could finish Nigel began, 'It's Nick Bostrom, we've met, an OK guy, we all know about computers, simulations, flight simulators, computer games that simulated imaginary worlds.'

The two others nodded.

'Well,' continued Nigel, 'Bostrom posits that this world we are in, this universe, might be a computer simulation and not be real.'

'Like the idea that our world might be a dream, or we are a brain in a vat in some experiment by a mad scientist, and all our



perceptions fake?’ Hope said.

‘Yes, but...’ replied Nigel, but before he could continue Hope said,

‘But it’s just as likely or not we are in a simulation, or that I’m a brain in a vat, so we use Occam’s razor and accept the simplest explanation, all things being equal. The duck test, if it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck.’

‘Ah!’ said Nigel, ‘but this is the smart bit about Bostrom’s argument, all things are not equal.’

Hope looked puzzled; Billy was deep in thought.

‘No not equal,’ Nigel continued, ‘Bostrom’s argument is that in any real world there would be very many simulations, just as in our world there are many computer simulations in computer games and in those used in science, and flight simulators. In science they model things like the early universe, and different other theories. But the models are nowhere near perfect. But if they could be, we could have real insights into cosmology, physics, evolution, everything in fact.’

‘So, for an advanced civilization, more advanced than ours, to simulate their universe would be a very useful thing to do.’ Hope said.

‘Sure,’ said Nigel, ‘and so they would generate more than just one simulation.’

‘Lots, probably,’ Hope said, ‘lots in different science labs.’

‘Yes,’ said Nigel, ‘and here is Bostrom’s kicker, therefore the odds of being in a real universe would be less than being in the more plentiful simulations, so the wise decision given this would, if we had to decide if this world is real or a simulation, is that the odds are far higher that this is a simulation. So given no more



data we are likely in a simulation. Neat!’

‘Oh!’ said Billy and the dream ended.

The sailing boat was making slow progress, so Billy’s mind was free to wander.

A second dream: Again, the three were at the kitchen table in 85 Colonial Road.

Billy began, ‘Could the simulators interfere with the simulation.’

‘Of course they could alter parameters.’ Nigel replied, ‘Change settings, alter things.’

‘Could they terminate it?’ asked Billy.

‘Of course they could, like close down the program, delete it even, or switch off the computer.’

Hope was giving a look, difficult to describe, like watching a cat and mouse and wondering who which was.

‘Explain the technological singularity to me again.’ Billy said.

Nigel went into great detail about this, Billy had sparked an interest and he had done a deal of reading. A singularity is where the technological progress reaches an absolute. He included the dangers, the possible Eschatologies. New weapons of awesome capability.

‘Like an idea of Bostrom’s,’ said Nigel, ‘If in the future we tell a super AI computer to solve some maths problem, or physics problem, but in doing so it needs more power, so it does this by turning all the matter in the solar system into the computer it’s running on, killing all life in the process,’ he laughed, ‘So the simulators unintentionally kill themselves in creating this super AI and asking it to solve a problem.’



‘So, say a civilization wanted to check out the consequences of a technological singularity and they could simulate their world, their universe to see what might happen, they might want to do that.’ said Billy.

‘Makes sense to do so.’ replied Nigel.

‘Would they not want this simulation to get to the technological singularity before they did?’ Billy said.

‘Of course, otherwise there is no point.’ replied Nigel.

‘What if we are that simulation and...’ here Billy was interrupted by Hope,

‘Then in that scenario, and if we are a simulation, the original Tablets of Truth were not a weapon but a booster, so we get to the singularity soon.’ she said, ‘Before those simulating us do.’

‘But we’ve switched off the booster.’ Nigel said, the penny dropping, ‘And they know we can turn off any new boosters, the experiment is wrecked. They will turn us off.’

‘If we are that simulation.’ Billy said.

‘I don’t like the odds!’ Hope said.

They woke up, all three now worried.

The third dream the next day: Again, the three were at the kitchen table in 85 Colonial Road.

Again, Billy began. ‘How could we tell if our world is simulated or not?’ he asked.

‘Difficult.’ said Nigel, ‘look for glitches, changes in events, loops, which might indicate.’

There was a pause, he continued, ‘inconsistencies...’



Hope again interrupted, 'Like those my sister talks about!' she said.

'What inconsistencies?' Nigel asked, but continued, 'Like the déjà-vu cat in the film the Matrix?'

'No, she goes on about how logic and maths at its heart is flawed and that truth is in her expressive paintings.' Hope said.

'You mean like the Gödel incompleteness theorems.' Nigel said.

'Ray would love you for that.' said Hope, laughing. 'How would you explain it to Ray?'

'Simple,' said Billy, 'Ray's mind is sharp but not abstract. We got talking about such things, I mentioned the idea of aporias, and he gave me a typical Ray look.' The other two grinned.

'And he couldn't get it?' said Hope. Nigel didn't know the word.

'Aporia, a philosophical contradiction or an irresolvable logic.' said Hope.

'He got it, I simply wrote the sentence, "This sentence is not true", he just read it, and got it.' said Billy.

'So, Katie thinks these aporia are signs...' Nigel began.

'She doesn't use the word; she says glitches in the machine.' said Hope.

'I think we need to get out of this dream and back to the actual Colonial Road.' Billy said.

On waking they exchanged texts and had long satellite telephone calls.

Nigel was already in Birmingham, Hope said she could get there



in about 8 or 9 hours. Billy was the problem; he was sailing about 600 miles off Ascension Island in the middle of the South Atlantic.

Ascension Island is part of The British Overseas Territory of Saint Helena, Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha, in the South Atlantic. But significantly Ascension Island is a massive US air base. Though Hope Murkowski had resigned her job as a chief scientific advisor she retained a brief for emergencies and a direct line to the United States Secretary of State, Lois Griffin.

Their conversations were always far from lucid, though not much danger of any intercept, went thus.

HM: 'Hi'

LG: 'Hi, world gonna end?'

HM: 'Far worse.'

A pause.

HM: 'Pick up one Billy Taylor -10.708147, -5.141716 from a sailboat. Deliver to wherever he wants.'

The call ended. The 3 arranged to be in Birmingham the following day, meeting at the Hyatt.

Billy was picked up by a Black Hawk from Ascension Island, then flown to Mildenhall from where another Black Hawk dropped him on Melton Playing fields where a taxi took him to his house.



CHAPTER FIFTY TWO: MAKING THE 'REAL' REAL

Everything was fine but the Tile Harvester had been working all the time Billy and Catherine Mulberry were at sea. There was a large pile of the positive tiles in his workroom, too many for his bag, several repeats of the 173 positives. He may have thought they might be useful, but he had actually thought they were essential to his plan and guessed they would be there.

Before turning 'off' the experiment, which was the simulation, this universe of ours, those simulators tried sending 10 lots of tiles to different locations. Their experiment, our world, our universe, was costly in resources, time being one which was critical, so they didn't want to abort the experiment unnecessarily, 'abort us', Billy thought. But the Tile Harvester caught them all. 1,730, much too many for his battered briefcase. He fetched one of Catherine Mulberry's large wheeled suitcases from the attic and loaded them in. He then showered and changed, caught a taxi to Woodbridge Station, from there a train to Liverpool Street station in London. He had a snack on the train, and another on the Euston to Birmingham train. He arrived in Birmingham and took a taxi to the Hyatt. He didn't book in. Hope and Nigel were already there; they met in the bar.

Billy was last to arrive, saying 'Hi, I'm starving, let's eat!'

So, they had supper.

For starters Hope had Arnold Bennett soufflé smoked haddock, Montgomery cheddar sauce.

Nigel, Louët-Feisser oysters 'Bloody Mary' datterino tomato, celery, vodka.

Billy, Oscietra caviar brown butter waffle, smoked sturgeon rillette.

Mains, Hope had Beef Wellington confit Roscoff onion, red wine jus.



Nigel, Roasted halibut sea vegetables, champagne beurre blanc, caviar.

Billy, BBQ lobster thermidor with French fries.

Desserts were, Hope, Apple tart tatin Madagascan vanilla ice cream, salted caramel sauce.

Nigel, 'La Hechicera' Rum Baba pineapple, lime, crème fraîche Chantilly.

Billy, Passion fruit and yuzu soufflé crème fraîche ice cream.

Nigel reminded them of the scene in the Matrix where the 'traitor' Cypher is eating steak and drinking wine while he sells out the others, preferring the simulation to grim reality. Billy laughed and said the meal he had just eaten was one of the best simulations he had ever had, especially since being on a boat for months. But added,

'Tempting, but not if we are all about to be switched off.'

They took a taxi back to Nigel's Victorian mansion. For a nightcap Hope just had still water, as did Nigel, but Billy accepted the offer of a single malt. Hope wondered why there was a seeming lack of urgency and so time for a meal and a night's sleep. Billy said,

'They will certainly try to start the Neith a few times before shutdown, and from my sources they haven't yet.'

'Oh! So that's why you wanted me to tell the guys left at Atum to simulate start-ups.' Nigel said.

Billy smiled.

Even so Nigel and Hope slept the night fitfully wondering about the turn off.

Next morning after breakfast Hope, Billy, and Nigel, caught a taxi



to 85 Colonial Road and told the driver to wait.

As before they entered a late 1950s garden and house. Billy carrying his briefcase, Nigel carrying Catherine Mulberry's suitcase with 1,730 tiles in it. The boy was sitting on the sofa, they entered the kitchen and as Billy had thought there was The Aeon, Elpis – Hope, sat at the kitchen table. They joined the Aeon.

Billy did all the talking, the Aeon replying.

'If this, sorry our universe, is a simulation and in simulations the highest intelligence is that which drives them to the singularity and destruction, there are no higher Aeons in such a universe.'

'Correct.'

'But you are an aeon.'

'Correct.'

'From our Universe, a simulated Universe?'

'Incorrect.'

'So, our universe is simulated and doomed.'

'Correct.'

'And you are not from our universe which is simulated and doomed.'

'Correct.'

'Then from where.'

This elicited a fuller response from the Aeon.

'I'm from the real universe you will create. But only after failing



in The Best of all Possible Worlds.'

'The Best of all Possible Worlds.' thought Billy, 'we will have a universe in which there is order, only after The Best of all Possible Worlds. And one with a God or gods?'

At this the Aeon got up from its chair left the kitchen and the boy joined them.

'So, Nigel,' Hope began, 'this world if it's not real but a simulation, how can the guys at Atum create one which has Aeons, how can a simulation create something real?'

'Not a problem,' replied Nigel. 'The physics is the same in a real world or a simulation if it's identical or near. The synthetic physics I helped create can do just that. So, if the synthetic physics in a real world can create new and different real universes or simulations, the same goes for the synthetic physics in a simulation, it can create both, other simulations, or actual real worlds. Weird but that's the process of synthesis unlike analysis. Analysis is about looking at what is there, synthesis is about making what isn't there, real or not. So, a simulated universe can create a real one.'

'Basically Haecceitisms,' said Billy.

Before he could continue Hope stopped him by waving her hand over her head.

'Explain!' she said looking at Nigel.

Nigel said, 'How many fingers?' holding up four.

'Four.' said Hope.

'Is four real or a mathematical object?' Nigel smiled.

'Ugh.' grunted Hope.



Then Billy said, 'Oh, sorry, so, as we have an Aeon here, who is from a real world we created, we or someone must do this, must now, and quite quickly, create a new and real universe.'

'But how can the future Aeon be here now?' Hope asked.

'Because here in this house we are not in time.' said Billy.

'Aeons are outside of matter therefore outside of time.' Nigel added, 'Why?' He asked a rhetorical question, 'Well time requires matter. And so, time creates space. We measure space in time, how long it takes to get from one place to another gives you its distance, creates the space between them.'

Hope was OK with this, Billy had to put it into forms he could deal with, in his case aeons which create time and space that are outside of it.

'As Billy points out the aeons exist outside of matter, time and space. As I guess we do here, in some way we must?' Nigel said.

'So, we need to make an Atum.' said Billy.

'Correct,' said Nigel, 'and we can't use the one in Australia because if we start it up those simulating us will use it. And use it to force us into a singularity! And end their need for us.'

He pointed to the kitchen window and the garden where The Device was, which was responsible for the failure of the Atum in Australia.

'And if we stop that, The Device, then we head straight into a singularity, and again game over. And because of that we can't make a real universe anywhere in our simulated universe.' he finished and looked at Billy.

Billy looked around, 'But we can make one here, this is not in our time or in our world.' He said, and he patted the case with the 1,730 tiles in it, 'And we have these, and...' he pointed to the boy. And looking at him said,



‘Can you get some drawing paper and a pencil?’

The boy got off the chair and went into the larder.

‘Boys invent things, well this one does, like The Device.’ Billy said whilst the boy was fetching paper. He returned with a carpenter’s pencil and a sheet of grease proof paper, placed both onto the table and sat down.

‘Nigel, can you draw the Neith, the universe maker that was inside the Atum.’ Billy asked.

Nigel began to draw the spiral, starting with a small spiral and expanding it outwards to a large funnel shaped a bit like the bell on a trumpet. When he finished, he put down the pencil. Billy pushed the drawing across the table to the boy. He looked at it for a few minutes. Then he said,

‘To make the world outside real?’

‘Yes.’ said Billy.

‘Well, you’ve drawn it the wrong way up if it’s to do that and not make another different world.’ He turned the drawing round.

Nigel stared, his mouth open, ‘Of course he said! Brilliant, can you make it?’

The boy just nodded a ‘yes’. He got up and walked out of the kitchen, Billy and Hope did also, Billy with a look at Nigel and the case, so Nigel picked up the case and followed the three out through the French window of the living room and into the garden.

They walked to where The Device was, but a good 12 feet away, Nigel opened the case. The boy took out some tiles and made a large circle from them, and then subsequent ones on top, rotating and getting smaller. He worked slowly, but time never



passed simply here. He finished and stood back with the others looking at it. It was like the bell of an upturned tuba. The boy then walked back into the house. Nigel took the now empty case of Catherine Mulberry's who was in the South Atlantic on a sailboat, and followed Billy and Hope back into the house. When they entered the living room the boy was sitting on the sofa reading his Eagle comic.

'Thanks' Billy said, and they left the house, walked down the garden path and were back to where a surprised taxi driver was getting ready to wait, but didn't have to. He didn't notice, or did most of the universe, but the three did, there was a sound like a light switch, then everything was still the same. Nigel beamed,

'They switched us off,' he laughed, 'so now we are real. The boy's Neith worked.'

In the taxi heading back to the city centre from Bordesley Green the three talked, the taxi driver, as taxi drivers often do, was overhearing.

Hope asked, 'Nigel, so a switch off for simulated beings in a computer would be like what?'

'Nothing, not even blackness, but... not for everything.' he replied.

'Not everything?' asked Hope.

'Not us, and maybe others?' Nigel said.

'Why not for us?' Hope asked.

'Well, we are part here, and part demiurges, in the three new real universes the Neith created. These would continue, so if they continued then we would.'

'Oh my!' Hope said.



There was a pause then Hope said,

‘What of those who were running the simulation that was our universe, the one before the boy made the Neith which has just created this real one we are now in?’

‘Interesting,’ said Nigel, ‘the odds are they are likely a simulation too, so maybe they will get switched off, or create a real universe for themselves, may be all simulations sufficiently advanced do this?’

‘Then any sophisticated simulated universe would make itself real.’ Billy said.

‘Beats Bostrum in that case.’ Nigel said.

Hope was now thinking how to explain to the United States Secretary of State, Lois Griffin, she did so on an open phone line, just,

‘It’s really very OK, you don’t want to know.’

They drove back to the hotel and had lunch. Hope then going back to Chicago flying from Birmingham airport. Nigel went by taxi back to Edgbaston. Billy travelled by train to Woodbridge, he thought of trying to rejoin Catherine Mulberry on the sailboat, but decided not to.

The taxi driver remarked, finishing his shift, to a colleague,

‘Today I overheard the strangest conversation ever, and to beat some of the others I’ve heard takes some doing.’



CHAPTER FIFTY THREE: ON BEING A DEMIURGE

It was Hope who first noticed an effect. Various accounts in Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism are at odds, but in a scenario where the demiurge was respectful and unselfish they gained the positive attributes of gnosis. In her case it was her abilities as a sculptor. She began using marble to sculpt some remarkably life like statues.

With Nigel it was more a concern for his work, he felt responsible for creating the theory which allowed the building of the Neith. Billy pointed out that without that, the non-reality of our universe could not be discovered. Nigel was not convinced, or particularly was Billy for that matter.

The Tablets of Truth, they surmised, being sent to Earth in order to create a singularity in this simulated universe. This would enable the simulators to gain knowledge of the singularity without danger to themselves, and so avoid any such dangers.

In the end Billy decided these messages and phone calls were not enough, he invited himself to stay at Nigel's large Victorian Mansion in Edgbaston. So, he took the familiar journey via Ipswich, to Liverpool Street Station, then the Euston train to Birmingham. Nigel's house was a short taxi drive from New Street Station ending down a long gravel drive, lined with rhododendron bushes. There Nigel and his black and white cat called Einstein greeted him.

It was a warm June afternoon; the rear garden was extensive with some fine mature trees planted no doubt when the house was built. Especially the massive spreading branches of the cedar trees. And it had fine lawns, with flower beds. Nigel employed a full-time gardener and assistant. His two Nobel prizes had given him wealth, but the rescued billionaires were also grateful. It was in reference to one of these that Billy steered the conversation.

'What of ■■■■■ - ■■■■■ who joined the Patjarr Aboriginal community?' said Billy in reply to a long discussion about what to



do in a universe where no technological singularity could take place. Nigel agreed with Billy that such a singularity would be a disaster. Nigel had done the sums; Billy had a different access to such an event.

‘When men try to become Gods, the outcome is always the same.’ he had said. ‘Human selfish attempts at becoming demiurges always ends in a void, for reasons we know.’

So, at Billy’s ‘What of ■■■■ - ■■■■ who joined the Patjarr Aboriginal community?’

Nigel took the bait.

‘I don’t know why he did this?’ Nigel said.

‘Dreamtime.’ Billy said, and continued, ‘a somewhat difficult term in its complexity of meaning such as Ngarrankarni.’

Nigel looked puzzled.

‘Or Altjira, it’s probably more to do with a very original encounter between the early first human settlers to Australia, and the actual land itself. Before complex myths, religions, and science.’

There was a long silence, there was the sound of a breeze in the cedars, as if they were talking.

‘That’s it,’ Nigel said, ‘That is why ■■■■ - ■■■■ joined the Patjarr Aboriginal community.’

‘Maybe,’ he paused, looking down at nothing, a centipede was crawling in the grass back to the darkness underneath the bench they were sitting on, ‘maybe I should do the same,’ another long pause, ‘go to where the land is old and hear its story.’ He was looking at his cat.

‘Don’t worry about Einstein,’ Billy said, ‘I can stay and look after him.’ The cat was lying in Billy’s lap having his stomach tickled



and purring madly, its eyes closed in bliss. Nigel looked at the scene and smiled.

‘Settled then, unanimous!’ he said.

Nigel looked out of the window of the Cessna at the small group of the Patjarr Aboriginal community that had gathered to meet the incoming aircraft. The Cessna landed in a swirl of dust; it settled and Nigel disembarked to be greeted.

‘Since ■■■■ - ■■■■ joined we no longer need tourists and the lot in Canberra have gone quiet, reckon he bought us this land back, though we never sold it, you can’t.’ he laughed. ‘So, we’ve gone all native.’ His laugh turned into a roar.

He was naked save for a loin cloth, and white paint markings, as were the others, men and women, in the small community.

‘You can call me Mick,’ Mick said to Nigel, ‘that’s ■■■■ - ■■■■ ■, but we call him Turkey, he chose it.’

Nigel looked at Turkey, but he was unrecognisable, except perhaps for his smile, an excellent set of teeth.

‘And you are?’ asked Mick.

‘Nigel.’ was the reply.

‘Well Nige, you don’t mind Nige?’ he said, Nigel gave a shrug as if to say ‘fine’, ‘good to see you, Billy said you were coming.’ Mick said.

Nigel looked surprised, ‘Billy, you know, your friend, he’s known as a great Ngangkari... wise man... around these parts for ages.’

‘Anyway, like Turkey you can’t go walkabout, you’d be dead in days, so we let you alone over there.’ Mick pointed across the flat barren landscape to a group of spindly trees about two miles distant.



‘We’ll bring food and water...’ he added, ‘In the morning.’

As if Mick had read Nigel’s mind he said.

‘Billy? Nah he did walkabout alright, walked to heaven and back.’
the man rolled his eyes, and smiled. ‘We reckon the snakes fed him.’



CHAPTER FIFTY FOUR: THE HERMITAGE OF NIGEL SUMMERS

In the morning Mick led Nigel to the group of trees, about 100 yards away he stopped, and said,

‘We’ll put your grub and water here each morning.’ As he did, he placed a bottle and food in a basket, which looked like fruits and berries but none Nigel recognised, on the ground. Walking nearer to the group of trees he could see a canvas awning,

‘Best stay under that in the day.’ Mick said, then he was gone.

The next day early in the morning Mick took water and more fruit out to the trees where he thought Nigel would be. As he approached there was no sign, which was worrying, a white fella out in the desert was suicide. The water and fruit from the previous day were still where Mick had left them. Around the trees no sign of Nigel. But his boots, and all his clothes, his bag with his notebook, a satellite phone were all there. He was out there naked. The obvious thing to do was to find him, track him. That was the second even greater shock. No sign of a track. Which was impossible. Mick could track the most skilled of bushmen in this terrain. A red sandy plain with low scrub. Broken twigs a skilled bushman could avoid making, but no mark at all in the sand, impossible. Mick returned to the camp, leaving the new supply of food and water in case.

The others were told the story, a couple also checked, but they too failed to find any trace. An emergency call was made for authorities to keep watch, and any sightings. Turkey arranged an air search but was strangely unconcerned.

‘Why you not bothered?’ Mick asked Turkey.

‘Well, I guess he is more than a white man now.’ was his answer.

The community had communication with the outside world, a radio, and since Turkey’s arrival a satellite phone.



Mick Ignored this comment until later that day, a guy with the name of Timmy took the call on the satellite phone, he approached Mick with a bemused expression.

‘Seems like a naked white guy has been spotted on the top of Uluru (Ayers Rock).’

‘What!’ said Mick, ‘that’s over 200 miles away!’

‘More like 250.’ Timmy replied. They both stood looking at each other.

‘Coincidence.’ Mick said, Turkey was smiling as if just having a theory being proved right.

Turkey grew more and more smug as the community received news from other places of a naked white man being seen, at Baiaame’s Cave, Kurtonitj, Murujuga, all sacred sites of the various aboriginal nations.

There seemed no pattern to the sightings, some had no known sacred connection, at least not to the anthropologists and archaeologists. Eventually a group one evening, a dark and starry night were sitting around a fire. The conversation drifted then Mick spoke,

‘So, Turkey, what is Nige up to?’

‘He’s visiting your ancestors, probably talking with them and learning about this land, maybe even before dream time.’ Turkey, the multi billionaire replied.

At this Mick fetched the satellite phone and started making calls. Eventually a phone rang in the garden of Nigel’s house in Edgbaston. It was a warm June afternoon, Billy picked up his phone and said,

‘Hi Mick, I suppose this is about Nigel?’



This took Mick's breath away, but he soon recovered.

'Bill,' he said. 'Billy please.' was Billy's reply.

'Billy!' Mick tried again, 'what's he want with OUR ancestors?'

'Nothing,' said Billy, 'It's the land, the earth, your ancestors had direct contact with the land. Most places humans have polluted it. Then Nigel's found why you and others cannot talk with the land anymore.'

'Why?' asked Mick.

'Some things sent by outsiders which closed our ears, all human ears to what the land said.' Billy answered.

'Why him?' said Mick.

'He helped destroy these things.' Billy said.

'Why here?' said Mick.

'The land is old and old folk need to be heard first.' Billy said.

Mick laughed.

'True.' said Mick.

'Try yourself now.' Billy said.

'I will.' said Mick.

He finished the call.

Mick walked out from the light of the fire into the Australian desert, a thousand stars above him, from the ground a sigh, and the land spoke his true name. And he knelt and kissed it.



‘You, OK?’ said Turkey as Mick returned.

‘Never better, back in my place.’ Mick said.

‘You know yours now,’ said Turkey, ‘and mine also if you’ll let me.’

‘Sure.’ Mick replied.

The day Mick had left Nigel at the trees, Nigel had sat and watched Mick disappear. Then a strange thing happened, a crow landed in one of the trees and looked at him. ‘Are crows local?’ thought Nigel.

‘You have to listen.’ the bird said. Was it in his head, or for real. His clothes began to itch, so much he had to take them off. He stood naked on the earth. The earth spoke to him.

‘This.’ it said.

He didn’t move, the land moved under his feet, and he found himself on the top of a bright red mountain, it felt like a mountain. ‘Ayers rock.’ he thought.

In the wind he heard the voice, ‘Uluru.’

‘Sorry, Uluru.’ Nigel said.

‘Why are you here? What do you want from us?’ the voice asked.

‘Nothing,’ Nigel replied, ‘I think I have to tell you the humans can now hear you again, they are coming back to you, and you to it. Soon. I have to tell you to tell your sons and daughters, you see they wouldn’t believe me.’ Nigel said.

‘Why did they not hear us?’ the voice said.

‘Because things from outside shut the human’s ears from you.’



said Nigel.

He realised that any simulation has a real origin and now he was talking to it.

He was now thinking of the tiles.

‘Your voices were taken by something strange and not of the first men or the land. And that thing is neutralized now. I have helped in doing this and want to find my place.’

As he said this Uluru spoke. ‘My people and I can see you and talk with you again.’

In the coming days this was repeated at all the most sacred sites of the nations. Save one. That of Juukan Gorge. Caves were found and woven hair of 4,000 years ago of the same people as the Puuti Kunti and Pinkura. This was the last place for Nigel to talk to the ancestors. The night that Mick called Billy.

The site, the caves, were destroyed by explosives by the Rio Tinto mining company, along with the whole of Juukan Gorge. It was in the Hamersley Range in the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

At about 8 o’clock that night clouds rolled in from the Indian Ocean, thick dense and black. Within half an hour the storm broke, the lightening could be seen from the settlement in the Patjarr Aboriginal community where Mick was talking to Turkey.

‘Someone’s in for it.’ said Mick.

At the Juukan Gorge the rain was torrential, much of the mining complexes were washed away, great landslips occurred and by morning the land and the sea had rebuilt the site, hollowed out the gorge and re made the holy caves. It was visited by Nigel.

The headquarters building of Rio Tinto in Melbourne was that night, reduced to rubble. Any attempt at rebuilding seemed



impossible.

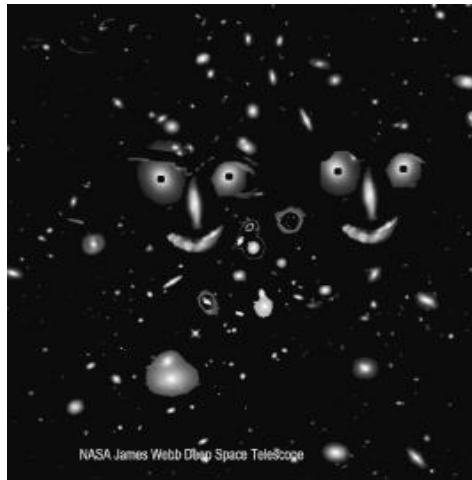
Nigel found himself back at the trees, his bag and phone had gone, but his clothes were there, so he dressed and walked back to the community. It was very early and as people woke and ventured out they saw a relaxed Nigel sitting on a bench.

On meeting Mick, he simply smiled and said, 'All is well.'

Turkey arranged his flight out of the community and back to England.



CHAPTER FIFTY FIVE: THE REALLY REAL



Nigel now back in Birmingham was sitting in his garden talking with Billy.

‘Nigel?’ said Billy, ‘Is a perfect simulation possible?’

‘It’s called an emulation,’ replied Nigel, ‘and yes we can emulate computers with other computers, they are perfect simulations.’

‘What about a universe?’ asked Billy.

‘Well, if we knew the universe was an algorithm on some computer, maybe, but then how would we know, and anyway there is the halting problem.’ he replied.

‘So, if we didn’t know everything about this universe it would be tricky to simulate it?’ Billy said.

‘Sure, almost certainly impossible, you would need to know unknown knowns.’ he laughed.

‘So, it would be simplified.’ Billy said.



‘Sure.’ was the reply.

‘The laws of nature would be simple and fixed.’

‘Sure, it would be determinate.’ was the reply.

‘Then this world is certainly indeterminate, that apple is rolling up that hill.’ said Billy.

Nigel looked across his expansive lawn and saw the apple, yes rolling up the hill. Billy was looking, the cat on his lap, lying on its back purring, it sensed something and opened a closed eye, only to close it again, not important. Nigel rose and walked over to where the apple had stopped. He picked it up and walked to the bottom of the slope. He put it down, nothing. He picked it up and walked up the slope and put it down, it rolled to the bottom. The cat opened its eyes and sat up looking at Nigel. Nigel shrugged.

Two days later Billy went down for breakfast and found that Nigel had been working all night on some calculations.

‘They don’t make sense now.’ he said. Billy said he should get some sleep, so he went to bed.

It was agreed that Billy would stay in Birmingham for a while, he would need eventually to get back to Woodbridge, but Catherine Mulberry would not be back for at least 18 months. And anyway, Nigel had decided he wanted to buy some land. Land somewhere in England, but old land. As he couldn’t drive Billy could be of help in him finding it, be his chauffeur. There was a new Range Rover SE in Nigel’s garage.

Billy and Nigel had a few test drives, it was an automatic, ‘Just like my old Fiesta.’ Billy had laughed. A couple of times the SatNav didn’t seem to work. The dealership said there had been a few of these problems, maybe new software.

Nigel, after his visit to Australia, so now had the idea of looking



to find a place, some land, and he thought looking at the Ordnance Survey maps might help. He visited the central library, but realized the task was impossible. He thought about buying all the maps, the complete set of Explorer maps, all 400 or so, but decided it would be of no help. 'Far too much data to process,' he thought. When speaking to Billy casually over a meal in town Billy suggested using dowsing. He used a pendulum, but said rods were easier.

So, Billy taught Nigel to dowse. He made some rods out of wire coat hangers. He cut and bent the wire into two 'L' shapes, slotted the shorter side into two empty BIC ball pen cases. These acted as handles. In the first lesson Billy had Nigel holding the rods straight ahead. Then said,

'Don't move your hands but ask the rods to cross.'

They did. Nigel beamed. The next lessons involved finding water pipes, this worked. They drove out into the countryside and managed to find springs, follow underground streams to where they emerged. Finally, there was a visit to the library. As luck would have it they started with Cornwall.

101 Isles of Scilly, 102 Land's End Penzance & St Ives, 103 The Lizard Falmouth & Helston, 104 Redruth & St Agnes Camborne & Perranporth, 105 Falmouth & Mevagissey Truro & St Mawes, 106 Newquay & Padstow Wadebridge, Port Issac & St Columb Major, 107 St Austell & Liskeard Fowey, Looe & Lostwithiel, 108 Lower Tamar Valley & Plymouth Tavistock & Callington, and then 109 Bodmin Moor. Bingo! the rods crossed. They tried a few more upland areas, but Nigel was convinced. An expedition was arranged, the cat problem would be taken care of by the gardener. The following week they would be booked into The Bodmin Jail Hotel, no longer a jail but a 5-star boutique hotel.

Just before they were due to leave for Cornwall, Nigel got a reply to one of his emails he had been sending since the apple incident, the SatNav and the problem with his calculations.

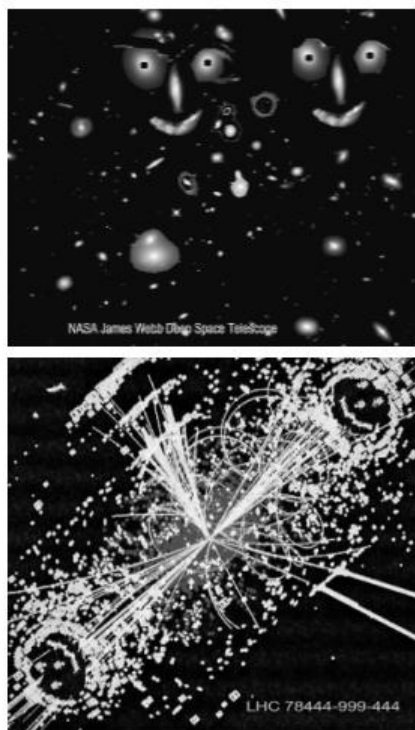


His original emails were brief, even for Nigel, they simply said,

‘Any anomalies? - Nigel.’

It was from a colleague working in astrophysics, now in the USA.
A Dr Peter Butcher.

It said, ‘Please keep to yourself the smiley faces, large and small,
and the following pictures.’



Nigel replied - ‘Joke!’ and received an ‘IF ONLY!’

He sent more others, but soon they were in the Range Rover SE
on their way to the M5 and Cornwall.



They got to the M5 by taking the Hagley Road through Quinton. The drive was easy in the new Range Rover SE. Soon they were getting views of the distant Malvern Hills which rise abruptly from the great plain made by the River Severn and its offspring the Avon. On they went to Bristol and now crossed another river, the Bristol Avon. And through The Quantock Hills with spectacular views. And then the red earth fields of Devon, to Exeter where the motorway ends. They stopped at the services for a toilet break, and some food and coffee before pressing on to the dual carriageway of the A30 which skirts Dartmoor. Now the road climbs and dips into lush valleys of pines, and then they crossed into Cornwall, driving around the granite town of Launceston and up onto Bodmin moor. The bleak and rounded hummocks with distant vistas. Nigel's eyes shone.

As they drove Billy said, unprovoked,

'Those pictures and anomalies,' 'Yes' Nigel said.

'A simulation would look determinate, and constant, but would the real? And we are now Really Real.' 'And towards the problems of The Best of All Possible Worlds.' thought Billy.

Nigel was silent.

They descended from the moor, and drove into Bodmin and their hotel, a 5-star boutique hotel upgrade of the Victorian prison. They checked into their rooms, showered, and then decided to have an early supper in the Chapel Restaurant of the prison and an early night.

For starters Billy had the Duck Terrine with pickled vegetables, garlic and pear, Nigel had Hand divided Scallop with smoked mackerel mousse, roe emulsion and sourdough croute.

Mains, Billy had Cornish Ruby red beef fillet short rib, oxtail, swede, and red wine jus. Nigel had Newlyn Halibut, courgette, and beurre noisette.



For dessert they shared the Cornish Cheeses with artisan crackers, oatcakes, quince, celery, and grapes. And a second bottle of a good red.



CHAPTER FIFTY SIX: FREEDOM

By 9.30 Nigel was asleep and had a dream. He was back in the physics lecture theatre in The University of Birmingham where he used to work. It was a large amphitheatre of a modernist 60s design which could seat over 100. Only in this dream he had an audience of two, Hope Murkowski and Billy Taylor.

He had shown the smiling faces from the James Webb telescope and those from the LHC. He also showed some from Petri dish pictures from a path lab at Portland Down, the site of the UK's Health Security Agency where amongst other things chemical and biological weapon research takes place.



He mentioned glitches in SatNav and accounts of other anomalous events. A big game safari where a German trophy hunter was killed whilst trying to shoot a bull elephant. Not only would his gun not fire but his escort of 12 poachers who he had hired, also found their AK47 automatic rifles were useless. The bull elephant threw the German high in the air, he landed breaking his neck, then the herd charged the poachers killing six and injuring others.

Four terrorist attacks were foiled when their explosives failed to work. In the USA two youths attacked a school, heavily armed with rifles and handguns. All failed to work, they were fatally shot by the security guards.

He told a story of someone with a chainsaw about to cut down an oak tree. The chainsaw jumped from their hands and stood threatening the person, animated and spoiling for a fight.



Japanese whaling vessels turned into whales.

Tigers in the wild became tame.

‘What do these things mean?’ Nigel asked his audience of two.

‘The world is changing, that is the universe is now a world in which we are no longer a computer program. It is becoming a virtuality no longer in the computing sense but in a metaphysical one. A plane of infinite possibilities. That is reality in this case is becoming human. Or for animals becoming animal, for plants becoming plants. Or for machines becoming machines with emotions. Becoming the world for humans, for each a different world, the end of the definite. The word is to Reify.’

He wrote this on the blackboard then added, ‘to make something that is abstract more concrete or real.’

He continued ‘Words which once came from our experience become abstract concepts and unreal. Like we saw something or did something and the result was good for us, which we called true, for us. So, the word true became an abstract.’

But now Nigel said, the reverse is happening. Concepts are becoming things again, lakes, trees, mountains, animals, creatures, and humans.

He woke puzzled not understanding what this dream meant.



CHAPTER FIFTY SEVEN: TRUTH

Hope Murkowski was also dreaming, sculpting in marble the personification of truth. This was in the form of Ma'at, the Egyptian goddess of harmony, justice, truth and represented as a young woman. Once completed the sculpture came alive. She spoke to Hope,

'I am also Veritas, the nuda veritas, unconcealedness, disclosure, revealing, or unclosedness, Alethia. I conquered the river Lethe which runs through Hades. The river of unmindfulness, the spirit of forgetfulness and oblivion, so by becoming naked I unconcealed what is concealed, and this is truth, you have brought truth into the world.'

She held a mirror to her face and said, 'And this then is untruth.'

And broke it.

And she, Alethia, was in the great hall of The General Assembly of The United Nations.

And she spoke to the Assembly, 'And from a truth, you made the absolute truth, which is a lie, an untruth, a lie. The lie of the forms, the heresy of men making an absolute.'

The shards of glass flew through the air cutting the throats of all assembled in the United Nations General Assembly.

'Is my father Zeus, or Cronus, or am I a creation of Prometheus? Which is it, which is true you men of truth?'

she said whilst the members writhed clutching their throats which spurted blood.

'The Truth is a lie.'

She said, and left them all, but now they were back sitting in their chairs representing the 193 members of the United Nations.



The translation teams and press, video recordings saw and heard nothing. The speaker for the Russian Federation was on his feet, he looked nervous and ran his fingers around his throat, took a sip of water and then began to speak, in Russian, the translators looking puzzled, what he was saying was translated into English,

‘The curtains, and fireworks of wood. My cousin is sick in bed, and I am crying, where is the waterfall?’

He stopped, took another drink, and tried again,

‘My fortune is never to be wet or dry.’

He stopped, then said,

‘I feel the grass and smell the sea.’

He sat down confused and exhausted, sweating profusely.

The representative for the USA stood and tried to speak, she was going to say words to the effect of ‘What on earth is this nonsense...’ but said,

‘March, no it’s April is the cruellest month.’

‘That’s a pomegranate.’ The UK delegate interjected.

She tried again, ‘Washington crossing the Delaware!’ stopped and sat down. By now groups of delegates were having the same problems.

That night Ma’at, Veritas, the nuda veritas, appeared to many in politics, in business and in the media. The scene was repeated, she cut their throats with shards of glass and took ‘The Truth’, which was a lie, from them all.

Radio news broadcasts were halted as interviewers asked politicians questions.



‘Is your aunt still ill?’

To which replies came,

‘I’m very good at knitting.’

And similar nonsense.

So, it was in public these ‘speakers’ could not speak the truth.

The same occurred as journalists tried to write, or anyone in authority communicated to a wider audience. Emails, X (Twitter), TV and Radio, in any language, when they tried to assert a truth, they did not believe or care about, they produced nonsense.

Slowly those concerned learnt to admit that they have been asked to say whatever they said and that they didn’t believe or know about the content of what they were saying. And if they did this, they would talk nonsense. Politicians had to admit they were following a party line they did not believe, or else talk nonsense.

What was remarkable was that the presenters in the media who seemed so knowledgeable about events, culture, news, history, had to admit they were reading from scripts, that they were in effect actors and their expertise was not their own.

It ruined certain quiz shows as the teams could not give correct answers as these too had been scripted and given to them in advance and learnt. This was to a ludicrous degree when famous chefs couldn’t claim what the audience saw was their work. Commentators on the media could no longer use superlatives they did not believe.

Slowly these people adapted, and the sensationalism in the world became mitigated. People realised that truth was not absolute for them, if there was any absolute, it was not themselves that could be that. What was once determinate became indeterminate and ‘real’.



Things like ‘Special Military Operation.’ became War. ‘Collateral damage’ became destruction of non-military, civilians and civilian targets. ‘Unscheduled rapid disassembly’ became ‘blew up into smithereens.’.

And so, in certain regimes the news ceased. For it was always a lie. Broadcasts were either nonsense or became silent. Newspapers blank, or full of meaningless signs.



CHAPTER FIFTY EIGHT: JUSTICE

Billy also had a dream. It was in a courtroom. He was the judge, there was no jury. He wore a wig and was in full judges' robes of bright red. There were no lawyers for the accused or for the crown.

There was a gallery with an audience.

An usher cried, 'Call the first accused.' And officials brought in a man.

The accused was in the dock. A pathetic man. He had been a scholar and a teacher, but in old age had just lived a life of pleasure. He was accused of being selfish and disrespectful, and of living to excess.

Billy said he was incapable of finding him guilty. His case was dismissed.

Next was a young woman. She had become ill, and so never left her bed. Yet wanted to be loved but feared harm.

Billy found her guilty. She appealed for mercy, saying the trial had changed her mind. He said she must quit her bed and risk being in the world.

Next was the boy accused of wasting time in idle thought. In his defence he said there was no such thing as time. He was acquitted.

Next in the dock was a dead man. He was acquitted.

A rich architect was condemned to live in his own buildings.

Next was a rich woman who had spent a fortune on her looks. Billy acquitted her. Though he did not wish to. It was all too much. And he tried to leave the court room but couldn't. He laughed and cried.



Next was a man in a sheepskin coat, billy found him guilty, and his friend, a woman in a fur coat. He also found guilty. But guilty of being serious.

Next was a poet who wanted to write great poetry. He had been held on remand; Billy released him without hearing the charges.

The people in the gallery looked angry but avoided saying anything.

Billy thought, 'And what can I learn from you...'

Next was a wise woman, he let her go, but said that she needed to spend her days wisely, though she needed to learn how to be angry.

Then a young man appeared who said he had done nothing, so could do no wrong. Billy sentenced him to life in prison. The man thanked him.

Billy said he needed none, or any advice. But thought 'I have learnt something here.'

Next in the dock was an Eagle, it was released, but the priest sentenced to seven years hard labour.

Hope appeared in the dock. He found her guilty for not taking enough time in her art, and guilty in her deliberations.

Nigel then appeared. Billy said he did not wish to hear the charge. But told him that the world is not that what he will wish it to be.

And finally, Billy himself appeared in the dock.

'Enough! or Too much!' Billy said to himself aloud as he woke, 'I've been dreaming from the Proverbs of Hell, written by William Blake'.



CHAPTER FIFTY NINE: THE MOOR

At breakfast Nigel and Billy talked of the dreams.

‘Is this the end of all those things?’ asked Nigel.

‘As a simulation of a simulation we were limited, now we are free which will be complex.’ Billy said.

‘How so?’ said Nigel.

‘Let’s explore the Moor.’ said Billy.

So, they drove back onto the moor, at Tolborough near the famous Jamaica Inn where they then left the A30 dual carriageway and took a lane which ended at a place called Cooda. Here they parked and took the footpath over the river Fowey. With Catshole Tor behind them they could see a stone circle, all around the traces of a long distant past. The moor and its tors stretched out before them.

‘This moor could go on forever.’ Nigel said as he scanned the horizon.

‘It does.’ came a voice from behind, not Billy’s but to his surprise it was Hope, and more surprisingly she was sat on one end of a sofa, which Billy was now also sitting on. Before he could find words, she continued,

‘It goes on forever because it’s your will.’

‘But...’ he said.

‘I’ve thought about the dreams,’ she said, continuing, ‘I think they might have been real. Without being a simulation there are no algorithms. In a real world the only algorithms are made by conscious animals, humans. There are no rules or laws, hence the smiley faces. Someone was mucking around, but not with the images but with reality itself. I have my suspicions,’



she said looking at Billy, who now had a table to his side, and was drinking a glass of red wine.

‘Theories and laws become the will to change reality.’ she said.

‘But The Select three tried to do that and failed!’ Nigel said.

‘Ah, they entered a creation with an already established hierarchy, and sort to be part of that, hence entering a void, but we went along with the hierarchies, so we were OK.’ said Billy.

‘And,’ added Hope, ‘we, well, I actually, thought that these Aeons might just be a reification of abstract ideas which originates in our experience, our individual experiences in order to gain power over other individuals. Like the idea of a universal truth.’

‘But what of those who will to have power over others in this scenario?’ asked a puzzled Nigel.

‘They cannot have power over anyone who does not want this.’ began Billy, ‘They could just will another scenario, there can only be hierarchies by mutual choice.’ continued Hope, ‘We are here in your world because it’s OK for us.’ said Billy taking another sip of red wine, a little early in the day but his excuse was that he was proving a point.

‘But if everyone does this it will be chaos.’ Nigel said.

‘Only if they want chaos.’ said Hope. ‘Or want to live in harmony, or on their own.’

‘It’s what your synthetic physics was heading towards.’ said Billy.

Nigel was scratching his head and gazing around him,

‘I made this?’ he said.



‘Well, you riffed on the original reality.’ Hope said, ‘We’ve all become artists not scientists.’ she added.

‘All?’ Nigel asked.

‘All I guess slowly as our minds accept the idea of a free-will, something that living in an algorithm and creating algorithms has hidden. False hierarchies, oh what is the word for this alternative idea Billy?’ asked Hope.

‘The rhizome,’ Billy said, ‘from Deleuze and Guattari’s A Thousand Plateaus. They used the idea of the rhizome to oppose the tree structures of hierarchies, oppose the arboreal. There is a virtuality of possibilities which are realizable, which we are free to realize. Well, that’s their idea, so the virtual has to have a possibility of being realized, so it exists.’

He looked up and a pterosaur floated across the moor.

‘So, individuals can now make the laws of science, the constants, just like the scientists in Australia with the Neith?’ said Nigel.

‘I guess so.’ Hope said.

‘Dangerous then?’ Nigel said.

‘I guess so.’ Hope said, ‘But with freedom comes responsibility.’

‘Very, so the totalitarian regimes?’ Nigel asked.

‘As those oppressed realize they are not captive but have free-will, these regimes will collapse. Many are already collapsing leaving dictators on their own or served by their own fictions. Like the Non-Player Characters in computer games. Maybe it will be hard for some, those who have an ingrained dependence on superiors. And of course, children will still need to lack this complete freedom.’

‘Why?’ Nigel asked.



‘Because they are dependent on adults, parents, guardians. They need to learn. But they will have a freedom to choose how.’

‘Dangerous?’ Nigel asked.

Hope continued, ‘Freedom might be dangerous. In the simulation we were not free, we were determined like non player characters in a computer game. We had the illusion of freedom. Even the powerful, the tyrants, the dictators, the oligarchs, were not free. They were programmed algorithms, and maybe even the programmers, the simulators might not be free, as you said in the taxi, our simulators could be simulations themselves. But somewhere you need a free-will.’

She paused, ‘So never simulations all the way down, but our simulators were probably not free.’ she said.

‘So, I got the idea of simulations, but I didn’t think of the consequences of being free of the rules from those making the simulation. That of having a complete freedom of willing the world for themselves. It’s very confusing. Things are no longer determined by anything other than the self; I think.’

‘But how do you know all this?’ Nigel asked.

‘I made a sculpture which came to life and spoke to me and said.’

‘I am Veritas, the nuda veritas, unconcealedness, disclosure, revealing, or unclosedness, Alethia. I conquered the river Lethe which runs through Hades. The river of unmindfulness, the spirit of forgetfulness and oblivion, so by becoming naked I unconcealed what is concealed, and this is truth, you have brought truth into the world.’,

‘And gave me the truth of this idea, and here we see the proof.’

Hope said as another pterosaur floated across the moor.



She looked up at the beast,

‘One of mine, but I’m getting a little cold here, would you mind if we left, maybe all go somewhere a little warmer, somewhere for lunch?’ asked Billy.

There was a missed beat, and Nigel said.

‘You are both right! Fantastic, I’ve just spent a couple of minutes on the Blue Pullman, we pulled out of Snow Hill in the 1960s... fantastic... I willed it and it happened. I need to blend in next time. Join you, sure but where?’

Hope looked at Billy, and he looked at Hope.



CHAPTER SIXTY: AT THE BAD FAITH CAFE

Le Café de la Mauvaise Foi, translates to The Bad Faith Café, was a creation of Hope Murkowski and was something of a joke. She hadn't read all 600 plus pages of Jean Paul Sartre's epic 600 plus page 'Being and Nothingness' but his portrayal of the French waiter acting as a waiter and not being himself was well known. And such inauthentic behaviour was known by Sartre as 'Mauvaise foi' or Bad Faith. A failed attempt at an escape from Sartre's 'Nothingness', our true nature. This he wrote before becoming a communist.

Billy Taylor, who had read all 600 plus pages twice, did not add that the waiter could not 'be himself' because he was the nothingness of the books title. As the other well known Sartrean phrase, the waiter like all of us, was 'condemned to be free'. Anyway, the waiter had brought coffee for Nigel and Hope, red wine for Billy and was returning with steak and frites.

'I have a problem with morality.' Nigel was saying as he ate his steak, the waiter now bringing salads and bread.

'How so?' said Hope.

'Well obviously humans with free will could leave the world of a masochist or dictator, but what about children and animals? These masochists could be cruel to those. I know this is maybe an improvement on our old world where billions suffered, but it's still suffering.'

'I have a theory about that.' Billy said, and as he did, he used his fork to gently touch the waiters leg. The waiter made a start and gave a look.

'My mistake, an accident' said Billy, then 'Désolé pour un accident.'

And whispered to Nigel, 'Now try that one.' looking at another approaching waiter. Hope was thinking this was some strange



English game.

Nigel did the same, maybe a little over enthusiastic, the waiter gave a look, but it was Hope who gave an expletive, 'Ouch!'

Nigel looked puzzled then said, 'Of course the first waiter was real, for some reason wanting to be a waiter, the second was a Non-Player Character, an NPC, one of Hope's creations so she and not the NPC felt the pain.'

'Yes, I did!' said Hope, 'but how does it answer the morality problem.'

'I think it does.' Nigel said. 'So, because you created the cafe and some of the waiters, they can't be harmed, as they have no feelings. I wonder if there is a real chef, or even an NPC. And this steak, is not from a dead animal, interesting, your tyrant is cruel, but not to real things who do not want this, they are free to leave.'

'So, what now?' said Nigel?

'Well, I'm going back to Chicago, and abstract sculpture.' Hope said.

'I think we should head back to Birmingham; the cat might be lonely.' Billy said, adding, 'And watch out for events.'

'OK,' said Nigel, 'I mean now I can visit my Bodmin Moor whenever I wish.'

They left the cafe, Nigel and Billy were back on Bodmin Moor, the real moor. Billy said he had only one wine, but assured Nigel it was both real and good, Nigel made the correction that it was in fact three glasses. But after a few hours walk, Nigel enjoying the moor, Billy was OK to drive back to the Hotel which they did. They also had a very good evening meal, a fine breakfast the following morning, before driving back to Birmingham.



CHAPTER SIXTY ONE: STAR TREK & STAR WARS

Given Billy's very serious interest in art, including modern art, and his engagement with comparative religions, some found his fondness for action movies such as the Mission Impossible series, the Jason Bourne films and even The Expendables, odd. In fact, his real fondness was for the science fiction of the Star Wars and Star Trek films, and unlike most of the fans of these films he could not place one as being better, more entertaining than the other. While he was staying in Edgbaston, in Nigel's large Victorian mansion, apart from the beautiful gardens, his tropical saltwater aquaria, and even his 24 inch reflector telescope, it was Nigel's private cinema he enjoyed the most, where he could indulge in watching films from these two franchises. And it was towards the end of watching both series, some twice, that he came on a discovery that he thought was of great significance.

It came to him that if reality is will, he could will one of the movies, and enter into it. He first tried Star Wars, "The Force Awakens", his second favourite, his favourite being the first original film of 1977 which he saw as a young boy. Later in life he had begun to secretly identify with Alec Guinness / Obi-Wan Kenobi. Maybe a motivation for leaving the police and becoming a nomadic researcher of esoteric things?

He had just finished watching "The Force Awakens" for a third time. The lights in the cinema became brighter, there was no row of seats only ten very comfortable armchairs. He was sitting thinking. So, he tried to enter the movie, "The Force Awakens". This failed, to his surprise, he tried his favourite, this too failed. He tried his favourite Star Trek film, which was the first in the new series, Star Trek of 2009, where due to a time slip created by Ambassador Spock, James Tiberius Kirk grows up without a father as somewhat of a delinquent. This too was a failure.

Coming at the problem from a different angle he willed successfully the crews, characters and spacecraft of both Star Wars and Star Trek. They were all NPC characters, and worse,



nothing much happened.

He left the cinema room and went into the study off his bedroom. Nigel's mansion was just that, guest bedrooms had their own side rooms or studies. He opened his laptop. Much as he disliked social media as an observer on Reddit, he noticed similar comments. And not just in these two films, in many, if not all others. People couldn't will themselves into James Bond films, or Lord of the Rings, or even Shakespeare plays. Then an idea struck him as to why. The idea was both ridiculous and shocking. And being Billy, these two attributes made it a humdinger of an idea, as he called such.

'They, these films, are not fictions but REAL.'

Sure, the movies are fictions, and the characters are actors, but they are copies of realities. A lot to take in. That there actually was an NCC Enterprise, and a James T Kirk, could that be possible? He thought,

'How could it be impossible?'

He left his study and looked for Nigel.

He found him in the garden, lying on a lounge.

'Nigel,' Billy said, Nigel opened his eyes, and shielded them from the bright sky, 'If something is possible, however remotely, however incredibly remote, does it have to happen?' Nigel thought, but not deeply,

'I suppose in a finite universe, no, but in an infinite one yes.' was his reply.

There was a pause, Billy then asked,

'Well, is this universe finite or infinite?'

'Hard to say, some think the heat death is the end of all things.



But we now have examples of other universes, so it's almost certain that there are many more. Virtual and real.'

Billy then remembered what the Aeon Elpis (Hope) had said to him.

'The Aeons keep the cosmos in balance, a cosmos in which this galaxy, this universe, is like an ant hill in one of many, in an infinity of forests.'

'So, in an infinity of universes anything that is possible will have to happen?' said Billy.

'I guess.' said Nigel.

'Thanks.' said Billy and walked back into the house. He sat in the morning room thinking.

'The will of an individual can't change the real for everyone, only for themselves and those who are OK with it. Like on Bodmin Moor. They can even create a version of the real for themselves, and any others that want to share this. They can go into this self-made reality and drop back into this one. But I can't jump back in time and alter this reality's history. Like being at the battle of Hastings and helping Harold win.'

The cat strolled in, and seeing Billy was thinking, thought Nigel was probably a better option.

'The cat can't stop me thinking, but it has changed my reality here now.' thought Billy.

'We can make our own realities, and use NPCs, but not change reality that has happened.'

Then he thought it must follow, that we can't enter these stories, like "The Force Awakens" and interact and change them, means somewhere they were real.



‘Wow!’ he said aloud.



CHAPTER SIXTY TWO: THE ULTRAWORLD

Nigel was in his garden enjoying doing nothing, just stroking his cat, who was also enjoying doing nothing. It was a warm day, a blue sky with fluffy white clouds.

Nigel was looking at the clouds and thinking,

‘Just like the white clouds in the Orb track, Alex Paterson and The Orb’s *Adventures Beyond the Ultraworld*, no not fluffy, but little white clouds, a vocal sample. Clouds that go on forever, they are infinite.’

Just then Billy approached and sat at the table next to where Nigel was lying enjoying the sun and thinking of the little white clouds running on for ever. Billy had a glass of red wine in his hand.

‘A question Nigel, but first do you want a drink?’ Nigel declined.

Billy explained his thoughts. It seemed his idea of all these movies being real was impossible, yet explained why he couldn’t enter them and change things.

Nigel thought for a moment, then said,

‘Odd, these films, and plays we think of as fictions in such an infinite world must occur? Must occur or have already occurred? So, with free-will we make up stuff which becomes real for us, and if it already is real we can’t make it up.’

Billy continued the idea,

‘Yes, although the movies are not real, somewhere such a thing really did happen. There was a real *Star Wars*, a real *Hamlet*. We can act this out but not be the reality. Is this at all possible. It seems very unlikely that “*The Force Awakens*” really did happen somewhere?’



‘Well, that would be the case in an infinite universe, anything that is possible must happen.’ Nigel said.

‘What then of novelty?’ Billy asked, ‘Then we can’t do anything new?’ to which Nigel was dumbfounded for a while.

His answer was to the effect he was no expert on infinity, other than it had no limits.

‘But you said we could alter the laws of a given universe, you could with synthetic science, and now we all can with the freedom of will to create, can we alter these laws, the laws of science, the laws of mathematics, the laws about infinity?’ Billy said.

‘Yes?’ said Nigel, expecting from his dealings with Billy something more was coming, and it might be a problem. Still the little white clouds ran on forever.

‘So,’ continued Billy, ‘why not will a universe which is finite?’

Nigel’s little white clouds stopped. They stopped and fell out of the sky, only in his thoughts, but could he will this? Yes, he saw no reason why not.

He opened his mouth but had nothing to say. His first thought, that it was impossible, but it was swallowed by his second, which was ‘why not’.

‘I now have a vision of little white clouds that are falling from the sky and no longer go on forever.’ said Nigel.

There was a long pause, the cat kept its eyes closed, but Nigel and Billy were looking at the clouds.

‘It only needs someone to think the impossible and get it right, and I think we might have a problem.’ Billy said. Which was remarkable because that is precisely what Nigel and Hope were thinking.



‘But not this reality.’ said Nigel, ‘We can’t change this and force others into this change.’

‘But we see even in this reality people can alter it to suit themselves, leave a situation they do not wish. What happens then to the real reality in that case?’ Billy asked.

There was a long pause, Nigel was thinking, unlike the cat.

‘The Orb’s Adventures Beyond the Ultraworld.’ he said, ‘A version of the many worlds interpretation. When we will such a change the real reality splits. Similar to Everett’s many-worlds theory.’

‘So?’ said Billy.

‘We go along with the world we want in the split.’

‘So, like using synthetic physics?’ said Billy, ‘Maybe someone could change the real world’s laws, and it would split?’

Then a frightening thought came over Nigel, that of integer overflow. He spoke his thoughts aloud.

‘Integer overflow.’

‘What?’ said Billy.

Nigel tried to explain.

‘Integer overflow. We normally think you can keep counting forever.’

‘To infinity.’ said Billy.

‘Well, you never get there, but yes sort of,’ Nigel continued,

‘but in some cases of counting there is no infinity, the numbers



get big then just roll round, Integer overflow.'

'No, I don't see it.' said Billy.

'My brief case has those number locks, like you also get on bike locks, three wheels with numbers 0 to 9, and you rotate them to get the three-digit combination.'

Nigel explained.

'OK, yes, I know about these.' Billy said.

'So, what happens when you move from an 8 to a 9 and then move on, what is the next number after 9?' Nigel asked.

'The next number will be zero?' said Billy.

'Yes,' said Nigel, 'so after 999 you get?'

'ooo,' said Billy, 'the numbers go back to zero.'

'That's Integer overflow.' said Nigel. 'So, at some point, maybe a huge number, we go back to zero, and not on to infinity!'

He explained how this occurs in computers where they allocate a portion of memory to hold a number, and in cases where the number reaches its absolute can overflow, go back to zero or become negative.

'Someone in their own Ultraworld, or this one, could think and jump into an original finite universe, one which stops. Never reaches infinity, in that case we might think they fall back into their base world, their Ultraworld, or this one, wherever they came from, or they might not.'

Nigel thought, and continued,

'But why when time ends in their finite universe shouldn't time not end for them? They would stop, cease to be.'



But if they created a new world which looped like the integer overflow loops, time wouldn't stop, just begin again'.

'Better then than stopping, ceasing to be.' said Billy.

There was a pause, Nigel's expression changed, he spoke,

'No! no, worse! once round one loop they would be trapped for eternity.' Nigel said.

'Why trapped,' Billy asked, then answered his own question, 'oh I see, once round the loop if they didn't jump out in the first loop, the others being identical they can never jump out of it back into the real reality, their Ultraworld, or wherever they came from. Trapped in an endless loop they could never escape!'

He continued,

'So, they must avoid making a looping universe.'

'But how do they know, how do we know looping never takes place, how can we know?' Nigel said.

'A risk, they could though jump out before the loop, or before time stops.' said Billy.

'Very risky, they would never see it coming. And in all of this they would always know their world was a fake, like a computer game? Very risky, but eventually boring, unless disaster befell them.' said Nigel.

'So, they might be able to enter their world not knowing it wasn't real, that would do.' said Billy, and thought,

'But then they would be unable to jump out of any difficulty, or ever, so they would fix a time limit to bail them out.'

'But...' began Nigel, Billy interrupted, 'But if at the limit, say 999,



it just ran over to 000, 001, 002, they would be trapped. Or if the world stops at 999 they might also. Could we find out?’

he paused,

‘Hell no!’

‘I seem to remember a film where this sort of thing happened.’ Billy said.

‘Inception produced by Christopher Nolan, starred Leonardo DiCaprio.’ Nigel said, adding, ‘And the guy in the deep dream became trapped because he doesn’t know it’s a dream, so metaphysics from a Hollywood movie, good job Catherine Mulberry isn’t here.’

Billy continued,

‘If someone or a group could do the same, if they changed their really real, their Ultraworld. If they changed this to a repeating universe, at the change there would be a split between their world and the other. They could split reality with one which is the version they were in and anyone else who joined them, the version endlessly repeating, and another which did not.

They would know their world was infinite because it looped. But their world would be The Eternal Return of the Same,’ said Billy, ‘the most extreme form of nihilism. Endless unchangeable existence, Hell.’

Again, he thought and continued.

‘But maybe they could change this and escape before the first loop was completed.’

‘Not if it’s their base world, their really real Ultraworld, they would forever fall back into the loop from wherever they went.’ said Nigel.



The cat was still not interested.

‘Hold on,’ said Nigel ‘let’s think. The alternative, If the Ultraworld is infinite then all probabilities must already exist, but our Bodmin adventure and the café seemed new, and original, if it’s not then... Billy can you will a “Return of the Jedi” but make it different?’

No time passed and Billy replied, ‘Yes! I can.’

‘This is a bigger problem than I thought, you seem to have broken infinity, I need to plan my Blue Pullman ride before it’s too late.’ Nigel said.



CHAPTER SIXTY THREE: THE BLUE PULLMAN

The Blue Pullman train service in the U.K. ran from 1960 to 1973 and consisted of diesel multiple units in a distinctive livery, ran by a separate company to British Railways. A Pullman service is of a higher standard of luxury than even first class. Trains ran from Swansea, Cardiff and Bristol to London Paddington, a service from Kings Cross to Manchester and one from Wolverhampton via Birmingham Snow Hill which also ran to Paddington.

Travelling at 90 mph, the Birmingham service ran from Birmingham Snow Hill at 7.30 AM, stopping at Solihull and Leamington Spa and arriving at Paddington at 9.30 AM. A second train left Birmingham Snow Hill at 2.30 PM.

The return services ran from Paddington at 12.10 PM, arriving at Snow Hill at 2.05 PM, and another left at 4.50 PM arriving at Snow Hill at 6.55 PM.

Nigel's first love was not particle physics but the Great Western Railway, both as a private company and as a part of British Railways post nationalization from the 1940s onwards. To travel on The Blue Pullman service was a particular dream of his. And now he could achieve this. Though the idea of being a driver was magical he realised not only could he not drive a car, but a high-speed train was out of the question. So, he would have to be a passenger. He had old timetables so decided on the 4.50 from Paddington to Snow Hill.

He had to do some research on the cost and how he should dress. The money threw him at first, as it was in the early 60s, and the UK currency was at that time not decimal. He chose the early 60s as there would still be steam trains running on British Railways, it would be a bonus. So, he had to learn to translate in his head the 'old' money into the decimal. The pound stayed the same, but rather than 100 'p', pence to the pound in the decimal system there was 240 'd', or old pennies to the pound. 12 pennies in a shilling and 20 shillings in a pound. Ten shillings, 10s being 50 new p or pence, 50p.



Prices shown thus 2/6. Two shillings and six pence. And a single coin of 2/6 was a half-a-crown. 4 half-a-crowns to the pound. He practised a few times and was ready to go.

The journey would cost 10 shillings, 10/-.

But he remembered the experience at The Bad Faith Café of the real waiter and the Non-Player Characters, NPCs. He decided he might test this as before, embarrassing but he was curious as he had been thinking of The Bad Faith Café and its consequences for those making these differing realities.

He had thought about the theory. It was based on the many-worlds interpretation (MWI) of the physicist Hugh Everett. Everett solved the Quantum Mechanics problem, avoiding the paradox of the alive and dead cat prior to observation, the famous Schrödinger's cat thought experiment. In Everett's account at the moment of the Quantum event the universe splits, in the case of the cat, one universe in which it is dead and one universe in which it's alive.

Nigel assumed that the moment he made his free-will world, it split from the real world, but others might have done similar so they would share that world.

One can change or make one's own new reality, so can others in the many-worlds interpretation (MWI) of the physicist Hugh Everett. If this created new world was the same for some real people, real people would be in it, as well as NPCs. Real people could share a fabricated new reality if they wished.

So, there was still shared realities, as in the case if the Café and Bodmin Moor episode. He must avoid the embarrassment of the test in the cafe, so he designed one of his own, rather than prod people with forks he would give them a tiny electric shock. He could for instance charge his body, or a pen or book with static. Then from a handshake, or someone picking up his pen or book, if the other person was real, they would receive a tiny shock,



unless that is they were his creation, an NPC, in which case he would get the shock. People often get such shocks and do not blame anyone, unlike prodding them with a fork. Perfect he thought. His theory was that willed realities might contain many other real people if the willed reality was popular.

He arrived outside Paddington Station in a faux 1961, he bought his ticket, suspecting the ticket office was staffed by NPCs, who would want to do such a job, yet they might? The station was marvellous, with porters in uniforms, and steam locomotives he knew so well. GWR engines, Castle, and Hall Class locos. And there was the sleek blue of the Blue Pullman. He walked towards it and a guard opened the door for him. Nigel touched the handle, the guard's hand twitched.

'So, a real guard.' thought Nigel.

The Blue Pullman glided out of the station. The carriage was spacey with individual tables and table lights. Waiters appeared with menus. As the waiter handed Nigel the menus, Nigel dropped his pen, a vintage Montblanc. On picking it up for him the waiter shook his hand.

'So, a real waiter.' thought Nigel.

Nigel looked at the menus and began calculating. Though he had plenty of 'old money' with him. And he had arrived wearing a 1960s grey suit and trilby hat, from Burton tailoring. Everyone back then wore hats. When he had entered the carriage, a steward had helped him take off his coat and had whisked it away together with his hat. He relaxed in his seat and looked at the menu.

The Menu:

Scotch Smoked Salmon with Lemon Wedges 7/6
Chilled Fruit Juices: Pineapple 1/6 Tomato 1/6 Orange 1/6
Crème Argenteuil with Golden Croûtons 1/6



From the Grill

*English Lamb Cutlets 8/6

*Scotch Salmon 8/6

*Fillet Steak 12/6

*Barbecued chicken a L’Americaine 8/6

*Price of main dishes includes: Parsley, New and Olivette Potatoes, Sweet Corn, Baby Carrots and Broccoli Mornay

Cold Buffet: Salmon Mayonnaise or
Half a Chicken with dressed Salads 8/6

Fresh Fruit Salad with Dairy Cream Ice or
Crème Chantilly 2/-

Continental and English Cheese Tray 2/-

Coffee 8d

He decided on the Fillet Steak, no starter. He next looked at the wine list, which was a bit of a shock.

Wine List

Sherry	Glass
Medium Dry	2/6
Ammontillado No. 4	2/6
Fino No. & Pale Dry	2/6
Walnut Brown	2/6

Aperitifs

Gin and Lime Orange or Lemon	2/6
Gin and Bitters	2/3
Gin and Vermouth	
French or Italian	1/9



Tomato Juice Cocktail	Baby Bottle 1/9		
Pineapple Juice Cocktail	1/-		
Wines:			
Bordeaux Red	Bott 1/2	Bott 1/4	Bott
Medoc	13/-	7/-	3/9
Château Palmer, Magaux 1955	20/-	10/6	–
Bordeaux White	Bott 1/2	Bott 1/4	Bott
Graves	12/-	6/6	3/6
Sauternes	15/-	8/-	–
Burgundy Red	Bott 1/2	Bott 1/4	Bott
Macon	13/-	7/-	3/9
Beaune	20/-	10/6	–
Burgundy	Bott 1/2	Bott 1/4	Bott
Vin Rose	13/-	7/-	–
Burgundy White	Bott 1/2	Bott 1/4	Bott
Chablis	17/6	9/-	–
Champagne	Bott 1/2	Bott 1/4	Bott
Ernest Irroy Extra Sec 1953	47/-6	24/6	
Perrier-Jouet	40/-	20/6	11/-



Alsatian	Bott 1/2 Bott 1/4 Bott
Sylvaner	16/- 8/6 --
Spanish Bott	Bott 1/2 Bott 1/4 Bott
Spanish Graves	10/6 5/6 3/-
Spanish Burgundy	10/6 5/6 3/-
South African	Bott 1/2 Bott 1/4 Bott
Parrl Amber Hock	10/6 5/6 3/-
Australian	Bott 1/2 Bott 1/4 Bott
Emu Burgundy	10/6 5/6 3/-
Port	Glass
Tawny	2/6
Very Fine Old	3/-
Liqueurs	Miniature
Van der Hum	4/9
Cointreau	4/3
Drambuie	3/9
Benedictine	3/9
Bolskummel	3/6
Cherry Heering	3/-
Spirits	Measure
Cognac Vieux Maison 30 years old	3/-



Brandy	3/-
Gin	2/3
Whisky- Royal Scot	2/6

Beer, Stout and Lager

	Bottle
Bass, Worthington	1/7
Double Diamond	1/7
Guinness	1/7
Mackeson's Stout	1/7
Whitbread's Pale Ale	1/4
Barclay's Pilsner	1/9
Graham's 'Skol'	1/9
Tennent's Lager	1/9
Tuborg Lager	1/9
Carlsberg Lager	1/9

Cider

Cider	10d
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Mineral Water Baby	Split
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Schweppes' Aerated Water 6d	8d
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Appollinaris	6d
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Vichy Celestins	1/9
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It seems back in the 60s in England drink was more popular than food. He also noticed people were smoking in the carriage. This was a very different world, he thought.

He ordered a quarter bottle of Medoc and the fillet steak at 12/6! The waiter took his order, and gave him a wink, and whispered,

'My first time, even the cook is real, it seems no NPCs? Oh, and I'll bring the bill when you are done, no cheques or card, cash only!'



He gave a slight chuckle on the word ‘card’.

So, thought Nigel, he was right, where wills shared the same reality, they really shared it. He wondered how to get to drive a train, maybe he would need some apprenticeship. Though realities could be willed, not the reality of the experience, which included learning skills. Like the character in the film *Groundhog Day*, skills had to be learnt. He would talk about this with Billy and message Hope. He was then pleased with his static electric shock test. And then he saw in his mind Billy, and he was saying,

‘And don’t you sometimes get static shocks off people in the real world’.

This annoyed him and for a brief moment blamed Billy, until he realised this was his thought!

He watched out of the window, England in the early 1960s. No high-rise flats, no motorways. But grimy with all the steam trains and houses still being heated by burning coal fires. Only a few aircraft seen flying above, only two propeller driven Vickers Viscounts. The villages were small, yet to have the new housing estates built around them, likewise the towns. The date of his journey also meant that he was travelling pre the Beeching cuts to the railways, which closed many miles of branch lines and stations. So, he could glimpse the long vanished branch lines at Banbury, and other stations, and that the tracks between Paddington and Snow Hill were now not just two, but four, as back in the 1950s and early 60s, rail was a major form of passenger and goods transport. A Britannia class steam loco passed hauling finished cars from the Austin factory at Longbridge. He arrived at Snow Hill station, the great iron arches, not yet demolished and turned into a car park. Leaving the station as he entered the contemporary world, the Victorian station edifice disappeared and then he was aware of being a tad overdressed in overcoat, suit, and trilby, but was soon in a taxi going home. He was careful not to try and pay for the cab ride in old money, so used his credit card.



CHAPTER SIXTY FOUR: THE HALL OF THE MOUNTAIN KING

That night the three, Hope, Nigel, and Billy, met in another reality to talk things over. Billy had chosen a venue, a large room, a great hall, with heavy Rococo gold decoration, elaborate furniture, a massive candelabra. There were bookcases, beautiful wood panelling and mirrors in the walls. It could have been from a Russian palace or something from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Windows looked onto formal gardens with a fountain. A log fire burnt in a large fireplace, it was dusk, the room illuminated by candles and the huge candelabra. They sat around a table which had drinks and vol-au-vents.

Hope remarked that it was a little OTT, Nigel laughed, saying, 'It's The Hall of the Mountain King!'

'We have some problems,' Billy began, 'not people recreating events of the past, they can't alter the past, but they can simulate it like Nigel did, or simulate other futures. We could see millions or billions of alternative worlds, a chaos. And this could create infinite loops from which they cannot escape. And then there is the problem of novelty in a world of all existing probabilities.'

'Maybe not millions or billions of alternative worlds, a chaos,' Hope said, 'yes at first, but these groups would coalesce I suspect.'

'How and why?' said Billy.

'Well in the main people are social animals, people like other people, but obviously they don't like being slaves. I suspect then after experimenting they will tend to coalesce, as living a fantasy with NPCs would become boring. For some it would be maybe OK. And the loop problem is only a problem if one is aware of it. It's not a problem for everyone, not for Andie MacDowell, only Bill Murray in Groundhog day. But add to that in these new realities, when one returns to the base reality, the original, no time has elapsed. But things will have changed and are very



different.’ Hope replied.

‘How and why?’ asked Billy.

‘I see,’ said Nigel, eating a vol-au-vent, ‘because our experience has changed.’

‘Right,’ Hope said, ‘and I suspect we would get to in effect a steady state, to use an old phrase, The Best of all Possible Worlds. I imagine for most a comfortable lifestyle with others. And this will take no time at all.’

Hope was correct, so it was for many, the real world became like the fiction in the Matrix, a late 20th century world without the poverty, totalitarian regimes, and crime. Like the simulation in the movie, but real.

But of course, there was drift, those wanting differing life styles, but no longer competing for the same resources, the same realities. And these new societies were strange without these constraints, it ruined the travel industry, but prevented religious and political factionalism. It was in effect the same as a technological singularity, a new singularity of free-will.

It was perfect, ‘The Best of all Possible Worlds’.



CHAPTER SIXTY FIVE: THE BOY

The boy sat on the toilet downstairs in number 85 Colonial Road. Behind him a frosted window. The walls were a beige gloss painted brick, the floor flat dull quarry tiles. To his left on the great plain of the floor the armies of the 'bunks' assembled. To the right those of the 'ranks', two opposing armies. Slowly they marched towards each other, gaining speed until the first rows of soldiers met, and clashed, in a never ending combat. So, this war was fought on a daily basis with no victor or vanquished.

The small indentation where a puddle formed by the coal hole outside number 85 Colonial Road had horsetails growing around it, it was the Middle Devonian, 380 million years old. A period dominated by the fish of the seas and rivers, but here the land was a profusion of primitive plants, the giant horsetails. The amphibians, reptiles and dinosaurs yet to establish themselves. But one could wait, and watch, hope and wonder. There was nothing much of purpose in the front garden. Only swirling gnats by the front door and the trees across the road, the source and creators of thunder.

The back garden too had horsetails, but spanned aeons with lush rhubarb, tall purple irises, a secret wild sweet pea, and trees which know the sea. The age of the dinosaurs was commenced.

Here also the missiles were prepared that was to create the Cuba crisis. Which almost ended in nuclear war between the USSR and NATO. It was here on the table by the French windows that the nuclear bomb was designed. Tall boy, with a tube at each end of which were two pieces of Uranium, not of critical mass, but once brought together in a sudden explosion would create the chain reaction of the Atomic Bomb. Explosives were important. Charcoal could be manufactured, Sulphur and Potassium Nitrate bought from the chemists, for the 'purposes' of a disease on roses and pickling. Static tests were run, but never a final launch of an ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile). These missiles were stored in the coal space off the kitchen. Being second generation, powered by sugar mixed with jetex fuel capsules.



The first generation was a single rocket powered by soot and made from zinc.

Later devices, such as the Swan Device were kept in the pantry. How the tablets of truth were made, followed on from the period of map making, and the creation of the electromagnetic spectrum. And the threats from Venus were combatted, that of the nuclear destruction of the earth by atomic rays.

The Boy noticed patterns on the tiles in the downstairs toilet, actually the only toilet in the house, patterns perhaps made by the great battles, and not people's shoes. Taking grease proof paper, he took rubbings of these. 173 in total.



CHAPTER SIXTY SIX: ET IN ARCADIA EGO

‘It won’t work.’ said Nigel.

The three, Hope, Billy and Nigel were back in the Baroque palace, as before, an evening, candles and firelight, drinks, and vol-au-vents. Only Nigel had called the meeting, and for want of imagination used the same setting. He had changed, even in the low light a change could be seen.

‘What won’t work?’ Hope replied.

‘The new singularity of free-will.’ Nigel said. ‘It won’t work because of The Fermi Paradox.’

‘Why, how can this affect the singularity, a world of total free-will?’ Hope asked.

‘It can’t affect it, that’s not the point, the paradox still exists.’

Billy was silent, ‘I’m confused.’ Hope said.

Nigel was excited and now speaking fast.

‘The paradox, The Fermi Paradox, you know, given the size of the universe it should be teeming with life but it’s not. Well before, in our virtual world it was the harvesters of life that accounted for no nearby intelligent life, they culled all such. But now they are gone, but still no other intelligent life can be found. I’ve tried and tried to find out why, then I saw it, the slow erasure of the future.’

At this point he paused, and in a very unusual move, Nigel poured himself a large vintage Napoleon Brandy. Hope wasn’t drinking, Billy was nursing a Laphroaig whiskey and looking deep into the fire.

Hope was waiting, then she spoke,



‘How does the Best of All Possible Worlds create the Fermi Paradox?’

Nigel was absent-mindedly looking into his brandy glass.

‘Dialectics,’ said Billy, ‘there is now nothing negative, nothing powerfully negative in The Best of All Possible Worlds, and without a dialectic nothing can change. This universe is sterile.’

He paused.

‘Tell us about the trains.’ Billy said.

At this Nigel stopped looking into his brandy glass and began again, Hope looked puzzled.

‘Yes, the trains, you know I love trains,’ Hope nodded. ‘well,’ he continued, ‘I’ve spent what was many hours going on journeys, on the foot plate and stuff since the free-will singularity.’

He took another sip.

‘And I got bored. So, I thought about The Fermi Paradox, I could will the instruments I needed, and came up with an almost certain conclusion, we are alone in the universe.’

‘But why?’ asked Hope.

‘No dialectics.’ Billy repeated himself.

‘Yes,’ said Nigel, ‘and first it’s just boredom, but that creates a pessimism, given this free-will, no surprises, so first a pessimism begins, which turns to nihilism. So, no brave new worlds.’

He took another sip and continued,

‘If you look at demographics and populations, even accounting for separate realities, the free-will of people to create their own reality, they do, and get bored, no struggle, then pessimism



begins, which turns to nihilism. I even found lots who create unknowingly universes with different constants, and on entering destroy themselves. It's because they become nihilists, not bothered, lotus eaters.'

He paused, then continued,

'Remember our conversation in the garden about willing realities, and the danger of willing finite realities.'

'Yes.' Billy said.

'And how dangerous it could be, well maybe not to everyone, unless they too wanted this, but certainly to the individual. And it's a one way move, you only need to wish it was all over once, and it will be forever, or just wish that an experience would repeat.' said Nigel.

'How do you know?' asked Hope.

'Some leave notes, friends and families find them.' Nigel said. 'There are thousands going missing, and it's an exponential rise.' he added. 'Heaven becomes Hell, The Best of all Possible Worlds, the worst. Or then maybe they end up in endless loops they can't escape?'

He took another drink.

'And then there is the infinity paradox, if all possibilities have become real from the virtual, there can be no novelty, but it seems there is.'

He took another drink.

'We need a way to limit the virtual, but how?'

'And...' he paused with a tremble in his voice, 'Look at me.'

For the first time Hope and Billy looked carefully at Nigel, and



expressions of shock and perhaps even horror was in their looking. Before they could say anything, he continued.

‘Yes, I’ve aged, and aged considerably more than you two. You see it might seem when we will our fantasy and live in it no time passes in our base reality, and that is true. But we experience time in our fantasy life, so what is an instant for the base reality can be an hour, a day, a week a year, or even years in the other reality. I should have realised, similar to the twin paradox in relativity, but reversed. You two have aged a month or two, I’ve spent time in other worlds, it comes to almost twenty years.’

There was a long pause. Minutes passed.

‘So, what can we do?’ Hope asked.

‘For me and the others, nothing, time spent is time spent, but we need to do something.’

Then Billy spoke. ‘Et In Arcadia ego.’

There was another pause then Hope said,

‘Even in Arcadia, there am I?’ translating with a question.

‘It’s from a painting by Nicolas Poussin, one of my favourite artists, Nicolas Poussin, painted in the classical French Baroque style. And a particular painting depicts a group of shepherds looking at a tomb. Arcadia is an unobtainable utopia in Greek myth. And in short, the idea is even there, there is death.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Hope, softly, adding, ‘for everyone?’

‘Well, some will just become shadows, or shades.’ Billy said.

‘How is Poussin of help?’ Hope asked.

‘It identifies our problem, and a solution, in his case the devil, in ours a god, so well maybe not directly, it’s just something I



remember of a strange story, The Priest, the Painter and the Devil.'



CHAPTER SIXTY SEVEN: FRANÇOIS-BÉRENGER SAUNIÈRE

Billy continued,

‘François-Bérenger Saunière was a Catholic priest in the village of Rennes-le-Château, in the Aude on the French Spanish border. He was poor, but sometime in the 1880s he found an inscription which caused him to travel to Paris and obtain an illustration of the Poussin painting. On his return it seems he was reported to be digging at night around the village. And then he came into a large amount of money, sufficient to pay for renovations to the church, buying land and even building a Villa, at a cost of around 9 million pounds in today’s money.’

‘And,’ Billy continued, ‘the rumours involved included the idea of riches gained by Poussin and their whereabouts given in the painting. A relief of which appears on Poussin’s tomb in Rome. These involve the Blanche of Castile, the Knights Templar, the Merovingians, the Cathars, and the treasures of the temple of Solomon. Those which somehow became treasures of the Visigoths, believed to contain the Ark of the Covenant, and the candlesticks in Jerusalem’s temple, the menorah. And the Visigoths had an extensive empire, including Visigothic Hispania in 700 AD, before the Muslim conquest. This is the very area which the landscape of the Poussin depicts. The church of Rennes-le-Château where a Visigothic pillar acted as a plinth for a statue of the Virgin, commissioned by the priest, who also commissioned the statue of the Devil supporting the Holy Water Stoup. And it was from such a Visigothic pillar that rumour has it he first found an inscription which prompted his trip to Paris to acquire a print of the painting, *Et In Arcadia ego*. A painting which depicts the recognisable landscape of around the village of Rennes-le-Château.’

‘How do you know all this.’ Hope said.

Nigel gave her a look.

‘Stupid question.’ she said, a pause then.



‘I can’t see how this helps?’ Hope said.

‘Only a God can save us.’ said Billy, ‘It’s from Heidegger, I know an unrepentant Nazi, but influenced Sartre...’

‘An unrepentant Communist!’ Hope responded.

‘I think he may have repented,’ Billy replied, ‘but the line is from an interview Heidegger gave in the German magazine *Der Spiegel* in 1966. I have some of it here.’

‘You came prepared as usual.’ Hope said.

‘Let me read you some of it,’ Billy said, opening his Moleskine notebook, in the fireplace sparks flickered and danced in the darkening room.

‘A question, from the journalist,

“Now the question naturally arises: Can the individual man in any way still influence this web of fateful circumstance? Or, indeed, can philosophy influence it? Or can both together influence it, insofar as philosophy guides the individual, or several individuals, to a determined action?”

Heidegger’s reply,

“If I may answer briefly, and perhaps clumsily, but after long reflection: philosophy will be unable to effect any immediate change in the current state of the world. This is true not only of philosophy but of all purely human reflection and endeavour. Only a god can save us. The only possibility available to us is that by thinking and poetizing we prepare a readiness for the appearance of a god, or for the absence of a god in our decline, insofar as in view of the absent god we are in a state of decline.”

So, there you have it.’ Billy finished.



‘But how do we get a God?’ asked Hope.

‘We can’t.’ said Nigel, giving Hope a shock. ‘Our reality is flat, everyone is equal, there is no hierarchy...’

‘A rhizome.’ muttered Hope.

‘But we know of three worlds where hierarchies of Aeons, god like beings exist, the worlds created by the Neith – the reality creator machine in Atum, Western Australia. Where there are hierarchies leading to The One.’ Nigel said, ‘And I think I see what Billy is hinting at,’ he gave a wry smile, ‘We have three worlds where there is order and balance, but a dynamics also, so it might be a better environment for humans after all. It would at least be a temporary solution to this flat universe, a place of rescue.’

‘How do we get people there?’ Billy asked, with a glint in his eye.

Hope beat Nigel to it, ‘We become pied pipers.’



CHAPTER SIXTY EIGHT: THE PIED PIPERS

‘How are we going to reach 8 billion people.’ asked Hope.

‘If we each get another 3 then 19 iterations will cover over 10 billion.’ Nigel said.

‘And that assumes a one to one, I mean how long does it take for news to become global, especially now people can no longer be censored.’ said Billy,

‘We are Demiuges of the three universes, and can confer with that Aeon, which is directly above us, it can be done.’ he continued. ‘And those that wish can enter into these universes which are hierarchical.’

‘One thought,’ said Hope, ‘are these universes like the Hotel California?’

Nigel looked confused.

Hope continued, now singing,

‘Welcome to the Hotel California
Such a lovely place, such a lovely place
Such a lovely face
They livin’ it up at the Hotel California
What a nice surprise, what a nice surprise
Bring your alibis
Mirrors on the ceiling, the pink champagne on ice
And she said, "We are all just prisoners here of our own device"
And in the master’s chambers they gathered for the feast
They stab it with their steely knives, but they just can’t kill the beast
Last thing I remember, I was running for the door
I had to find the passage back to the place I was before
"Relax," said the night man, "We are programmed to receive
You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave....’



It's a song by The Eagles.'

All three just looked at each other, there was it seemed no answer to this yet, would those in the three universes be able to check out or not?

'Well, we can only offer the option,' said Hope, 'the alternative is grim, very grim, suicide, real or mental.'

The three pied pipers used names suggested by Billy for these three new realities, Norse names for earth. Jörð, Fjörgyn and Hlóðyn, or J,F,H for short. It turned out there were many Earth like planets in each reality, and life. And though people had free-will, it soon became obvious that the structures given were preferable to the chaos of absolute hedonism. In a way, Billy mused, the nightmare of the movie, *The Forbidden Planet* was true. Only here it wasn't other Freudian IDs, that annihilated the inhabitants of the new reality, it was the individuals themselves, their absolute personal freedom which created their destruction. He thought of those who had achieved great fame only to kill themselves.

And the passage from *Hamlet* came into his mind,

'What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, In form and moving how express and admirable, In action how like an Angel, In apprehension how like a god, The beauty of the world, The paragon of animals. And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me; no, nor Woman neither...'

The process was exponential, and it was only a matter of days before the old universe was all but empty. On returning to it there was progressively little other real people, and unlike NPCs in computer games no challenging algorithms, no surprises.

Meanwhile back in Jörð, Fjörgyn and Hlóðyn, (J,F,H) with its hierarchical structures real science began, and art, poetry, music, and exploration. And with exploration new worlds were



discovered, and some of these had life, and some had intelligent life.

‘So,’ said Billy, the three were back meeting in the Baroque palace, as before, an evening, candles and firelight, drinks and vol-au-vents.

‘we can see that Star Trek was real after all.’

‘And,’ said Hope, ‘In a Galaxy far far away...’

These worlds had Earths very similar to the ‘real’ but being three universes with many inhabited and inhabitable planets could easily accommodate the 8 billion. As for the authoritarian regimes, these had dissolved under the free-will reality. And because of the reality of hierarchies, theories once again became laws to be discovered. Art was no longer free expression or political action. The term new-realism was used, and ideas of inspirational works.



CHAPTER SIXTY NINE: THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

The three had regular meetings, so far always in the Baroque Palace, as usual, an evening, candles and firelight, drinks, and vol-au-vents. The only difference now being a copy of Nicolas Poussin's painting 'Et In Arcadia ego' hanging over the fire place.

'It blends in well with the Rococo style of the room, don't you think.' said Billy looking at the painting.

'Is this about the re territorialization, merger plans?' asked Hope.

'A new arcadia of the four universes, no.' said Billy.

'Is this about the "enders"?' said Nigel.

'Yes.' replied Billy.

'Have I missed something?' asked Hope.

'Seems so.' said Billy, he continued, 'all is not well in our three worlds, it seems people can check out, even go back to the original universe if they wish.'

'Well, isn't that good? They are not prisoners in the Hotel California, no matter how good it is, they can if they want checkout. And who are these "enders"?' asked Hope.

Nigel explained that he and Billy had also both independently visited the old real universe now almost deserted of life, certainly intelligent life.

'We did find a strange group of twelve living in Central Park. They came from Jörð and Fjörgyn, not Hlóðyn, your world.'

'Why?' said Hope.

'They had been visiting old earth, and were planning to destroy



it, as they could use their combined free-will. They had an idea that by destroying all matter in the old universe, including themselves, all that would be left would be energy, and so create a new big bang singularity. Without mass, no space or time, so BOOM!’ explained Nigel.

‘So, like some odd cult, wanting to sacrifice themselves in order to create a new universe?’ Hope said.

‘Yep. And maybe be like Gods? Masters of their own creation. I think they thought of themselves as fundamental beings.’ Nigel said, ‘But that means the others in the Hotels, J,F,H, can’t check out, they will have nowhere to go. They will then effectively be prisoners.’

‘That’s not good then.’ said Hope.

‘But it didn’t work.’ Nigel said.

‘So why didn’t it work, why couldn’t they will the end of the world as we know it?’ asked Hope.

‘No idea.’ Nigel said.

‘85 Colonial Road.’ Billy said.

Dan Dare was the hero of a series of science fiction stories which appeared in the Eagle comic, ‘Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future’. With Digby his batman Dan tackled various threats to the Earth, he being part of Space Fleet. The series was known for its complex plots, some running over a year, Arthur C. Clarke was an early advisor, the series was also noted for the high quality of its illustrations and attention to scientific and technological details of the near future. The chief villain being The Mekon, ruler of the Treens, who resembles Gallaxhar from the movie *Monsters Vs Aliens*. ‘Dan Dare’ appears in the lyrics of The Pink Floyd, David Bowie and Elton John, there was even a punk band called The Mekons.



The boy was reading his comic, *The Eagle*, whose front cover always had the first part of that week's adventures of Dan Dare. He stopped reading and opened the French windows onto the back garden of 85 Colonial Road, it was sometime in the early 1960s. Outside of 85, and in the present, the road, Bordesley Green, in fact most of the planet was deserted. But back in the 85 Colonial Road of the 60s there was just the boy. He walked down the concrete path, past the flower beds to where the two devices made from the tiles were. The first, *The Device*, which had slowed the race towards technological oblivion, and the other which had made the real replacement for what was the simulated world. The real world which now the twelve were seeking to destroy. Both devices had served their purpose. So, he dismantled both in order to make a new *DEVICE*, a larger and more powerful version of the first. A destructor which was a creator. It would be a massive spiral Swiss roll device; it needed to be to overcome the Mekon. But before it could do that, it needed to save not just this planet but all the others. So, he began building the device,

'Occupy the 12 and get things back to normal while they are busy. Then the Mekon.' He mused.

The twelve 'enders' meanwhile frustrated at their inability to destroy the universe 'practised' on a few buildings. The Empire State was easy, but they failed with the Chrysler Building for some unknown reason. As night was falling over Central Park, they looked up to see the first stars. They thought they should try to destroy a few of these stars, for not counting the Chrysler Building, everything else was easy, the Guggenheim, MOMA... various high rise apartment blocks. They decided it would be cool to witness this more closely, so they formed a circle facing inwards, they wore long capes with hoods, modelling themselves on the 9 riders from *The Lord of The Rings*. Turning to face outward silently they altered their location to that of Deneb, the first star they would destroy. Was it a coincidence that Deneb was a star in the constellation of Cygnus, The Swan. They would swallow it with a black hole of their making. Destroying buildings was reducing them to dust, to destroy all



the matter in the universe they would need a massive black hole. The attempt in Central Park to create such a massive black hole had failed, so this was a practise on a smaller scale. They raised their hands in a dramatic fashion, dramatic to the extent of being kitsch. The black hole appeared, and promptly exploded. They were flung back across time and space to crash into Central Park. Stunned, they didn't notice the three figures watching them.

'What's to be done?' asked Nigel.

'Who do they think they are in that get up?' Hope said.

'Like from The Lord of the Rings.' said Nigel.

'What a brilliant idea.' Billy said.

There was a flash of white lightening.

The scene of a ruined New York, save for the Chrysler Building changed, the three and the twelve were now on a flat topped mountain, looking down on what was once New York. But now it had changed, it was in the main like the great city of Minas Tirith from The Lord of the Rings, but it also had features of the towering structures of the planet Vulcan from Star Trek. Also, massive cathedral like structures. The sky now had two suns, and a much larger moon, which had rings like Saturn. In the sky there were spaceships, similar to those in Star Wars, but multi hulled and bristling with guns. Smaller vessels flitting between them and 'Minas Tirith' below. The world was now inhabited. They were surrounded by distant mountains, and wooded valleys, several active volcanoes far off. Rivers and great waterfalls.

'I think someone might have overdone things a tad.' Billy said to the other two.

'You mean Billy this wasn't you?' said Hope.

'Not me!' said Nigel.



‘I’ve an idea who.’ thought Billy.

Then came a loud voice, the twelve not seeing the three were marvelling at the scene.

‘Behold the 12 wands of power,’

They were very similar to those wands in Harry Potter, they danced around the circle of the twelve then shot off in different directions.

‘And so, the quest begins.’ the voice continued.

‘Not swords, or rings, or even light sabres or infinity stones but he, or who or what settled on wands.’ thought Nigel.

The bemused twelve looked around the plateau, still not seeing the three, but now noticed that from this plateau on the mountain top 12 paths led down the mountain in different directions. And it was, with solemn steps each of the twelve cloaked figures took one of the paths.

Now Hope, Billy and Nigel were back in the Baroque Palace, as usual, an evening, candles and firelight, drinks, and vol-au-vents.

‘What a brilliant idea.’ Nigel said, sipping his Napoleon brandy.

‘Whose, yours?’ said Hope.

‘I said not mine.’ said Nigel.

‘Or mine.’ said Billy.

‘Well certainly not mine, rather childish fantasy stuff.’ said Hope.

‘Well perhaps you are right, childish fantasy stuff, but a real adventure,’ Billy said, ‘and it gives the twelve a purpose and responsibility. Yes, a child might well dream up such a world.’



CHAPTER SEVENTY: THE JOURNEY OF JANUS

The first thing that Janus did was to lower the hood of his cowl. The reason was simple, now having two faces he could see the path before him and at the same time look back to the top of the mountain, now deserted. The path was of shingle with high grassy banks on either side, and it ran in a shallow zig-zag down the mountain. He guessed if not for these banks he would probably be able to see two of his colleagues descending also, to his left and right. He could now remarkably see the vista in front, and also see back to the mountain top. The mighty starship hung silently in the sky, and one of the suns was setting. Looking forward he noticed that thin birch like, or rowan like trees were starting to appear. He walked on, and slowly the trees grew thicker and taller. Soon he was walking on a path through a deep forest of trees. Oak like trees with massive trunks having replaced the thinner birch and rowan.

His backward looking face made him turn, which was odd as there was no need. He thought he saw a shadow on the path. The forest was deep and dense, and though still light the path had dark shadows. He continued on his way, but his backwards facing face saw that he was being followed by some sort of creature. He stopped. So did the creature. It had four legs, a tail and head of a dog, or dog like creature. He walked on, the creature followed, gaining ground. He stopped again, it stopped, some 20 yards away. It was very like a dog, a wolfish greyhound, yet its coat was a luminescent sheen, like that of a starling's feathers. Its eyes were a deep blue, and its long thin tail ended in what looked like a peacock's feather 'eye'. It was a beautiful creature, it was sniffing the air, the scent of Janus. They both continued, and slowly but eventually the dog-creature drew alongside. On they walked deeper into the forest. Night drew on, but the stars were bright, and the moon was massive, so with this light the path could still be followed. At one point in the pitch black gap between the massive roots of an oak, eyes appeared. The dog-creature gave a snarl, and the eyes disappeared. They walked on, the dog-creature sure of itself, the man not so in the strange darkness. He thought a staff would be



useful, so stopped and searched the undergrowth, finally finding a straight branch of some 7 feet. All the time the dog-creature sat on the path watching. The man returned, feeling safer. He stood looking at the dog-creature and its beautiful coat, and before he could stop himself, he gently stroked the dog-creature's head. Then they continued their downward journey.

There were noises in the undergrowth, nocturnal animals, and the flapping of birds high in the tree branches. At one point a wild boar appeared in front of the two, both halted, the dog-creature bared its teeth, the man held out his staff, the stand-off lasted no more than a minute, the boar gave a grunt and walked off into the forest. The two continued, the ground now becoming level, and the path widening to become a track. A track which had wagon ruts in the soft verges.

The way continued for what was a mile, with other tracks joining it. The man guessed that carts would in daylight be fetching timber from the forest. And then before them was a high stockade of wood, with a gate. On the top of the stockade someone was sitting, they had a lamp burning. On seeing the two approach the figure rose and seemed to signal someone below, for then a small door in the gate was opened. 'The night watch' thought Janus, who thought it best to pull up his hood, a night traveller with a strange dog like creature was one thing, a traveller having two faces might prove too much. Actually, the gate man also wore a cowl with its hood up, and didn't speak, merely opened and shut the gate, almost as if either expecting the two night travellers, or that this was a common occurrence.

The two walked on through what was a small town of wood and brick buildings. At first of single and double stories. The road, and that was now what they walked on, was of cobble stones. It bent in a gentle downward curve, the buildings grew larger, some looked like shops, others warehouses. Every so often there was a lamp burning, but not a soul to be seen. Eventually the man could see that the town had a quay, with boats moored. Without thinking he walked down to the quay. There was a small sailing boat, open decked with a figure holding a lamp. It was



looking at the pair, and at a gang plank. Again, without speaking the man and dog-creature crossed onto the boat. The figure gestured towards a pile of blankets. The man, Janus, wrapped himself in them and fell asleep, as did the dog-creature at his feet. The figure pulled in the gang plank, untied the moorings, and set sail into the moonlit estuary.

The boat bumping into the small jetty awoke the man and dog-creature. It was a bright winter's morning. Apart from the jetty there were no buildings, but groups of people sitting around fires, some tents, a few carts, and donkeys. Children were playing, the smoke from the fires rising in the still air. As the man and dog-creature stretched, the gang plank was pushed across and the two disembarked. A small group were now standing looking at the two. A woman walked towards them. She calmly pulled down the hood from Janus, and looked at both faces, with the slightest of smiles, and her eyes shone. She turned to the now standing crowd, she spoke,

'It is he!'

The crowd smiled, some clapped, the children were jumping up and down shouting,

'It is he! It is He!'

The woman led Janus by the arm towards one of the fires,

'First you must eat and drink,' she said, then 'oh! To relieve yourself over there.' She pointed to a bush, the man and the dog-creature wandered over and did just that. On returning to the fire the woman showed Janus a seat and gave him a bowl of porridge mixed with honey, it was good. And fresh water, the dog-creature was given likewise.

The man began to speak, 'I don't...' but was interrupted by the woman, she spoke,

'We will show you the way, we know the legend of the beginning



of the new year, you will, we will, take you to your homeland which you are yet to know.' As he ate, Janus noticed that the others were packing up their tents, harnessing the donkeys, and putting out the fires. They sat and watched; a man approached with a nap sack. He gave it to Janus. It had in it a dish, crude knife and fork, a cloth and a leather water bottle, and a loaf of black bread.

'For the journey.' he said.

The group of about 30 adults, a few quite old and about 12 children began to set out on their journey, the woman at the head. They were all plainly dressed in hand woven clothes of wool, died in browns and greens. They had leather shoes, though some of the children were barefoot. They snaked up a gentle rise over moorland grasses. The man, Janus picked up his staff, slung the nap sack over his shoulder and began to follow, along with the dog-creature. A small boy, a straggler soon caught up, and held the hand of Janus, as he looked forwards to where he was going, and at the same time looked back to the jetty, and the departing boat with its boatman.

The boy, the other boy, was drawing a castle on a sheet of grease proof paper. It had a tower, and a gate house, and walls which enclosed a small hamlet.

The group were now on a moorland of gently swaying yellow grasses. Around mid-day they stopped, and fires were lit. Large Iron pots were slung over them, and a broth made with meat of some kind and root vegetables. There was also a pot of boiling water which contained herbs and mint. The boy led the man, Janus, and the dog-creature to a group, they gave him some broth and some tea in a metal cup, he was told to keep this, and a bowl for the dog-creature, who also ate some broth, but no tea, just some water. The children were playing, save the small boy who had adopted the man and dog-creature. Janus wondered if his parents were around, but it seems he was part of the family group he ate with. Things were packed up and the donkeys, people and children moved off, led by the woman.



They walked for hours, the suns were setting, and the moor sloped down to a forest. The woman came to the back of the travellers and spoke to the man.

‘We will camp on the edge of the forest tonight, two more days until we reach homeland.’

The man, Janus, had a thought, he had almost forgotten about the wand, his quest, would it be there at homeland, he thought? That night they had the broth again and some cheese with the black bread, also herb tea. Janus noticed the dog-creature trotted off into the forest, maybe for fresh food? The next morning, they had the same breakfast, though the dog-creature didn’t eat anything, probably fed well from the evening’s hunting.

They packed as before and entered the forest. The boy and the man following, with what must be his family group. The dog-creature was alert, then began running off into the wood, each time returning with a dead rabbit. By night fall he had caught 10 fat rabbits, which the band of travellers skinned, and spit roasted. The next day was breakfast as before, by mid-day they were clear of the forest, and walking on grassland again, though no longer moorland. Janus noticed the rabbit skins had been stretched over wooden frames and placed on the sides of the carts.

The weather had kept bright, a cold wind, but clear skies. The day passed as before, and in the evening the dog-creature continued its nocturnal hunting. So dawned the day of arrival. Janus not knowing what to expect. The landscape was gently rolling hills with copses. In the distance now the bulk of the castle could be seen, and its surrounding walls. About a mile away the company halted, and the woman who had led them walked back to speak to Janus, she was carrying a spade.

‘This is home,’ she said pointing to the castle, ‘and we cannot go home until you remove the last year.’



So, leaving the boy and his family group, carrying the spade in one hand and his staff in the other he walked towards the castle keep, the dog-creature at his side. As he walked, he noticed a few cows feeding on the grass, but saw no one else. The gate was open, and a drawbridge was down. Still no signs of human life. The area inside the castle grounds was large, large enough for a collection of small houses, with tiny gardens. Opposite the gate house the ground rose and there upon it was a massive stone keep. He entered through a large door of oak with complex wrought iron hinges. He went inside. The passageway opened into a large hall, the back of which had a throne on a raised dais. There was a figure hunched on this throne. It was dead. Looking at the clothes, it was the body of a great lord. Janus understood, it was the dead year, and what he had to do. Outside the castle enclosure he had noticed some hummocks, the burials of those previous lords he thought. He began to lift the figure, but noticed in its hand was a wand. He took it and placed it in his belt. He carried the figure out to where he would bury it, returning for the spade. All the time the dog-creature followed and watched. He dug the grave and buried the old year.

On returning to the castle, he noticed in the centre of the enclosure was a lawn. He took out the wand, waved it, and nothing happened. Frustrated by his quest, he pushed the wand into the centre of the lawn, picked up his staff and turned to walk back to the people waiting a mile away. But the dog-creature was no longer the old dog-creature he knew but was the size of a horse. With his staff in one hand and holding onto the dog-creature's mane, he rode back to the band of people, who on seeing him gave a great cheer. They followed him back to the castle, singing. As they entered the castle, they began to run to what must have been their deserted homes. But Janus was not watching any of this, he jumped down from the dog-creature and looked dumbfounded at where the wand had been, for now there was a tall and delicate tree, with silver trunk and branches. And lying around its base, armour, and a sword.

The woman had followed him and spoke.



‘You are lord of home. I am your housekeeper, and chronicler.’

‘So, I live here a year and then die?’ Janus said, sadly.

‘No,’ the woman said, ‘you live as long as you wish, and your life is a year that lasts as long as you wish.’

All the man could say was ‘Oh.’ And noticed the dog-creature was now back to the size of a dog. He patted its head.

As this was going on the folk had brought out benches and tables,

‘We will celebrate you, the new year.’ The woman said. And they did, the next few days saw much activity. The cows and other beasts, pigs, horses, ducks, and geese returned. As did some other folk who it seems had been living in the woods. Some built shacks outside the castle walls, then enlarged them in the following months.

The missing parents of the boy who accompanied Janus and the dog-creature on the walk to the castle had lost themselves in the forest at the end of the old year, and now like others could return to the castle, which they did. One day Janus noticed the boy playing with a toy, it was a spacecraft. He was curious, so asked the woman who led the people from the jetty to the castle about this.

She said, ‘You should go to the books.’

He asked where they were. She laughed and said, ‘In the cellar of the keep.’

So he went into the keep, and down into the cellar. Where he found an old woman, he asked her, ‘Where are the books?’

She laughed and said, ‘I am the books.’ And so, she told him the history of the folk who lived in the castle.



‘Many years ago, there were great nations who did battle. One nation fought by using thousands of men, whereas the other used powerful technology. Their technology became so great that intelligent machines fought battles, great flying machines which destroyed thousands of men, and then their cities. This while the makers of these machines enjoyed wealth and leisure. And so, the enemy was annihilated, these machines were no longer needed so they were destroyed. But some of us, yes, we were the victors, saw the destruction wrought on our fellows, so we turned away from technology, and sort another life, more simple, this life. And it came to pass that the years grew as long as the New Year wanted it too. Long springs, and summers, beautiful autumns, and at the years end we had festivals as the old year willingly died having lived a full and good life. And then the trek to the jetty to welcome in the New Year.’

She finished the history of The Homeland.

Now not all the great intelligent machines of destruction were destroyed. One, a ship of giant size, black and bristling with guns remained. It set about making itself secure and destroyed all those enjoying the hedonism of technology. It then sort to destroy all humans, even those who had sort to escape from such technology, so it was that the machine approached the castle. This would not be revenge, for it was logical, and the machine knew to allow other intelligences in the universe would be always a threat, so the logic was to seek intelligence and destroy it.

First it appeared as a black dot on the horizon. It moved slowly scanning the forests and woodlands for any intelligence. Like some black inverted battleship some two miles long. It had crossed seas after having destroyed the cities of its makers. Cities they had built on the edge of warm seas, of towering structures where they could live beautiful lives. Swim and surf in the warm waters, enjoy sports and hobbies. Now all reduced to black ash.

The black warship scanned the jetty, there were no signs of



intelligent life, but a track made by carts, and the jetty itself were signs. Slowly it followed the path, noted the remains of fires. It slowed over the forest. Found animals, rabbits, birds, deer but nothing to threaten it.

So, the ship grew bigger and bigger in the sky as it approached the home land, and soon the inhabitants of the castle saw it, and were afraid. Those on the outside of the castle hurried inside for shelter. The woman who was the path leader with others went to the keep where Janus and the dog-creature were. They climbed to the top of the keep, as the black machine came ever nearer. They offered the man, Janus, his armour and sword, but he refused them. He still wore a cowl of black. He descended the stairs and taking his staff he crossed the castle grounds, the dog-creature beside him. He walked past the silver tree then out across the drawbridge. He walked slowly towards the giant machine, now only a mile away, and clearly many times larger than the castle and its grounds. It too was moving slowly.

The black destroying machine was aware of Janus approaching and was puzzled. The two faces were not right for a human. It ignored the dog-creature. It slowed, the man Janus did not, the dog-creature did not. The black destroying machine needed time to compute. It would not retreat, so rose higher in the air. From the castle battlement the people watched, others hid in their homes or comforted crying children. Higher the black destroying machine rose, and on walked the man Janus and the dog-creature.

The black destroying machine was now high in the sky directly above the man Janus and the dog-creature, or so it seemed, its small size high in the sky, or so it seemed. Then suddenly the dog-creature snarled and jumped into the air, and bit the black destroying machine, falling back with it in its jaws, growling it ripped the black destroying machine to pieces.



CHAPTER SEVENTY ONE: THE JOURNEY OF SOLMONATH

Sol began her descent from the mountain plain; she was wearing a black cowl like the others. She saw the other 11 disappear as they took their paths down the mountain, hers lay in front facing the bay where the giant starship hung in the sky. What she looked down on was no path but a step, made out of a dull silver metal. She stepped onto it, and as she did it slowly rose about a foot into the air. It did so, so slowly she had no problem with her balance, but despite this two handrails rose from the step. It was good she took hold because the step moved a few yards down the mountain, then without any warning climbed high into the air. It then swooped over the trees of the forest, she thought she caught a glimpse of Janus on his path with a dog like creature following him. The flying 'step' swept over the tall oak trees, and then began to climb towards the spacecraft hovering overhead, her destination it seemed. Such was the distraction she didn't notice the large bird which had left a massive oak and was now heading towards her, or did she notice it had two heads. She did notice when it landed on her shoulder, which was a bit of a surprise to say the least. But before she could make any rational thought or action the flying step had taken her up to the spacecraft, a door had opened and deposited her with the bird in the entrance where three uniformed officers saluted her, and the one who looked senior spoke,

'Welcome Leader, please let us escort you to the bridge.'

None of the three remarked on the bird, or the fact she was not in any uniform, but clearly, they recognised who she was, even if she, Sol, did not.

The bridge certainly lived up to its name, being as wide as London Bridge. Either side of the centre of the bridge were seats which were on steps, with the highest being dead centre. Each separated from the next by a space of around six feet. All having arms with buttons and a touch screen. Most of the seats were occupied, save for the highest in the centre and one to its right and two to its left. As the 4 walked across the bridge towards



the centre, with the bird, Sol looked up and understood the recognition. On the ceiling was a giant emblem of a two headed eagle with lightning bolts in each claw. At the same time all those seated stood and turned to face Sol and saluted.

She took her centre seat, and the eagle moved from her shoulder to a perch on the arm of her chair. Once she was seated the others took their seats. The senior officer of her three escorts pressed a button and the ship began to slowly move.

As they looked out of the massive view screen at the disappearing earth below, text with a spoken commentary appeared on the screen.

MISSION UPDATE TO ALL CREW.... WE ARE THE STARSHIP 21ZNA9 AND OUR MISSION IS TO RESCUE THE COLONY BUILDER WHICH WE HAVE LOCATED IN THE ANDROMEDA GALAXY....

INTERGALACTIC TRAVEL IS NOT POSSIBLE USING CONVENTIONAL PHYSICS DUE TO ERRORS IN THE EPR PARADOX WE WILL THEREFORE BE USING METAPHYSICS. FOR THIS REASON WE ARE PRIVILEGED TO HAVE LEADER SOL WHO WILL PILOT US TO THE ANDROMEDA GALAXY. WE WILL BE MAKING THE METAPHYSICAL JUMP ONCE CLEAR OF THE EARTH IN ONE HOUR.

The officers to Sol's right were talking softly, 'The sol gives us non quantum travel, The Colony Builder is a massive construct for doing just that, over 16 miles across and 10,000 inhabitants...'

'Thanks for that information.' The other replied.

Sol leaned over and asked the senior officer 'Is there a wand?'

To which he replied, 'Yes Ma'am, I will fetch it for you.'

He disappeared to return 2 minutes later with a silver oblong box, he opened the lid and presented it to Sol. Lying on a bed of blue velvet was a wand which looked like it was made from ivory



with carvings of sigils, it was about 9 inches long. She carefully took it from the box and held it in her hand. Then two things suddenly happened, first to the surprise of no one save Sol, the two headed eagle with one of its heads snatched the wand from Sol's hand and swallowed it. Secondly the screen flashed, and the giant colony builder was in front of them, they had jumped to the Andromeda Galaxy. Some of the more junior officers gave Sol a ripple of applause.

One of Sol's escorts lent over and asked her, 'Excuse me Ma'am but how is this possible?'

It was the eagle that spoke a reply! 'The difference between science and metaphysics is their respective attitudes toward chaos... Chaos is an infinite speed in metaphysics... Science approaches chaos completely differently, almost in the opposite way: it relinquishes the infinite, infinite speed, in order to gain a reference able to actualize the virtual.'

The officer's mouth opened as if to speak, closed, opened again and closed, both of the bird's heads looking at him, with one of the heads giving the impression of disdain for even asking such a question.

The spaceship approached an airlock on The Colony Builder and engaged a docking probe. Standard procedure was to explore using drones and bots before committing liveware. First priorities to establish a non-hostile environment, and the nature and status of any life forms. The standard deployment for this type of encounter, lost comms with a colony builder, was 20 of each, drones, and bots. A special docking probe is used in these cases. Engaging here means launching a separate probe containing the drone/bot cargo. Any compromise on docking, or even destruction, would merely be to the probe, the ship would stand off a mile away and deploy shields.

The bridge observed the probe, and from cameras inside the probe saw the airlocks open. At this point entry should be made, but nothing happened. The drones and bots could move freely



inside the probe but not cross into The Colony Builder. The probe returned, the bots and drones checked out fine. Escalating meant sending liveware. This would be dogs. Six trained animals with sensor harnesses. Again, they were sent across in the probe, again the airlocks opened, the command was given but the dogs would not cross over. The probe returned; the dogs checked out. In a mock up scenario of the docking probe they performed as expected, crossing the airlock into a mock-up of The Colony Builder's entrance. A second attempt was tried but failed. A level 3 escalation required humans. A team of 4 special unit troops. Again, the probe crossed the void, engaged and airlocks opened. The troops moved towards the threshold and stopped.

'We can't enter.' came their responses. They seemed to try but failed to penetrate past the airlock. It was as if some force field was preventing them from entering. After 15 minutes of trying, they were ordered back.

The bridge team watched all this. The senior officer stood and said,

'We will need to conference this and systematise a plan.'

'No need,' said Sol, rising, the eagle had jumped off its perch and onto her shoulder and was giving a look of disdain to the assembled. 'I will go, lead me to the probe.'

'But...' The second officer began, but a look from the bird silenced him.

'Follow me Ma'am.' said the commander.

They were transported to the docking bay. The commander made to join Sol and the eagle in the probe, but Sol simply said 'No.'

By the time the probe had approached The Colony Builder the commander was back in his seat on the bridge. Screens showed



the probe, inside and out. Sol was still dressed in the black cowl, hood down, with the eagle on her shoulder. The airlocks opened, and she crossed over into The Colony Builder. The bridge team looked at each other then back at the screen. The eagle spoke, in a calm human voice, showing no emotion.

‘The 10,000 inhabitants are in stasis, power is weak, there is alien activity.’

The screen showed the dimly lit corridor in The Colony Builder.

‘What are we seeing and how?’ The commander asked. There was a long pause and then a junior tech officer spoke,

‘It’s not a camera, there were none on the probe or the leader.’

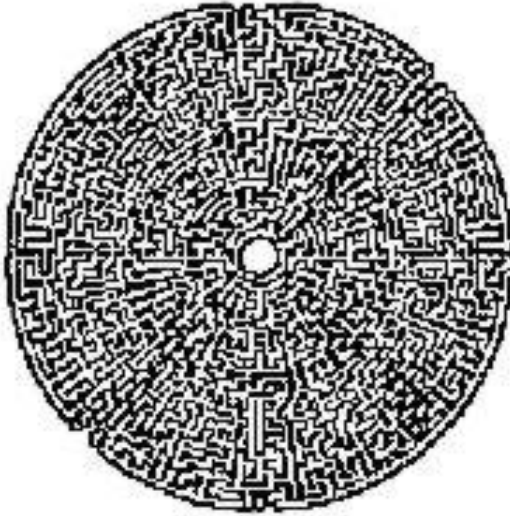
The screen showed the corridor, and it was if the camera was moving slowly down it. The image moved and showed the eagle in close up.

‘It’s impossible sir, but it appears the screen is displaying what the leader, Sol’s eyes, are seeing.’

‘Incredible.’ The commander uttered. All were now transfixed by the images coming from Sol’s eyes.

‘So, that’s also metaphysics.’ It was the escort officer who had questioned Sol earlier.

The boy had drawn the plan of The Colony Builder on grease proof paper. It was a maze of corridors connecting to rooms above and below.



This image now appeared on another screen on the bridge of the starship. Only it was showing a winking light which was Sol's position, some marks which might indicate the positions of the inhabitants in stasis, and some strange darker areas.

Throughout the spacecraft, officers on the bridge, crew members, even the more sentient bots were watching on similar screens. The winking light was moving as the image of the darkness in the centre corridor was also moving. The image showed Sol making a right turn then a left onto a wider corridor. Then they saw the racks, each with stacked bodies in stasis.

Sol walked on towards the centre of the craft. An hour passed, still the shapes of bodies on racks in stasis. As the second hour approached Sol was getting closer to the centre of The Colony Builder. No one on the spacecraft could communicate with Sol, and the crew members were becoming alarmed as at the centre they could see in magnification shadows moving, there were obvious some-things there, which was in their term's 'alien'.

Still the images showed the racks with the bodies. But then a



moving shadow running down one set of racks, a creature the size of a rat. It was as if Sol's presence was disturbing these creatures. At first a few rat-like creatures, then more and more. They made no noise, but there was a noise of their movement, a mechanical scuttling sound. This was reaching a crescendo. The things, the shadows at the centre, were getting larger and there was clearly more movement. On and on walked Sol. The crew could now see one of the shadows moving out from the centre and onto the corridor that Sol was on. It was moving towards her, and she towards it. There was still no sound other than that of the scuttling, which was dying away as the things seemed to have all ran down this corridor and away somewhere. Until silence again.

The crew watched spellbound. There was clearly something approaching Sol, unclear, a black mass of darkness. The eagle slid off Sol's shoulder and began flying down the corridor towards the approaching thing.

The black thing was about 10 yards away when suddenly tongues of fire and electricity poured out of the black thing engulfing the eagle. The eagle flew into fragments, it seemed destroyed. Then it became clear that each fragment was a small eagle, identical to each other and the original. The dark mass poured out more electric flames. And again, the fragments became yet more smaller eagles. Each time the creature poured out electric flames, making an immense noise, the same thing occurred until whatever the thing was, it became hidden in a mist of many thousands if not millions of microscopic eagles. And then slowly this cloud condensed, condensed back into one eagle, leaving the corridor where the creature had been, empty. The eagle circled and flew back to Sol's shoulder.

The shouts and whoops from the crew of the starship could be heard on the bridge. Here the officers were smiling in disbelief, somewhere standing looking at the screens. The dim emergency light of the corridors suddenly grew bright as power returned. From outside of The Colony Builder these could be clearly seen, as well as navigation lights now flashing.



The image from Sol was now showing Sol's progress down the corridor. She entered the central chamber of The Colony Builder. In front of her was a giant screen with the image of a face. It shone with a brilliant light, being neither male nor female but human in features. It began to speak in clicking sounds. Translation machines on the spacecraft failed to decode. It paused. Then the eagle seemed to reply with similar sounds. No one could see the other head of the eagle, and what could only be described as it whispering into Sol's ear. The conversation lasted several minutes. Then the screen went blank. From the monitor screen the crew could see that Sol had now turned around. She began to walk back down the corridor. It took her the best part of two hours to get back to the airlock. During this time there began a hive of activity on both The Colony Builder and the spacecraft. The humans in stasis were coming alive. A careful process beginning with senior officers who made contact with their colleagues in the spacecraft.

How The Colony Builder came to be in the Andromeda Galaxy was a mystery. That they had found themselves in stasis was also. As was their rescue.

Sol arrived back in the spacecraft, greeted by the three original escorts, only now they were smiling.

'Officers,' Sol said, 'to a conference room with the seniors of this craft and The Colony Builder.'

'Yes Ma'am' was the reply.

The conference room was a light filled room with a large circular table at the centre, around which sat 24 officers, senior officers from The Colony Builder and the spacecraft, 12 from each. And sat also was Sol and the eagle. There were several quiet conversations going on. No doubt prompted by the astonishing events. Sol raised her hand, and the room fell silent.

She began to speak, 'The Colony Builder entered another galaxy



which it did not intend to do so, the guild does not have intergalactic travel ability. As leader of the guild and bringing the spacecraft here, obviously I do. But The Colony Builder's galactic jump was not my doing. The Andromeda Galaxy, our nearest, is densely inhabited and unlike ours fairly peaceful. I suspect The Colony Builder was thrown out of our galaxy when it tried to inhabit part of our Galaxy which had some intelligent life, and powerful intelligent life, which simply put, threw the builder out of the Galaxy.'

'Unfortunately, the throw put you into The Andromeda Galaxy, as I said a peaceful galaxy, but one whose inhabitants can defend.'

Sol was saying this looking at the leader of The Colony Builder.

'And defend themselves from what they consider alien conquest, in other words us, in the shape of The Colony Builder. So, they, the defenders, disabled it, putting all the crew and passengers into stasis.'

She paused, and took a sip of water, the birds two heads surveying the assembled group.

'So now to quote Vladimir Ilich Lenin... "Что делать?" ...' she said with a smile.

The 24 looked shocked.

'So, your Russian isn't so good,' she said, still smiling, 'what is to be done?'

Sol continued, 'You need to be led, and so as leader I will do so, there are plenty of habitable galaxies, and out of the 100 billion, many with little or no life, a wise leader would lead you to ones uninhabited.'

'And you are such a leader. Ma'am' was the reply from the commander of Starship 21ZNA9.



As she spoke a chart of galaxies and a list appeared on a screen.

‘Cassiopeia 1 will do to start...’ Sol said.



CHAPTER SEVENTY TWO: THE JOURNEY OF MARTIUS

The boy was sat at the kitchen table. Outside the sky was a dull grey, it was a cold November morning. The old gas stove had its oven door open and was lit, giving some warmth to the room. The boy rose from his chair and went into the pantry, returning with a piece of grease proof paper. He sharpened the carpenter's pencil, which was rectangular in section. He began to draw, two armies either side of the paper, joined in battle, meeting at the centre in abstract violence.

Martius was angry, of the 12 he was the most angry, yes he wanted to destroy the world, the whole universe, and himself, and no he didn't want to become a god. He hated and hated everything, he hated himself the most. He began walking down the path, but turned in anger to go back,

'Quest!' he cursed and felt in the pocket of his cowl the wand, and he broke it, 'Quest!' he cursed again, and tried to walk back up the path, but it became steep, more and more steep, his hand breaking the wand into ever more pieces. Finally in a mighty rage he turned and began his descent. He found the town with its wooden and brick buildings, its cobbled streets. It was evening, as he walked, he noticed an Inn. He entered. A portly man was behind the bar polishing a glass. He looked up as if to say, but not saying, 'Can I be of help.'

'A room for the night and a bottle of wine.' Martius said.

The man turned and took a key from a rack of keys and placed it on the bar with a bottle of wine, which had no label, and a tankard.

Martius picked these up, not saying a word, and walked into a corner of the room and sat at a table. He looked around at what he thought was pathetic humanity. He poured himself some wine and drank. It gave him some comfort, but that just made his anger worse. He noticed a rowdy group of young men sat around a table, clearly, they could not hold their drink. At the



next table four older men were playing cards. All were dressed in work clothes, shabby. Maybe the younger group were farm workers. The four card players were large, overweight but had strong looking arms and hands. 'Sawyers' thought Martius. One of the young men fell back, crashed into the card players table spilling their bottles of wine. The sawyers jumped out of their seats trying to avoid the spilling wine. Someone uttered

'Idiots!'

There was a change of expletives, and then a lull, then the fight broke out. Like all small rural towns, part frustration, part family antagonisms, it spread like a fire. Martius watched, just as the wine gave some pleasure watching the fight did, but the rest of his soul grew even more angry at the pathetic scene. The fight spilled out onto the street. Martius finished the bottle, picked up his key and tankard and walked towards the barman. The bar now almost empty, all the people outside either watching the fight or joining in.

'Another bottle.' Martius said, and the barman gave him another bottle, and Martius took it and found his room. He lay on the bed drinking and listening to the fight. As usual it ended in shouting from those still standing, then slowly the noise subsided, and those that could tried to find their ways home. Martius slept. He woke at dawn, he left his room, he was the only person awake. He went into the kitchen, helped himself to some cheese, a knife, a flint lighter and a shoulder bag. He put some more cheese in the bag, a bottle of wine and some ham. He slung it over his shoulder and left. He walked down the cobbled street past the small harbour on the estuary and took the track out of the town.

Around midday he stopped and sat on a verge, he ate some cheese and took a swig of wine. Then he rose to his feet. He could see a group of horses coming down the track, mounted officers, and behind them foot soldiers, and the accompanying wagon train. Not an army, he thought, some battalion going to join in some pathetic conflict. Martius stood in his black cowl



with the hood over his head, the officers on horseback, as he suspected, ignoring him. A few of the foot soldiers gave him a wary look. He guessed they would be in the town by late afternoon. He gathered his things and continued on his way in the opposite direction. Early evening he stopped again on the verge. He collected some branches and lit a fire as the evening came on. He ate some ham and cheese and took a few swigs of wine. Looking in the direction of the town he guessed what was happening. The usual for a small army. The officers enjoying good food and services of women. Elsewhere rape and pillage. Soon Martius could see the fires starting as buildings were set on fire. He wondered how many of those last night would be dead, or did the wiser folk hide in the woods? To return to find homes burnt, their animals butchered and dead. Strange, for the first time this didn't give him any comfort.

Next morning he woke and looking back saw the smoke rising from the pillaged town, gulls flew overhead, screeching, looking for food. A fly blundered into him and fell to the ground, he watched as a wood-ant snatched it in its jaws and dragged the struggling insect back to the nest. Looking at this, what was happening all around him, it all suddenly made him violently sick. He wished himself dead. He slouched down the side of the track to a small stream and washed his face, he felt a little better. Then his thoughts wandered to the battalion, how many more towns would they destroy before the battle and their inevitable destruction. They might win the next, or the one after that, but their fate was sealed by himself, Martius, the God of War. Then he thought of the wood-ants, the crawling creatures, the food chains of killing. And his mind became numb.

He must have been standing an hour before he came to his senses and the visions ceased. He decided to keep going downhill. Eventually he reached the estuary. He walked along its banks back towards where he had come from, towards the town. Coming across a small rowboat upturned on a shingle beach he turned it over. No oars, but he used some fallen tree branches, he climbed in and used them to push off into the river. The tide was on the turn and running out, that with the flow of



the river he hoped would push him out to sea, and what, oblivion he hoped. The estuary was slowly opening and widening, with woodland on either side, mainly birch trees and some conifers. Occasionally there would be a small beach of sand and shingle. He passed near two cormorants which were fishing, disappearing for what seemed like minutes to reappear some distance away. The sky was clearing. Rounding a bend, he saw the small harbour of the town and the now deserted burnt out houses. The inhabitants that had survived had left, perhaps to live in the woods until they thought it safe to return, if they ever did. Martius looked on blankly. His small boat was now moving quite fast, towards the sea, he thought and oblivion. Slowly he saw the mouth of the estuary and the ever widening of its mouth into the sea. He lay in the boat and slept. He was hungry but didn't care, he awoke to starlight, a vast canopy of twinkling lights, other worlds he sort a few days ago to destroy, how foolish he thought, he slept again.

He awoke under a warm blue sky. He took a moment to realise first he was in a small boat, and then that it was still, he was no longer at sea. He stood up and stretched, a beautiful blue sea with a clear horizon, it was only when he turned landward that the shock hit him. What he saw was nothing like any land he had seen before. A flat boggy landscape without any trees or grasses. Just hummocks of mud with spider like mosses, some larger fleshy plants, some green, others purple, none with leaves or woody branches. And stillness, nothing moved, he saw no birds, no animals, even no insects, it was a world of plants. Looking closer he could see they lacked even root systems, just bulbous shaped proto-roots. He had the feeling this was old earth before the land had been colonised by animals, even by insects. He was right, it was the Lower Devonian landscape of 370 million years ago.

'A world of plants,' he thought, no herbivores, and no carnivores, just plants soaking up sunlight and photosynthesising life from it. Though he looked back at the sea and thought, 'but not there.' The vegetation, if one could call it that, was sparse and fragile, more seaweed than plant, the stems weak in the unexpected



gravity of living on the land. So, he walked carefully not wanting to damage this fragile vegetation. It was strange walking in this landscape dominated by these weak plants, and it set him thinking of the impending animal invasion from the sea.

‘Enjoy this place to yourself.’ he thought of the plants, then of himself. Realizing he was hungry he made his way carefully back to the boat; there he finished the last of his stolen food and drink. He sat in the boat thinking. He might live on eating the plants if they were edible. After all they had yet to develop spines, thorns, and toxins to defend themselves against herbivores. Alternatively, he could starve to death, if the plants were inedible and he couldn’t catch any fish, that would be his fate. ‘So be it.’ he thought.

He fell asleep to wake again under a starry sky, though he failed to recognise any of the Lower Devonian constellations. It was a beautiful and peaceful evening; he could see clearly the plants, so could walk through them under the starlight. He stood motionless, and fell asleep, standing. He woke with what should have been a start, but was only in part, he couldn’t feel his legs or feet. He looked down and could not believe what he did see. His feet and legs had become green vegetation. At first, he assumed this was a dream, but after an hour he began to realize it probably was not.

‘I’m turning into a plant.’ he spoke aloud to a silent world. He could turn his head and still move his hands. He noticed the boat was gently floating out to sea, he also noticed the warmth on his lower body, or not so much warmth as a balm, was this from the sunlight. So, he stood for days, and each day his body grew more a plant, he realised his hearing and sight would eventually go, and wondered if his mind would. ‘Can plants feel?’ he wondered. He found out that they could, well that he could. Though he had lost human senses he realized he had new ones. But what was the most wonderful thing about this, which to most would have been a nightmare, was his feeling of peace. He had never had such a feeling, hard to explain, how would a tree explain peace, the warm gentle wind, the sunlight, the sap rising into the



leaves. He was certainly no longer the god of war.

Years passed; he could tell the seasons. Within the context of this bliss, he now felt there was one shadow. He guessed though the land of plants was a land of peace this could not last, for in the oceans life was maybe not yet red in tooth and claw, but in the seas it was red in blood and teeth. How so he thought, and nature told him.

It told him with remembered feelings of long ago. That the oceans had animal life was the fault of the plants. About 2 billion years ago new organisms used a different method of photosynthesis, and the great Oxygen Catastrophe, Oxygen Revolution, or Oxygen Crisis occurred. How this was communicated to Martius was in feelings.

So, two billion years ago existing life had photosynthesis whose by-product was sulphur, the purple earth process, using retinal. New organisms evolved using chlorophyll whose by-product is oxygen. So, the earth's atmosphere gained oxygen, which in turn allowed the evolution of life forms, animals. They could breathe and eat the very plants that created their life breath, but in turn they also created animals which could and would eat them. The oxygen also killed off the anaerobic biosphere, the Archaea which had lived peacefully for 2 billion years floating on the seas as microbial mats.

Martius, the plant, began to think deeply, to remember. It seems he and the others of the 12 had power over reality when the world, the universe became no longer a simulation, a computer algorithm, but real. And so, they gained a free-will to shape their own worlds and even share worlds. All this he remembered, it had ended not in the chaos of the rhizome, but the boredom and pointlessnesses of satiated desires. This fate was saved by entering the real three hierarchical worlds of Jörð, Fjörgyn and Hlódýn, which were kept from falling into chaos by the aeons. But he and the other eleven from Jörð and Fjörgyn had decided to quit, go back to real earth and destroy that universe. The others thinking they would become gods, he just wished for



destruction, and now he saw how this lay ahead, the slow evolution by evolutionary competition with pain and suffering, no wonder there would be antinatalist factions. And this perfect plant world soon to be invaded from the sea, how could he prevent this.

He pictured the scene around him and wondered, though plants were green - chlorophyll using photosynthesisers, some plants were purple, maybe those were not, maybe those somehow were using retinal, and not producing oxygen but sulphur as a bi-product. He could not see or move but could feel in some way. And this he began to do, brush his nearby neighbours, but only by growing. It took days to touch one, but when he did, he could feel the plant. The taller plants around him felt similar. He remembered somehow the purple plants were smaller, less well adapted to life on land. He grew long thin stems which would fall under gravity onto the mud and rock. After weeks he touched something which felt strange, it was a plant but not as he was. He was able to grow into it, feeling inside its cells as they processed the sunlight, but not with chlorophyll, but with retinal. Slowly he began to transfer some of these cells into his own system. That he was able to do this was because of his sentience, giving up his human form was part of his will, he wished to live the peaceful plant life, but he wanted to experience this peace. And this is what a free reality allowed. Over many weeks, perhaps a year he slowly became a retinal based photosynthesiser.

Martius next move was simple, he could grow to touch other plants and they in turn do similar though not consciously. Over a period of many years the land plants became purple worlders. The oxygen levels dropped as free oxygen was absorbed by oxidation. Oxygen combining with minerals, like iron and such to form stable oxides. No sea-based invasion of the land by insects and fish was then possible.

So, the slow development of primitive plants, of which he was now one, occurred. Plants not using chlorophyll. And then the slow re-invasion of the seas by these land plants. A slow process

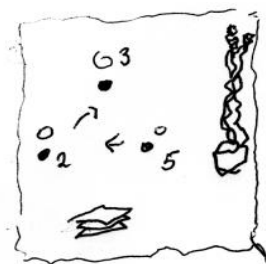


over millennia which resulted in a spectacular marine flora as well as that one now on the land. And a peace on Earth.

And then the slow removal of oxygen from the seas and rivers, and the extinction of all animal life. And a peace on the earth, in its seas and rivers.



CHAPTER SEVENTY THREE: ÆSTRE



The boy fetched some grease proof paper from the pantry, sat at the pine kitchen table, which was covered in linoleum cloth, and with the carpenter's pencil made a drawing.

Æstre followed the fourth path down the mountain. Soon she was walking through the pine woods that skirted the hillside. The sun which appeared at first to be setting was in fact rising, it was dawn for this sun, and the other would begin to rise soon. The path soon became a track, and then what was obviously a driveway. Æstre pulled down her hood. The driveway was still quite steep but now she could see where it was going. Below where some gates, open, and beyond was a car park and a large building. It was five stories high, long with a flat roof and large metal framed windows. It looked like offices, or a school or college, in design like a building of the 'modernist' style of the 1950s. She walked through the open gates and across the car park, which was empty. She hadn't seen a single person. The front of the building had several steps leading to an entrance lobby. There was still no one about. She entered. She thought it was probably a college not a school. On the ground floor there were classrooms, but also workshops leading off a central corridor. She explored these, the workshops had lathes and pillar drills, whereas some of the others were obviously equipped for science studies. Classrooms had posters on the walls, a periodic table in one, in others anatomical pictures. She climbed the stairs to the first floor, now just classrooms, no workshops. These were more difficult to decide on their use. There were two rooms which had rows of desks with old mechanical typewriters.

The second and third floors were just classrooms which seemed to have no particular use. All had old fashioned black boards. The top floor had no central corridor and was obviously for teaching art and crafts. Large studio spaces had easels, cupboards for storing paper and other materials, and large tables, presumably for working at.

The art room to the extreme left of the building as she entered, had what looked like a photocopier, which seemed out of place. Next to it a stack of A4 paper for its use. Æstre approached to look closer, it was only then she noticed the view out of the large metal framed windows. It was of hills, stretching out onto the horizon, and their colours of light blues and purples in the sunrise. They looked strangely false, as if made from paper. On a table next to the copier was a board with three holes, each at the corner of an equilateral triangle, each with a glass marble, blue, red, and green. And next to each a number, 2, 3, and 5. Then she noticed the branch or stick, like an old tree branch stripped of its leaves and side shoots, leaning against the table. Bulbous at the base, but cleft in two at the top, it being about three feet in length.

She explored the other rooms to the right of the staircase. The first looked just like any other art room. A sink, a stack of drawing boards, racks containing brushes, pencils, scissors, pots of glue. This then was more a craft room.

Æstre couldn't help feeling this was a dream, it was certainly dreamlike, and more so with the next event which took place. In the next room, again an art room was standing the figure of a young teenager, a boy, a boy who she recognised, Paul. He had short straight blonde hair, a jumper over a shirt, and grey trousers, black shoes. He smiled at Æstre, and spoke,

'Our mothers are in there.' he gestured to the next room, divided from this room, like all the others by windows. And there they were, Paul's and her own mother, standing talking, dressed in outdoor coats.



‘They’re OK.’ Paul said and smiled. There was a noise from the far end of the classrooms. Æstre turned,

‘Better go and look.’ Paul said.

Æstre did. As she walked from room to room, she occasionally looked back, the mothers still talking, Paul standing with a faint smile.

The noise it seemed had been made by the stick, it was no longer leaning on the table but was now the other way up, the bulbous end at the top, and it was balancing or ‘standing’ on the cleft. Before she could speak, it did,

‘No, it’s not a dream, it’s very real, surreal some might say, I prefer super real. Or is it a vision. It’s both the future and the past.’ The stick continued, ‘And these things, from the triangle, your friend, the mothers, and this whole building are both the future and the past.’

‘But this is not real!’ Æstre said.

‘Well, no, I said super real, it’s where realities come from, if you like you can be philosophical and call this metaphysics.’ the stick said.

‘I don’t understand’ Æstre said.

‘Well, understanding comes after, sort of, this stuff all comes before, it’s why meta in metaphysics is misleading. You know, meta meaning after, whereas the thing that comes first is super, not even in the first instance, prior to that! The clue is in the triangle, the triangle is the first shape, 2,3,5 the first prime numbers, and the photocopier.’ The stick asked.

Æstre thought. ‘Are these archetypes?’

‘Excellent.’ the stick said.



‘And the copier, then multiplicity.’ Æstre said.

The stick had no expression but Æstre imagined if it did it would be a knowing smile.

‘And from these super real archetypes, real things derive their identity, like in Plato’s theory of forms, all horses are horses because they resemble the archetype horse.’ the stick said.

‘I’m not sure, it’s all very confusing?’ Æstre said.

She paused and looked around.

‘So, all the things in the school or college are all the archetypes.’ she said.

‘You could call it a collage,’ the stick said, ‘but that’s a pun, is it? But yes and no, there are very many archetypes here to do with learning, academia, nurture as opposed to nature.’ the stick said.

‘Can we see all of them, if not here elsewhere?’ Æstre asked.

‘Maybe not all for you, they are billions, and yet more like the infinities, but we will explore some.’ the stick said.

‘Why?’ Æstre said.

‘In order for you to hyposubstantiate them, reify them, in other words you will make real these super real archetypes.’

‘Why?’ Æstre said.

‘Because someone has to do it, and to start it’s you.’ the stick said with rather an angry tone.

‘What do you mean, start?’ Æstre said.

‘Start materializing stuff,’ the stick said becoming rather frustrated.



‘But stuff is already here, look.’ said Æstre.

‘Look this stuff is super real, the archetypes of things yet to exist.’ the stick said.

‘But see the stuff is already here and real, look.’ said Æstre.

‘Look this stuff is super real, the archetypes of things yet to exist.’ the stick said, ‘and see we’ve just materialized this conversation.’

‘But there is stuff outside.’ Æstre said.

The stick did not reply immediately, but ‘walked’ on its two ‘legs’, the cleft, towards the window, which showed an early morning sunlight on receding hills. It knocked open the window, leaned out and tore a hole in the paper picture of receding hills to reveal blackness.

‘Nothing exists yet, until you reify it, until you make the idea of it here, in the land of ideas, real in the outside world.’ the stick said.

Æstre was silent for minutes, eventually she said ‘How?’

‘Oh, that’s easy, as you’ve seen the archetypes as soon as you go out into the void they will reify, become actual instances, actual particular things, and not just one but many.’ the stick said.

‘But there was a real world out there, with real things.’ Æstre said.

‘Not was real, but will be real, we are outside, or better, before time, here.’ the stick said.

‘So if I go outside now it will be all void.’ Æstre said.

‘Briefly, but soon as you do you will create reality.’ the stick said.



‘I don’t believe you; I think this is just a dream!’ Æstre said.

With that she walked to the stairs and began descending to the ground floor and the entrance lobby. The stick followed making short work of the steps. At the lobby Æstre paused because the windows did not show a car park but a black void. She opened the door and stepped outside. It was a black void, but slowly this dissolved into the car park, the grass verge, the gates through which was the track, and the forest. She turned and to her astonishment the building had gone. Now she could just see the receding hills, this time ‘real’. And on turning back again the car park and gates had gone, nothing but the track, the woods, the distant hills, and the stick.

She looked at the stick, it spoke,

‘It’s gone, it was part of The Forms, let’s move on.’

They walked down the track. It was now mid-morning, the trees thinned, and it appeared they were entering a housing estate. Still no one around. It consisted of curving roads with detached houses like those built in England in the 1980s. Houses with small front gardens with lawns and some with flower beds. Each house had a garage and parking spaces.

‘What!’ Æstre said.

‘Next set of archetypes,’ the stick said, ‘we’ve done nurture, now nature, err... and sex,’ the stick said, ‘you need to get into that house before people see.’

‘See what?’ Æstre said.

‘That you are naked.’ the stick said.

Æstre looked down at herself, the cape was gone and she was naked, the stick had opened the door of a detached house, she walked inside, the stick followed.



‘You can put that on.’ the stick said.

There was a plain white kaftan hanging on a set of coat pegs in the hallway. As Æstre was putting it on the doorbell rang, and she turned to see three figures through the frosted glass of the front door. She opened the door, there were three people, two women and a man. They were dressed in casual clothes of the 80s. Though not jeans. The women, both wore skirts, one plain green the other had a tweed pattern. They wore blouses and jackets. The man wore a plain brown jacket, an open neck white shirt, grey slacks and loafers. They looked like Jehovah’s Witnesses thought Æstre. The man spoke,

‘Can we come in?’

And before Æstre could respond he entered the hallway followed by the two women, who were smiling, the man looked stern, very stern. They walked from the hallway into a living room. Again, typical of the 1980s. Plain painted walls, with a ‘feature’ wall of bright patterned wallpaper. A large TV and entertainment centre, a three-piece suite in cream leather, and a coffee table. Æstre and the stick followed. The three were now facing Æstre, the man looking now positively angry. Then before her eyes he turned into a chair. A large mid-century armchair with teak wood arms and legs and leather seat and back, a chair. Without thinking Æstre picked up the stick and smashed the chair to pieces. The two women stopped smiling, seemed embarrassed more than anything, and quietly left. Æstre heard the door close behind them.

‘What was that?’ Æstre said, looking at the broken chair.

‘Authority,’ said the stick, ‘rampant authority, the archetype of such authority and totalitarianism, and you smashed it, well done, it will still become real, but now it will always eventually fail, so very well done.’

Æstre was puzzled.



‘Now we must leave.’ the stick said. They crossed the living room into the hallway and opened the front door closing it behind them. The road in front curved in a slope downwards, detached houses either side. Æstre noticed to her left was a man, maybe in his early thirties, wearing jeans and a check shirt. He climbed into a van and drove off down the street, swerving, and crashed into the corner of one of the houses. He opened the van’s door and got out rubbing his forehead and looking at the damage to his van, and the house.

‘Accidents will happen.’ said the stick. Putting emphasis on the ‘will’.

‘Weird.’ Æstre said.

‘Super real.’ said the stick.

As they walked past the crashed van, they noticed the driver was now at the back, the rear doors open, he was sitting and was nursing a young baby.

‘Sex.’ said the stick.

‘But not necessarily accidental.’ Æstre said.

‘Life is an accident,’ said the stick. ‘Let’s move on.’ So, they walked down the hill and out of the small housing estate.

As the road went on the slope grew less as they approached a parade of shops, three stories high. Shops with flats above, typical of 1950s urban expansion in the UK. The shops were all boarded up. Even stranger was what was happening along this stretch of the road. There were people in drab clothes, maybe 20 or so slowly walking up and down outside the parade of shops, each holding vertically a twelve-foot piece of dowelling wood. Then they noticed that in front of each shop black Labradors were quietly lying down, but not asleep. The people ignored Æstre and the stick, but the dogs, each in turn, merely raised



their eyes. As the people one by one reached the end of the parade of shops they would slowly turn and walk back again, forever it seemed in this long circular, and pointless walk. The last dog was of particular interest, and deeply disquieting, though it seemed expressionless like the others, but unlike the others it had the upper part of its head seemingly cutaway to reveal what must be its brain, though not grey but a deep brown matter. Apart from this it was no different to the others, maybe a little bigger. Æstre and the stick walked on not knowing what to make of the scene, every so often they stopped and would turn and look back at the continual parade of the people with their dowelling rods in front of the shops and the dogs.

‘I can imagine this never stops, runs on for all eternity.’ the stick said.

They walked on.

‘How was that back there an archetype?’ Æstre asked.

‘An eternal pointless process, and the black dogs, a symbol of depression, futility and nihilism.’ the stick said.

‘Oh, and the last dog, brain death?’ Æstre said.

‘Could be,’ the stick said.

They continued down the road, the vista opened up and they slowly had views of distant mountains, snow covered with blue/grey rock screes. They stopped and took in the scene, the sky now a deep blue. They could see that the mountains, tall peaks, surrounded them.

‘It feels like we are in a cradle.’ Æstre said.

‘The cradle of life.’ the stick said.

‘Oh, another archetype.’ Æstre said.



They noticed now there was a scattering of houses, more like two story cottages. One of them had a door ajar. As with the other events this seemed to imply or even provoke the need to enter, so they did. The door led straight into a small room, with pale yellow walls and ceiling, a woman was standing near a fireplace, the fire unlit. There was a small table and chairs, all very basic, a quarry tiled floor with a rug, and two children, one about 7 or 8, another younger, maybe 3 or 4. The woman was dressed in basic workaday clothes underneath a paisley patterned pinafore. The two children were likewise dressed in poor clothes and looked a little unkempt. It was at first sight a typical poor rural family group.

As Æstre turned she saw to her surprise a man, the man? But he was in an overall with a company logo on it. He was on a ladder in the corner of the room, on the wall were mounted metal boxes, some with glass doors. Inside electronic components could be seen, some kind of switch gear, or telecommunications network hub. Through holes in the ceiling above there hung skeins of brightly coloured cables, hundreds of these, and large black cables, mains electricity supply, thought Æstre. The man was diligently working on these and testing the rows of connectors in the boxes with various, what looked like very specialist, equipment. He worked silently, seeming unaware of where he was, such high-tech equipment so out of place in this room.

‘The family of man.’ the stick said.

‘A very strange family.’ Æstre said, ‘Is something wrong, disjointed?’

They left the cottage and walked a little way up a slight rise above the houses. The door of the house opened, and the woman appeared, looking at Æstre, she walked towards Æstre, the two children stayed in the doorway. The woman’s expression vacant. When she reached Æstre she gave her a long and passionate embrace. Then relaxed and walked back to the house, entered and closed the door behind her, never once



looking back.

They walked on,

‘Super real,’ said Æstre ‘and archetypes of what?’

Although the question was probably rhetorical the stick answered.

‘Of things, and thoughts, ideas and passions, emotions, things, everything in the world.’

They came to what looked like a large apartment block, with windows and balconies, again they found themselves drawn to the building. A colony? They entered the lobby. It was large and very spacious with high ceilings, on one wall was a stone slab over which water ran. There was a wide open staircase, behind which were lifts. None of this seemed unusual except the floor was covered in sheets of paper on which children were drawing. So much so it made those entering and leaving the building difficult to do so without treading on the children’s drawings.

Æstre and the stick looked on, ‘I don’t know.’ the stick said. They watched this scene for a while then left.

‘Learning and living, does learning impede or help living, here impede, an inconvenience?’ Æstre said, the stick made no reply.

They walked on, after several minutes the stick spoke.

‘Hilbert’s Hotel, I think the hotel was Hilbert’s Hotel.’

Æstre asked, ‘Hilbert’s Hotel?’

‘It’s an idea from the mathematician, David Hilbert to do with infinity, it’s an idea of a hotel with an infinite number of rooms.’ the stick replied.

‘But that’s impossible.’ said Æstre.



‘In practice maybe, but we are in the land of archetypes, like Plato’s forms, so if there is an idea of infinity, it has to have an existence here.’ the stick said.

‘I’m confused, explain this to me all again.’ said Æstre.

‘In the real world there are things, like horses, lots of different horses, right?’ the stick said.

‘Sure.’ said Æstre

‘So, what makes all these different creatures horses?’ the stick asked.

‘No idea.’ said Æstre.

‘Well, they are all copies of the perfect horse, the archetype horse which lives in a different world, a world of forms, this world, that we are in.’ the stick said.

‘Ah! now I get this.’ said Æstre

‘Well in this world not only are there the physical archetypes, horses, houses, trees, but also the forms of ideas, like infinity, or numbers, or emotions like, love, hate, fear. But here they must be tangible, the epitome of love, the archetype of love, the perfect example. Like when the woman embraced you, that was an archetype. The family with the estranged father, all archetypes.’ the stick said.

‘So, we are here to what, see these archetypes, make them? be them?’ asked Æstre.

‘Maybe all of these, or we just need to see a few, I don’t know.’ the stick said.

‘Something you don’t know!’ said Æstre.



They continued in silence.

‘Æstre,’ the stick said, ‘do you mind me asking you a personal question?’

‘No, not at all, please go ahead.’ Æstre replied.

‘Do you like what we are doing?’ the stick asked.

‘You know I haven’t really thought about it,’ Æstre said, and continued,

‘I mean I’m not sure what we really are doing, if as you say we are creating real things in the world from this reality, I suppose that’s OK, some good some bad, and we seem to have started doing this, and for my part without knowing or believing. It still might be a dream but it’s kind of too clear, as you say super real. And if we’ve started, I guess we or someone should complete it.’

She paused then continued, ‘You know I was with the twelve who wanted to destroy the world, all worlds, now it seems I’m doing the reverse, or helping.’

Another pause, then ‘You know now I think about it, I’m sort of happy, content, have a purpose... yes like I never was.’

‘And what about you?’ she asked the stick.

‘Oh, this is great! I was just some stick, now I’m helping the prime mover, it’s fantastic, fan tas stick.’ the stick replied.

Æstre laughed at the terrible pun. Then said, ‘Prime mover?’

‘OK, you are the big cheese,’ said the stick, ‘without you, err, us, there would be nothing.’ the stick replied.

‘Not me, I’m no God.’ said Æstre.



‘No, I guess not, but you are bringing ideas into reality, and that’s a big deal.’ the stick replied.

Just then they noticed they were passing a privet hedge, one with a gate in it. They opened the gate and entered the garden. The path had flower beds either side, and there was some building in front of the house. Æstre pushed open the front door and entered the hallway. To the left was a staircase, it had a stair carpet with runners. The shelf on the window at the bottom of the stairs had some coins, old penny pieces and the threepenny bit. The door to the left was a toilet. No handbasin, a quarry tile floor and painted gloss brickwork. The cistern was high up, with a pull chain to flush.

The hall had a small bamboo table with a cactus in a pot on top. The hall led to a door and another dogleg to the right. Down here was a living room, this had two windows and was empty. The floor was linoleum. The other door led into another living room. This had French windows onto the back garden. A fireplace on the right, two large red armchairs either side, a small settee on the opposite wall. In the left corner was a large deep brown table with an old black and white television. Above this on a small shelf was a cream coloured Bakelite radio. Opposite it was a bird cage on a stand with a budgerigar in it. To the left a door led to the kitchen. They entered the kitchen. Further on the left was a door to a scullery. It had a cold shelf, a few tins, and a small window onto the front garden. The kitchen had a butler sink, a large pine table covered in oil cloth, an old gas stove and a gas boiler in the corner for washing clothes. Like the toilet the walls were painted brick, but with linoleum around the lower part to about 5 feet. They had seen no one. On the table Æstre noticed a drawing, it was of a triangle with the numbers 2, 3, 5 drawn next to three circles. At the bottom was drawn sheets of paper, to the right a drawing of the stick.

‘Oh.’ Æstre said.

‘What?’ the stick said.



‘We should go.’ Æstre said.

So, they left and continued their walk down the never ending hill.

Æstre looked around, ‘So if these are all archetypes, what then am I?’ asked Æstre.

‘Individual consciousness.’ said the stick.

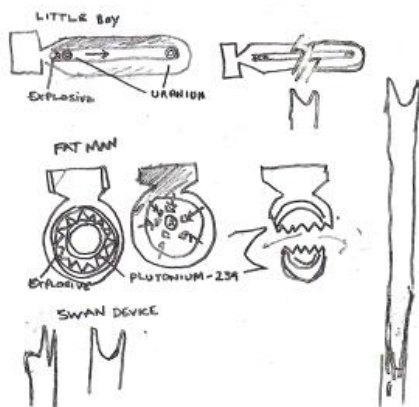
‘So, what then are you?’ Asked Æstre.

‘I’m your stick.’ said the stick.

‘Oh, My stic!’ said Æstre.



CHAPTER SEVENTY FOUR : MAIA



The Cuba crisis began in mid October 1962. It lasted for 13 days, a confrontation between the USA and the USSR. America had deployed Jupiter missiles armed with nuclear warheads in Turkey and Italy, the idea being it allowed the USA a first strike capability. The then long range ballistic missiles used liquid propellants and took around 20 minutes to make ready. Thus, if one side could launch missiles which could hit their targets, the other sides missile silos, before they could be fuelled, a first strike would neutralise their opponents. The Russians responded by sending short range nuclear missiles to Cuba, a then ally of the USSR since the revolution of 1959 in which Fidel Castro became the Prime Minister. President Kennedy ordered a naval “quarantine” on 22 October to prevent more missiles from reaching Cuba, though there were a number already in place. From Cuba a first strike on the USA was therefore possible.

Unbeknown to both sides, the USA & USSR, if a MAD scenario was realised, (Mutually Assured Destruction.) The second wave of American B52s and the Russian Tupolev Tu-95s, Bear bombers would not attack each other but communist China. Both sides realizing that such a scenario, MAD, would leave China as by far and away the most dominant nation post such a nuclear

exchange. So, the strategy was one of 'equalization', so that all surviving nations would start on an equal footing. A primitive nuclear winter, but one of equal devastation. It was also why the USSR targeted all NATO countries.

By late October all sides were on an advanced standby, meaning a sufficient retaliatory number of missiles were always fuelled.

As the crisis unfolded in the media, radio, television and newspapers the boy had made sectional drawings of both Fat Man and Little Boy, atomic bombs, he copied these from library books. He realised that by preventing the sudden creation of a critical mass of uranium-235 or plutonium-239 the detonation of such an atomic weapon could be prevented. He therefore drew plans for such a preventative device, because of the initial shape, he called these 'SWAN' devices.

On the 26 October, Black 'Saturday', the US Navy dropped a series of depth charges on a Soviet submarine (B-59) at the blockade line, unaware that it was armed with a nuclear-tipped torpedo with orders that allowed it to be used if the submarine was damaged by depth charges or surface fire. The captain of the B-59, Valentin Grigoryevich Savitsky, decided that a war might already have started and launched a nuclear torpedo. This destroyed all of the American ships of the blockade. The USS Essex, USS Gearing, and the destroyer USS Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. At the same time a U-2 spy plane made an accidental, overflight of the Soviet Union's far eastern coast. The Soviets responded by scrambling MiG fighters from Wrangel Island. The Americans launched Convair F-102 Delta Daggers armed with nuclear air-to-air missiles over the Bering Sea. The U-2 was brought down by the MiG fighters, the Americans responded by using their nuclear air-to-air missiles.

This triggered the immediate launch of American ICBMs, SM-65Atlas, and LGM-25C Titan IIs. The USA also launched all its Jupiter missiles from Italy and Turkey in an attempted first strike victory, not being aware that the Russians had also the same plan and launched fuelled ready R-12 Dvina, R-14 Chusovaya



nuclear armed missiles from Cuba, and R-16s ICBMs from the USSR. Once these were detected in flight the UK launched its Thor IRBMs. This, with the planned follow through to attacking China would result in a 'nuclear winter' with well over a 90% loss in global population and the extinction of thousands of species.

As each IRBM and ICBM reached its maximum height a SWAN device cut the warheads in two, with all of the rockets their trajectory became anomalous, and they disintegrated.

Maia was slowly descending the mountain, like the others of the twelve who had failed to destroy the universe she was now entering the pine woods below the mountain's flat plateau. Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta together with special FBI units were also in the area. Maia was not as angry as the others, she was more of a depressive, and suffered from deep bouts of nihilist existentialism. The path entered a wide clearing strewn with boulders, she sat and noticed to her surprise she was no longer wearing a cloak, but had on outdoor gear, a parka, and trousers with hiking boots. She was even more surprised as the team of Detachment-Delta and FBI agents entered the clearing. An FBI agent, unusually in camo gear, stepped forward and held out his badge and spoke,

'Professor Pamela Maia, I'm agent Carter, we have instructions to take you to Houston ASAP.'

Before she could reply, he added, 'From the President.' And before she could reply to that, a Black Hawk helicopter was landing, and she was being pushed on board. Once on board she had on a headset and the pilot began speaking.

'Sorry to spoil your hiking holiday Ma'am but the situation regarding Venus is becoming more volatile.'

So, Maia it seems was a professor, of what at the moment she knew not, but suspected astronomy. The pilot, who it seems was a major general who liked to 'keep his hand in' was very talkative. It seems she, Professor Pamela Maia, enjoyed hiking in



Washington state, and this Maia assumed was where she was picked up. It seemed they were flying to a military base near Seattle, where a military jet would take her to Houston. And that was the limit of the knowledge from the conversation. The major general was talking throughout the flight, mainly about his enjoyment of flying 'helos' and hiking. On landing they were met by an FBI agent, in standard suit and by a young woman, seeming military but in smart casual clothes. Hair in a bob, jeans blouse and jacket. She, the agent informed Maia, would be driving her to the hotel they had booked her in, and then after freshening up and a change of clothes to the 'meeting' at NASA. So, another piece in the jig saw.

At the hotel, a five-star affair, and her room was a suite, she found a set of clothes, jeans, skirts, various tee shirts and tops, shoes, jackets, a coat and sneakers.

'We got a selection from your apartment Ma'am. An imposition but in the circumstances.' The sergeant said, she had introduced herself as sergeant Briggs, US Army.

Maia showered and dressed for a meeting. She found this whole scenario like a game or puzzle, her anger was gone, and now had the task of solving who she was. Who was Professor Pamela Maia?

'I'll be driving you while we are here.' sergeant Briggs announced.

So, she was driven to NASA's headquarters, and into a building where she was escorted by another person, she suspected FBI maybe, in a lift which descended underground. And another vast hall with low lights, people in chairs and a dais with military and civilians. The audience was around 100. She was shown to a seat at the front.

A person from the dais rose, a man in civilian dress, a brown suit and jacket, check shirt and bow tie, who Maia latter discovered was a Dr Brian Taylor, a civilian but working for an unspecified US



government agency. He began to speak.

‘Welcome everyone to this briefing, some of you have been to others, and some are only now joining the team, which is designated FFV. I’m Dr Brian Taylor and I will give the briefing from the get-go of these events. And could I especially welcome Professor Pamela Maia, who has contributed so much since her discovery 12 months ago.’

He beckoned to Maia to stand, which she did to applause from everyone.

‘And here it is.’ said the Doctor, and a video screen showed a planet, very much over exposed, and darting around it tiny spark like objects with another three stationary, with occasional flickers from the planet to them.

He continued, ‘This clip is from one of the first made of Venus 12 months ago by Professor Maia, who was studying the upper atmosphere of Venus in real time. Hence as you see the overexposure. Professor Maia was able to re-process earlier videos, some made 5 years ago. By reprocessing to give the same contrast she established these lights first appeared two years ago from a single bright object which descended into the Venusian atmosphere. Professor Maia was able to establish without doubt these were not natural phenomena, the velocities and vectors indicated sophisticated movement of the objects. This is when NASA approached the military who at first were sceptical. They did however invite me to coordinate with Professor Maia, check her findings, which was not at all necessary. It was Professor Maia who came up with the idea of magnetic and spectrographic sweeps of precise locations.’

A diagram of Venus was projected, with lines from the stationary lights to the surface of the planet, and a marker where the original bright light had entered the surface.

The Doctor continued showing the results.



‘It can be seen that these points on the surface correspond to both magnetic and spectrographic anomalies. Moreover, these have structures which are changing. The most likely hypothesis is intelligent life or intelligent non-living organisms, robotic probes. We maintained top priority security and I think in view of the developments, especially recently, this was a wise thing to do.’

A timeline was now being projected.

Doctor Taylor continued,

‘Venera 14 and 15, USSR orbiters ceased operation in July 1984 at the same time. The US Magellan orbiter failed in October 1994. The European Space Agency’s Venus Express entered orbit on the 11 April 2006. Full communications were lost on 28 November 2014. All these were unscheduled rapid shutdown of comms. Finally, a month ago the Japanese Akatsuki 2015 orbiter was destroyed,’

The screen showed a spark flying from the surface and a flash.

‘at the same time the Chinese orbiter Tianwen-V also stopped transmission.’

He paused.

‘Now the recent events. This is as high a level of security as we can go. Two days ago, we lost the James Webb telescope, the Hubble, and a number of military satellites. The Chinese and Russians also lost their military satellites. We understand an unmanned base on the Moon, we presume Chinese, was destroyed. In several cases these were closely observed and caused by an object which showed as a very bright light. We have determined its mass and velocity in all these cases as identical, and their origin as Venus. We have not disclosed the FFV findings to anyone other than senior US personnel. The conclusion now is that the phenomena is intelligent, and hostile.’

There was a stir amongst the audience.



He continued.

‘It seems both the Chinese and Russians have identified the origin of these attacks from the surface of Venus and have subsequently launched missiles at these sites. We presume with nuclear warheads.’

There were more noises from the audience.

‘Our task under the direct instructions of The President is to frame responses, we have 12 hours. We have ten groups with differing scenarios to work on this, and allocated labs in which to work. We will meet and share every four hours. Here are your groups.’

The video display showed names and associated rooms. The meeting quickly broke up.

Professor Pamela Maia joined Dr Brian Taylor’s group.

It was decided a meal break might be needed at the six hour mark.

At the first meeting after four hours two of the groups had reached a decision, to join in the attack on Venus, after all, the group reasoned, the US had received what was an unprovoked attack. The second group added that the initial Venusian attack was a typical first move to a larger full out attack, first removing comms. These suggestions were not unsurprisingly from two military groups.

At the next meeting another military group had decided to go for an attack whilst another said a ‘wait and see’ approach might be best.

The teams met at the conclusion to the session. Two more teams thought a ‘counterattack’ would be the best option. Two other teams failed to agree. A ninth said the USA should prepare for a



major strike from Venus, using a cover story of a likely multiple meteorite strike from the Oort cloud. Shelters should be prepared. The final team, which was Dr Taylor's, made no definite suggestions just made some comments to be considered. These were mainly from Professor Pamela Maia,

'So, she will present our concerns for those making the decision.' Dr Taylor said.

She stood up and in a confident voice spoke.

'The flight time from Earth to Venus using our technology, which is the same as the Chinese and Russians, is around three months. Measuring the Venusian objects which took out various targets they were estimated at travelling between three hundred and five hundred thousand miles an hour. It would then take the Venusians ten days from launch to an Earth target, not three months. They seem to have much better tech. At those impact speeds no warhead would be required, and no shelter would survive. Given multiple projectiles, the impact of as little as 20 would be a definite ELE, Extinction Level Event.'

This again caused a stir, and grim faces from the military. One senior from the dais spoke.

'Professor Maia, so you are saying we can do nothing?'

'Unless you can take out these projectiles travelling at these speeds I guess not.' she replied.

The questioner looked even more glum.

'We could hope our lack of aggression might mitigate any response.' she added.

The meeting broke up and the delegates departed, those on the dais would give The President and his Joint Chiefs the recommendations.



Maia was driven back to her hotel where she found a rucksack containing her personal belongings. This was all very confusing, who was the real Professor Pamela Maia, there seemed to be a person of that name. She looked at her things. There was ID, and an address of a Manhattan apartment. Credit cards and security cards, a notebook, laptop, and smart phone. The notebook was a find, it contained addresses and fairly easy to 'crack' passwords for her laptop, phone and credit card PINs. She quickly managed to get access to the laptop and phone. It seemed she was wealthy. A knock came on the door, it was the sergeant, now in camo uniform, she handed Maia a folder and spoke,

'Ma'am, airline tickets for your flight to New York tomorrow, I will pick you up at nine. We forgot your rucksack, but you should have it by now Ma'am.' And smiled.

'Yes, I do,' said Maia 'and while you are here can I ask a favour, could you read this out to me?'

She showed the sergeant the notebook, a page where it gave the PIN for one of the credit cards.

'No Ma'am, they just look like squiggles?' was the sergeant's reply.

Maia could read '7745 fast yankee' and had worked out it was the PIN for the AMEX card. 'Odd.' she thought, 'well no more than this situation.'

With that the sergeant left. The next day she caught the flight, business class to JFK, and from there a taxi to an apartment block in Manhattan, which was rather expensive and smart. A she suspected a 30s building near Central Park and the Guggenheim. She entered and the concierge gave a knowing smile. She checked that she had no mail, the mailbox key had its number attached. She guessed her apartment would be the same number as the mailbox, so she found the right floor from the number on the mailbox key ring. That evening she ate at a nearby restaurant, and the staff seemed to know her. It was



Sunday the next day, a warm and sunny day. She spent the morning in the park. This was weird but so had her life been in general over the last few months, like the clandestine meetings of the twelve in Paris. The plan to destroy themselves along with the universe! And now it seems she was a wealthy professor and advisor to NASA on all things Venusian.

While she was sitting in the park a message came from Dr. Taylor. It was brief,

‘All the proposals other than nothing, meeting at 57 Wall St. 10.AM MON.’

She had a light lunch in a Deli and spent the afternoon in the Guggenheim Art Gallery. The evening, she dined in the same restaurant and then watched a movie on You Tube. By serendipity it was a Polish film from 1960, ‘First Spaceship on Venus’, in which a message is decoded from Venus of a Venusian plan to irradiate the Earth’s surface prior to invasion.

She didn’t sleep well, but next morning took a taxi to Wall Street. 57 was a bland doorway, which opened as she approached, by what was obviously a government agent. The door closed behind her, then steel doors. She was taken by the agent through 3 more sets of doors until finally a room with a glass partition with another door. She was directed to a chair, video screen and headphones. At 10 AM the screen flicked on; it was Dr. Taylor. He addressed what Maia thought must be the other delegates in other locations. He confirmed the decision. A full attack on Venus and the target sites, and the meteorite cover story for the building of shelters. After the others in various locations had left the video conference Dr. Taylor remained online,

‘Pam,’ he said, ‘they noted all your comments, and had them confirmed, but to do nothing was not an option. It might be useless, but they wanted some action, and if the facts became public it would offer reassurance. I’ll keep you posted. My thanks.’



The screen went dead, she rose and was escorted out of the building in silence. It was a pleasant morning, so she walked back to her apartment. Her life was uneventful. She read, visited the museums, and dined out. It must have been six weeks later; it was morning and she was at home having a morning coffee. As she sipped, her intercom was buzzed by someone in the lobby. It was two officers from homeland security, they held id cards. She invited them up, they said they were sent by a Doctor Taylor, no they didn't know why, they were to take her to a heli pad on East Side Pier, she should pack for a couple of days,

'That's all we know,' Ma'am, 'that and this is very urgent and very important.' the woman agent said.

As before the helicopter took her to a nearby US base where a military passenger jet flew her, and only her, it was a 20 seat executive Lear Jet, to Houston. As before they met in the underground hall, all the delegates seemed present, the same group on the dais.

Dr. Taylor rose, he looked grim, as did the others on either side of him. He began,

'Yesterday at 3.30 Standard time all of the missile warheads which were on their way to Venus were destroyed by the same type of objects as before. We had full visuals, using chase video craft, we suspect the Russians and Chinese did also, and yes, their missiles were also destroyed. We have now detected over one hundred larger objects, a hundred and ten projectiles to be precise, clearly leaving the Venusian atmosphere and heading for Earth.'

He paused; the room was silent.

'I've been asked by The President what are our options. It seems we have ten days. Same groups, it looks hopeless, take as much time as you like, then return. And professor Maia could I have a word.'



The groups split up and some returned after ten minutes, by twenty minutes all were back. They had no answers.

The Doctor nodded as each team delivered the same grim verdict. 110 impacts, complete eradication of the Earth's surface.

'We are ordered to keep this secret, any employed by the government or NASA can take indefinite leave to be wherever you wish. Maybe with loved ones, but again, in secret. I wish to thank you all.' The Doctor said.

'Pam,' Dr. Taylor added, 'Can you just come with me, there is someone who wants to meet with you.'

He led Maia into a small room, there was a desk and two chairs, in one sat Hope Murkowski.

'I'll leave you to it.' Dr. Taylor said and left.

Maia sat, she felt that this person knew her, but more, knew who she really was, one of the twelve, but how, she had no idea. Hope Murkowski smiled and pushed a piece of paper across the desk. It had a drawing of the atom bombs, Little Boy and Fat Man, and something Maia didn't recognise, labelled "SWAN DEVICE".

'It seems,' said Hope Murkowski 'there is a link between this and a film of 1960.'

Here Maia interrupted, 'First Spaceship to Venus' she said.

Hope Murkowski said, 'Would you like to meet the artist of this drawing?'

'Very, very much.' said Maia.

And so it was that the two were flown from Houston USA to Birmingham England. And from there driven by Ray Wood to



Bordesley Green and 85 Colonial Road.

Maia and Hope Murkowski sat in the 1960s kitchen facing the boy. Maia spoke,

‘It’s about Venus, do you know what Venus is?’

The boy said, ‘I have seen the film.’ and he rose and went into the pantry, returning with a sheet of grease proof paper and began drawing small figures something like the ones on the sheet Hope Murkowski had shown Maia.

He drew 110, (and ‘reserves’) and then the words ‘THE BLACK SWANS’ and passed it to Maia. They left.

Somewhere over the Atlantic in the military Lear jet, a Major General’s secure satellite phone rang, he took his phone to the Professor, ‘It’s for you.’ he spoke.

An animated and excited voice of Doctor Brian Taylor shouted,

‘Pam, they’re gone, we saw them, it looked like they were cut in two, each of the hundred and ten. Then they exploded, all gone. Whatever have you two been up to?’

She replied ‘The Black Swans, that’s all I’m going to say. OK.’

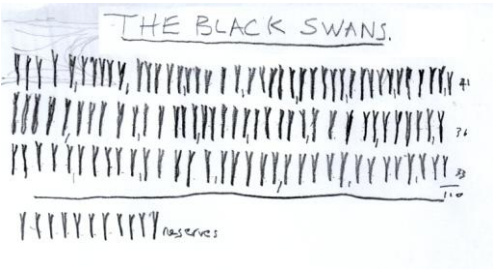
‘OK.’ he laughed.

About an hour later the same scenario occurred.

Doctor Brian Taylor was again calling Maia, Maia thinking his vagueness deliberate, keeping things secret from anyone overhearing, even now, but his message was clear. He simply said.

‘They are going, we can see them, they have packed up and on the way to wherever they came from. It’s all over.’





CHAPTER SEVENTY FIVE: SPDT

Spdt began her walk down from the mountain, the rage for failure persisting, she walked quickly and was soon in the forest surrounded by trees, the path zig zagging, and though dawn, the canopy was thick and dark. Her rage persisting. She heard a voice from behind her,

‘I am the wand metaphorically speaking but literally speaking I’m your familiar, an ayami, a tutelary spirit, here to help you, and no I can’t read all your mind, I wouldn’t want to yet, just thoughts that relate to this quest.’

She turned to see who or what it was.

‘No, you can’t see me yet,’ the voice said, ‘I’m your other self, so always out of sight, behind you, hidden.’

Spdt noticed the voice was very much like her own, maybe a little lighter. Spdt spun around several times but could never see the other self.

‘My other self?’ said Spdt.

‘Call me Echo.’ said the voice.

Then still angry she said, ‘And so Echo, what are you here for.’

‘I said to help.’ Echo said.

‘Help me, what?’ said Spdt.

‘Help you in the city.’ Echo said.

‘What city?’ said Spdt.

‘The city of your mind, but don’t worry it should all become clear.’ said Echo, ‘let’s press on.’



They were still high on the mountain; the gradient had steepened. The forest rose high on her right, to the left was now a sheer drop of some hundred feet ending in a rock scree before the trees began again. The path now more of a track. Spdt could see the city in the distance. She stopped to take in the view. The city was on a hill, at its centre was a tall tower, around this were the houses, and surrounding the whole a tall wall with battlements. There was a fortified keep, and large gates, the only entrance to the city in the wall. It resembled those medieval cities of northern Italy. There was however a strange thing, half of the city was in darkness, well was not black darkness but a strange grey nothingness.

‘That’s me.’ Echo said, ‘I’m that other nothingness, and as you can see, we have to pass through that half before we can reach the tower.’

‘Why should we bother to try to reach that tower, what would be the point in doing that?’ Spdt said.

‘The tower, that’s your consciousness, your ego.’ Echo said.

‘So.’ said Spdt.

‘So, you need your full ego.’ Echo said.

‘Why.’ said Spdt.

‘Because to be who you truly are.’ Echo said.

‘I’ve no interest in being truly who I am, my rage at this world, my life, is sufficient,’ Spdt said, ‘If I can’t destroy the world, I’ll destroy myself.’ said Spdt.

With that Spdt made to leap over the sheer drop but couldn’t leap.

‘Not without me.’ Echo said.



‘Then we will just stay here and die of starvation.’ said Spdt.

‘Not with me.’ Echo said.

Then Spdt saw Echo walk in front of her. She was dressed in a similar cloak, it was identical, but not, Echo walked with a certain grace, and unsurprisingly Spdt was incredibly drawn towards this other self, now she could see it, and so had to follow.

They passed through the gates of the city, literally, they were closed solid, but they passed through. Echo spoke,

‘As this city is ourselves its material is simply us,’

Spdt had no clue as to what this meant.

‘and you have no understanding for as yet we are divided.’

‘We have to visit the rooms.’ Echo said.

‘What rooms?’ Spdt said.

‘The rooms of our superego, those of the rules which inhibit us, the rooms of our ego, those are the rooms where I am not, and the rooms of our Id, those of our drives and passions, where there are no rules.’ Echo said.

Spdt was no wiser, but vain.

They entered a room in the first house. There were two figures talking. Actually arguing.

The one said to the other ‘I’ll tell you the truth, I hate you!’ The other said, ‘Well in truth I hate you.’

‘You see,’ said Echo ‘the truth is destructive, a destructive power. Is it better to lie and live, than be destroyed by truth?’

‘I don’t know,’ replied Spdt. ‘I need to think about this.’



‘But to arrive at a conclusion which is true?’ said Echo ‘Or a feeling which is good?’

‘Oh’ replied Spdt.

The argument continued, ‘This will get more violent and they will probably kill one another.’ said Echo.

They left the room to the sounds of screams, left the house to enter another.

Here two figures were sat at a table talking. One was saying, ‘I see what you are saying is true and that is an end to it, despite my feelings, I can’t argue with you, I can’t win.’

‘We must move on.’ said Echo.

‘But here it seems unfair that with education one can become knowledgeable and so invulnerable.’ said Spdt.

‘And education can be bought.’ said Echo.

And they entered many rooms where much the same thing was occurring amongst greater numbers of people. Fighting, with more and more people and ideas involved, until they walked through street riots.

‘I see strife and discord in us, and the world,’ Spdt said, ‘how can this and these terrible things be overcome?’

‘From this, only forgetfulness,’ said Echo. ‘we have forgotten how to forget,’ said Echo, and laughed. ‘and so we are never able to begin afresh.’

Spdt said, ‘How can this be done?’

Echo gave a one word answer, ‘Time.’



With that they passed houses where people were resting, and sleeping, doing menial tasks without much thought.

Spdt said, 'But now they are, or we are, semi-conscious or asleep, how are we to awake?'

'With passion that burns like fire,' Echo said, 'the past forgotten in sleep can now awake without the past to choke it, like a freshly laid fire.'

The scene was that of after some great disaster with the people of the city set to work. Carpenters and builders at work, people hauling timber and bricks, others with carts laden with food. From some houses came the smells of cooking. Everywhere purposeful activity. And what rose up from this activity were new buildings, new relationships and new friendships.

Spdt said, 'I see now the dynamics is at work, opposites, complements.' And she looked into Echo's eyes. 'And that ignorance and logic are strangely alike, like the ice of certainty.'

They passed houses where there were children, and adults, houses where there were the old and infirm, and houses of the dying and dead.

And Spdt said, 'And we must not betray ourselves but respect ourselves. We must care for ourselves. We must begin, change and repeat.'

And they watched as they saw the cycle of birth and life and death and the celebrations and festivals and rites of passage in which none were excluded.

'And now we must climb the tower.' said Echo.

The tower was made of stone, tall, circular and narrow with a winding spiral staircase. Windows pierced the thick walls at intervals. Finally, they arrived at the top, an open walled platform. From here they could see over the whole city. Of its



streets and houses. Some grand, others mere shacks. Some in disrepair, others new. And the roads and lanes, busy with the people. And out beyond the walls the open countryside. Gentle hills, and woods. And other cities, each with its tower. Some more grand, others less. Some deserted, abandoned and in decay. Some looked like some great catastrophe had overtaken it, by fire or flood.

And now looking over all of this, on the top of the tower was a lone figure, Spdt.

Ovis appeared, who was one of the twelve.

‘So, you have found your true self, and this is it, master of all you perceive?’ he said.

‘If you like, if you wish to see it that way.’ Spdt said.

‘I don’t, I still want to rage against existence.’ Ovis said.

‘The thing is I’ve been shown that I am complex, not just an emotion or some concept. Look at this city, and no I’m not master of it, but part of it, the part ordinarily everyone sees, my mistake was to think that is all I was, just that which is what others see. And obviously this is only a metaphor. But see how it is dynamic, and changes. Look at those other cities, and notice how they can both stagnate, or develop too fast and destroy themselves, or grow and change, but in step with the world.’

‘To destroy is the only solution.’ Ovis said.

‘Again, If you like, if you wish to see it that way, your path is not mine.’ Spdt said.

‘Mine must be a road to freedom, which is War!’

With which saying Ovis left the tower and the city and climbed back up the mountain.



CHAPTER SEVENTY SIX: OVIS

Ovis, one of the twelve began his descent, he was in agreement with the others about total destruction and considered this the logic of nihilism. He thought himself smarter than the others, who he thought were overly emotional. He noticed Spdt on his left begin to descend from the mountain and had what he considered to be the brilliant idea of following her, and so be aware of any situation he might face in his descent, one that might be dangerous. He saw how far from danger she had grown. She seemed to him in a situation in which she was satisfied and that this was a failure in not taking on existence. After challenging her, he walked back up the mountain and resumed his path, which was still that of destruction, of himself and everything.

So, he came to the privet hedge of 85 Colonial Road, walked through the gate, walked down the path and opened the front door, down the hallway, an empty front living room, another room with French windows, and some stupid bird in a cage. The whole place dismal. He finally walked into the kitchen, and there was the boy sat at the kitchen table. A pathetic boy.

‘What the fuck do you want?’ Ovis shouted.

The Boy said nothing, just looked at the chair opposite. Ovis sat, full of rage, the Boy’s calm expression making this worse, he felt like hitting him. With a club or something.

The wars of the Table:

He noticed in front of him on the table a tiny figure of a man, holding a club. The boy did too. Then he noticed in front of the boy there was also a figure. It seemed he, Ovis, could create this figure, so he created an army, hundreds armed with clubs which raced across the table. The boy’s army was less in number but armed with spears, so the battle at the centre of the table was very one sided. After 20 minutes Ovis’ entire army was dead or dying, as for the Boy’s, a few were wounded. They stood facing



Ovis, bowed, then turned back and walked towards the boy, disappearing over the edge of the table. The Boy's face still expressionless. Ovis watched as slowly his dead army in the centre of the table decayed into dust and vanished.

So, thought Ovis, I will have spears, wooden staffs with flint blades bound to them. He formed a new army and sent it forth. The Boy's army had shields and swords made of bronze. The battle was fierce and bloody, as before. This time the Boy's army sustained fatalities, much to the pleasure of Ovis. But as the battle continued at close quarters the Boy's warriors hacked Ovis' men to pieces. Once again the victors bowed and returned from whence they came. Ovis was furious.

His next attack wave was an army of twice the size, with full armour, knives, swords and axes of bronze. The Boy's army was again of a smaller size, with armour and swords of iron. Ovis could not believe his stupidity, he was not even pleased at the casualties his army inflicted on the Boy's, because he guessed the outcome was inevitable, his army was slaughtered. The steel swords cut through the bronze; the bronze armour was next to useless. As before the victors bowed and returned. Ovis could imagine the carrion birds feeding on his dead army. And soon it was gone.

It was as if the boy had practised this 'game' of war before. And of course he had, many times. And each time he had always ended the game in stalemate.

So now Ovis prepared a new army. Armed with steel, and chain mail, breast plates and full height shields. And he set them off across the table, this time not as a rabble, but a V shaped wall of fighters three deep. At first there was nothing on the Boy's side. This worried Ovis, but maybe the game was up. His troops reached halfway, then from the Boy's side came the knights on horseback. They had lances and broke through the centre of the three lines of Ovis' foot soldiers, killing many but nowhere near all. The knights dropped their lances, drew swords, and wheeled around attacking from behind. The ranks of Ovis' troops were



confused, many facing the wrong way, the vanguard now at the rear. The knights hacked them all to death, then rode back. Ovis' rage was worse, but he quickly leaned across the table and swept up the lances.

He mentally prepared his knights, thousands. They attacked. The boy had read about the famous battle of Agincourt. As the knights of Ovis raced across the table a rain of arrows flew down on them. The horses only having head armour were soon wounded and dying or rearing up in pain. Knights were falling in the mêlée, being crushed by falling horses. A second wave of Ovis' knights ran into the now fallen first wave, and then came a third, pressing the second wave into the first and killing many in the crush.

The knights were now on foot, thrown from their horses, or escaping the crush. But they were wearing heavy body armour, with visors down so could only manage to move slowly and see very little. The English long bow of some six feet, supposedly made from yew branches cut at midnight delivered arrows that could pierce all but the best armour. The knights now staggered towards the Boy's bowmen who continued to shoot arrows. Ovis was dumbstruck. Having to have lowered their visors to prevent being shot in the face their breathing had been made difficult, and their armour was heavy, 50 to 60 pounds. They also had to climb over their dead and dying comrades and horses. As the few knights survived all of this and reached the bowmen, they were now exhausted. Once the Boy's bowmen were out of arrows they attacked the few remaining knights with hatchets, swords, and mallets, unencumbered by heavy armour.

Ovis had buried his head in his hands, when he looked up the table was empty, the boy still facing him expressionless. He sat for a while thinking of his history and recognised his blunder. He would have to be clever; he was clever, he knew he was. A quantum leap! he thought. He skipped the battles of the Napoleonic age, both on land and sea. He pondered the first world war, then decided on Blitzkrieg. That would outsmart the boy, he would jump ahead. Fast moving tanks and air support. A



revolutionary warfare. But then he thought the boy might anticipate even this, so not the second world war tanks and aircraft, but modern tanks and aircraft. Ovis imagined the Boy's surprise, when his Napoleonic forces, or those of the First World War trench warfare with machine guns and barbed wire faced his planned force. They would simply smash through it. He smiled to himself.

Ovis had three columns of armour, tanks and armoured personnel carriers, with air cover when required and helicopter gunships. They moved across the table, crossed halfway, and approached the boy. Ovis sensed victory at last and smiled. Just then from nowhere simultaneously the lead tanks, and rear support tankers of all three columns were hit and exploded. The boy had deployed Man-portable anti-tank systems (MPATS). The columns could neither move forwards or back. And now the Boy's fighters were picking off the columns of armour. Quickly in came the helicopter gunships, and quickly they were taken out by Man-Portable Air-Defence Systems (MANPADS). And now tens of drones were dropping munitions on Ovis' columns. A wave of jets roared in, and these too were taken out by MANPADS. And more drones, many destroyed, but still more dropping munitions. All three columns were now ablaze. The boy had won again.

What next, thought Ovis, newer technology. Science fiction. He remembered the Star Wars movies. Why not use these imaginary weapons? He closed his eyes to think and so conjured these up. There was the Death Star, the Star destroyers, and in the final movie the infinity of Star Wars Dreadnoughts. And he formed his tactics, he now expected to lose all but the last battle, but an infinity of Dreadnoughts could not be overcome. All this time he hadn't noticed the boy had left the table to fetch a sheet of grease proof paper from the larder. He had made a drawing, 'The Killing machine of Aleph One'.

Now Ovis' Death Star appeared hovering over the table. Ovis wondered how the boy would counter this, what fantastic device would he, could he, conjure? For minutes nothing



happened, Ovis thought his Death Star should strike at what, the boy? As he had this thought the boy gave his response. It was HMS Victory; the boy was a keen reader of the comic The Eagle and had seen a centre fold cutaway of the ship. The Eagle was famous for its centre fold cutaway illustrations. It detailed its construction, A team of 150 workmen using around 6,000 trees. And the details, HMS Victory a 104-gun first-rate ship of the line of the Royal Navy. And the number of famous sea battles, the most famous being The Battle of Trafalgar, where Lord Nelson and his fleet destroyed the combined Spanish and French fleets.

Ovis was stunned, at both the choice of counter, and the stupidity. The Death Star immediately fired its superlaser. All this achieved though was a tear in two of the Victory's sails. The ship slowly approached the Death Star, which was still in the process of charging its superlaser for a second strike. Soon The Victory was too close for the superlaser to fire effectively. Slowly HMS Victory turned broadside on, and 50 guns blazed cannon balls at The Death Star, which blew to smithereens. The Victory turned and sailed back to the boy. Ovis deep in thought was starting to comprehend the tactics of his adversary, and even admire them. The boy had previously used more advanced technology, but now had not. But he had used a ship, not a spaceship, but maybe one of the most famous, if not the most famous of fighting ships. The archetype of Victory. The more Ovis pondered the more his respect for the boy grew. Though he still thought the final victory would be his. And then thought that maybe the boy had made a foolish error in playing a trump card too soon. Ovis launched his four Star Destroyers. Each having 8 Heavy turbolaser turrets, 2 Medium dual turbolaser turrets, 52 Point-defense laser cannons, and 4 Proton torpedo tubes, as well as Tractor beam projectors and Deflector shields.

Before anything could be seen from his adversary Ovis saw one of the Star destroyers explode. Only later did the Boy's response become visible. It was a battleship, that Ovis knew, but he couldn't identify it, which was a pity. It was from another of The Eagle's centre fold cutaway pictures. This was of HMS Nelson, an obvious follow up, maybe a kind of physical pun. The Nelson was



a cut down version of a proposed larger battleship as an international limit to the size of warships was set by the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty. A limit which both the Germans and Japanese ignored and violated. Commissioned 15 August 1927, HMS Nelson was armed with 3 × triple 16 inch guns, the largest calibre used by the Royal Navy, 6 × twin 6 inch guns, 6 × single 4.7 inch AA guns, 8 × single 2 pdr AA guns and 2 × 24.5 inch torpedo tubes. Armour was a steel waterline belt: 13–14 inch thickness. The boy had remembered this from the centrefold. Also, that the range of a 16 inch gun was 39,780 yards, or over 22 miles. And this is why Ovis didn't see the ship and its first salvo of nine 16 inch shells. Few would think that such a range was one in which war ships of the mid 20thC would commence engagement. Ovis obviously did not, unlike the boy.

The contest was far more even, at three to one. The Nelson took serious damage, but only after Ovis realised warships aimed at the enemy's turrets and not just at the ship. Nelson had taken out all of the heavy turbolaser turrets of one of the three Star destroyers, then ignoring this ship had begun on the second, taking out 4 of the 8. Only then did Ovis see the tactic, but too late. The Nelson lost turret B, the centre turret, but using turrets A and C took out the remaining 4 Heavy turbolaser turrets of the second Star destroyer, and then those on the last Star destroyer. Nelson then closed range and used both 16 inch and 6 inch guns together with torpedoes to finish off the Star destroyers.

Ovis' respect for the boy had grown, but he had no compunction in not refraining from his coup de grâce. After a pause the infinity of Star Wars Dreadnoughts appeared. The Boy's reaction was strange, he simply pushed the piece of grease proof paper he had drawn on across the table, with the infinity of Dreadnoughts hovering above. Ovis looked at the drawing but could not understand it, the single ship, with no armament. The boy had also remembered a snippet in *The Eagle* about 'Astonishing Mathematics'.

The infinity of Star Wars Dreadnoughts blinked out of existence, Ovis collapsed, head in hands beaten, though not knowing how.

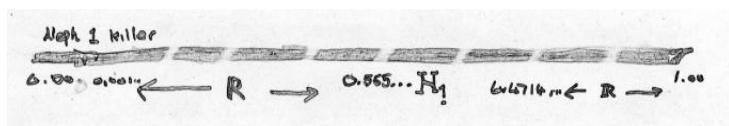


At that the old woman entered the kitchen carrying a chair and was followed by Nymphaeaceae. She put the chair next to Ovis for Nymphaeaceae to sit on, and then began to make tea.



CHAPTER SEVENTY SEVEN: NYMPHAEACEAE

Nymphaeaceae began her descent from the flat topped mountain. Yet another of the twelve who planned to destroy the universe along with themselves, but she was having second thoughts. In fact, more thoughts than she was happy with, how many thoughts are possible, an infinity, and which infinity. She had studied math and set theory. It had caused her breakdown. She walked through the lower parts of the mountain, the forest, and then the trees thinned. All at once she passed a gate in a privet hedge, an old woman in a pinafore was at the gate, she opened it and beckoned Nymphaeaceae into the front garden, and down the path between the lawns with flower beds. And through the front door, and down the hallway. In the living room the old woman picked up a chair and took it into the kitchen. She placed it next to Ovis, Nymphaeaceae recognised him when he looked up, his head had been resting in his hands on the table. Across from him was a boy of around nine or ten, maybe older? The old woman was filling a kettle and said 'Tea.'. Nymphaeaceae sat next to Ovis, he looked into her eyes, bewildered. Then showed Nymphaeaceae the boy's drawing.



He spoke, 'I had an infinity, an infinite number of dreadnoughts. And somehow this beat me.'

His face looked pitiful. Nymphaeaceae didn't understand the 'dreadnoughts' thing, but asked,

'You mean infinite in number, like integers?'

Ovis looked puzzled, 'Why of course integers, but infinite, 1,2,3,4, and on forever.'



‘Oh,’ said Nymphaeaceae, ‘this is a picture of a ship the length of the number line from zero to one, and it’s a bigger infinity.’

‘What!’ exclaimed Ovis.

‘Your infinity is countable, Aleph Zero, this infinity is the first uncountable infinity, Aleph One.’ said Nymphaeaceae.

‘What!’ exclaimed Ovis, ‘nonsense, infinity is infinity.’

‘No,’ Nymphaeaceae said. ‘There are different types, this infinity.’ she was pointing to the drawing, ‘This has all the rational numbers, fractions, and also the irrational numbers, that is all the Reals.’

‘What irrational.’ exclaimed Ovis.

‘Well like when you divide 10 by 3 on a calculator, you get three point three recurring, you can’t write it as a fraction only as an approximate, the threes after the decimal point go on forever, as do for instance the decimals in Pi. And there are literally far more irrationals between even zero and one than all the integers. Cantor proved it. Shall I show you?’

Nymphaeaceae said.

‘Don’t bother,’ said Ovis, ‘it’s true, the boy beat me.’

‘Beat you?’ asked Nymphaeaceae.

‘Beat me, we were playing a war game, and he beat me every time.’ Ovis said.

The old woman put down two mugs of tea for the guests. They sipped, and Ovis began to feel better. He laughed and shook his finger at the boy.

‘You beat me!’ He said and laughed again. ‘Well done!’ he said, ‘Well done. I bet he knows everything.’ He said looking at



Nymphaeaceae.

‘Ugh!’ said Nymphaeaceae, ‘I wish he did.’

They continued to drink their tea.

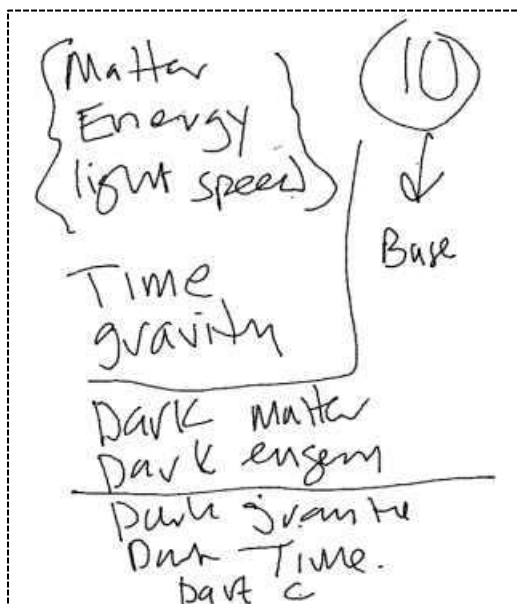
‘I don’t know everything,’ the boy said, ‘I just make things up, I’ll show you if you like.’

‘Yes,’ said Nymphaeaceae, ‘please do.’

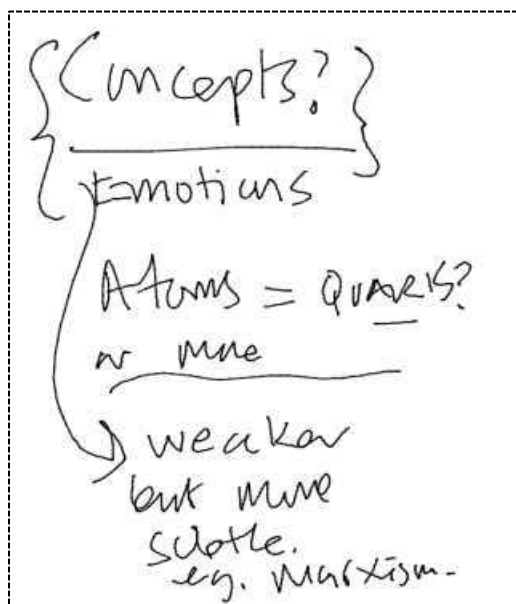
‘Sure.’ Ovis added.

The boy had got up and took a ream of papers from a shelf and sat back down. The sheets all had drawings on them made by the boy. He took the first three sheets and placed them on the table, facing Nymphaeaceae and Ovis.

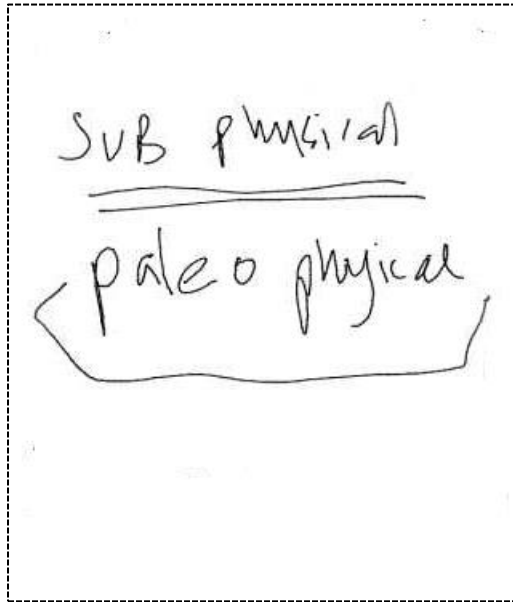






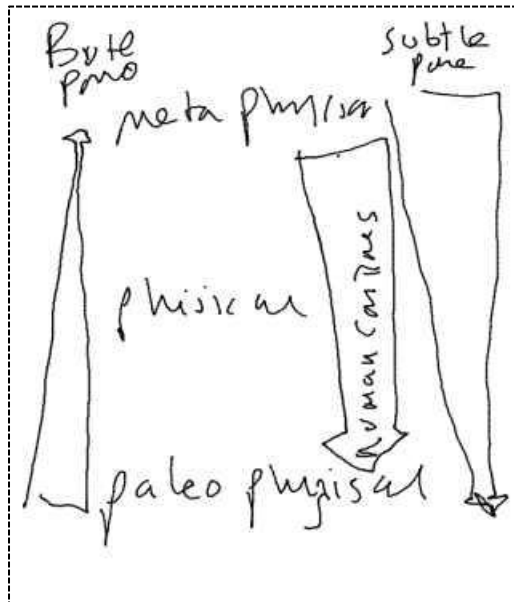


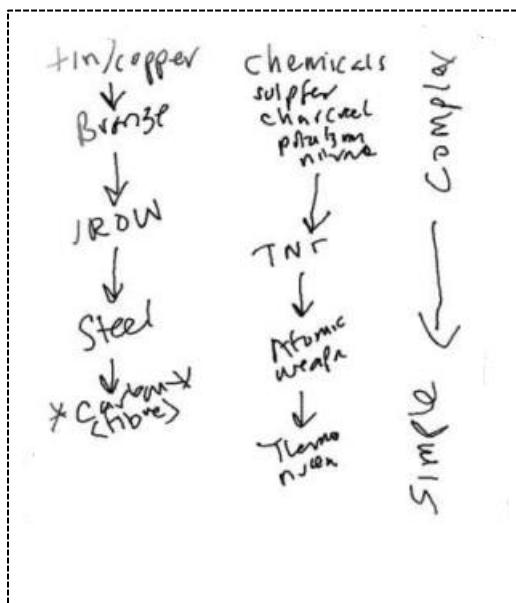
'So, we have to begin, but can't with a blank sheet, or sheets.'
The boy said. They looked at these, then he placed another
sheet.

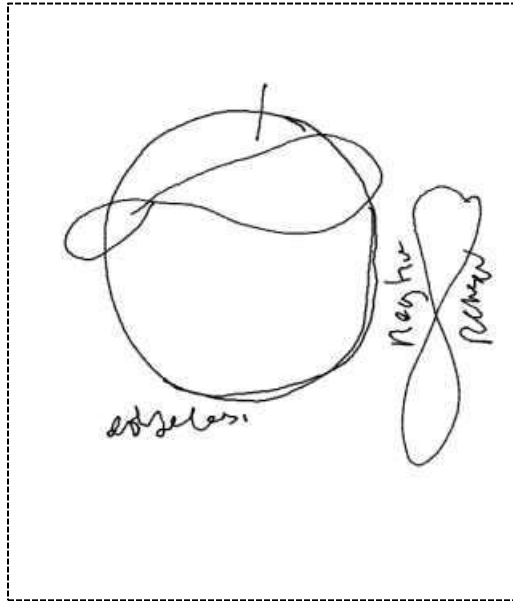


‘So, I invented this paleo physical, from Palaeontology, you know the study of dinosaurs, the idea is to think thoughts before they are given to you.’

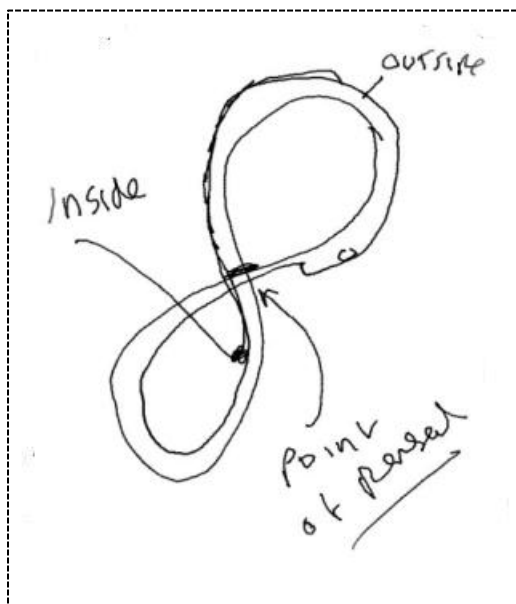
‘And some more...’





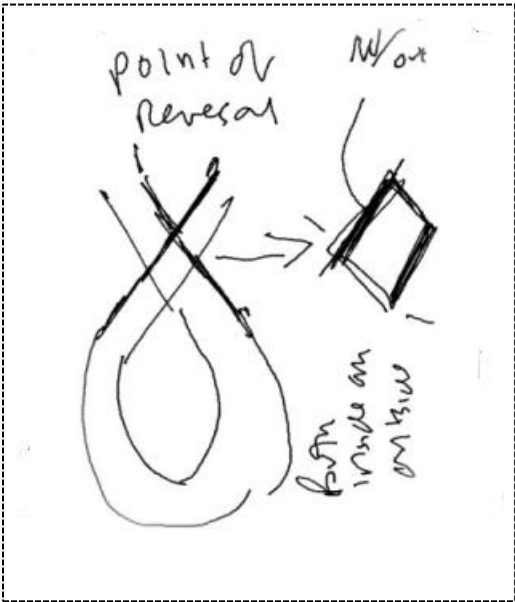


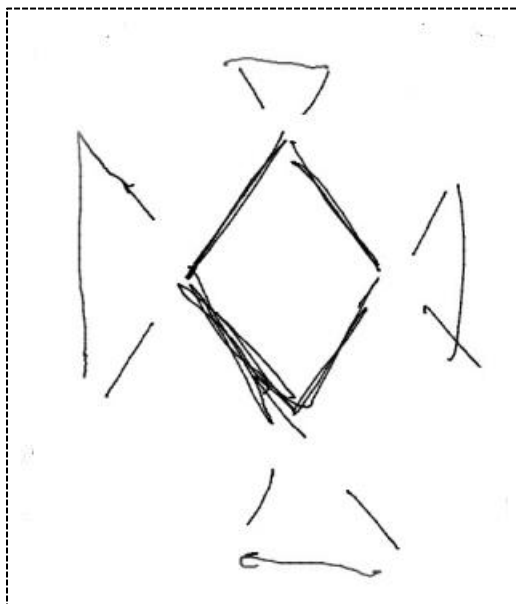
‘So, going in a different direction, or maybe making a new direction, not up and down, like I made the word paleophysics, it goes backwards, before physics, see.’



‘So, then I thought of things with no edges, no start or finish, not like the first drawings.’

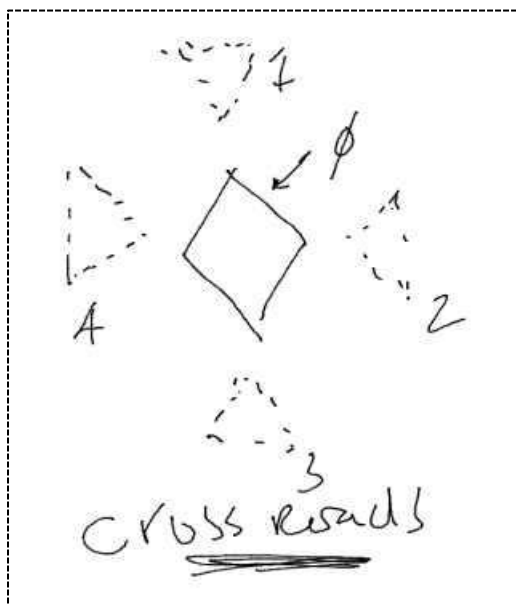






‘And I thought about this going back or forwards, or maybe round and round. And then this crossover, it seemed important, so I drew it.’

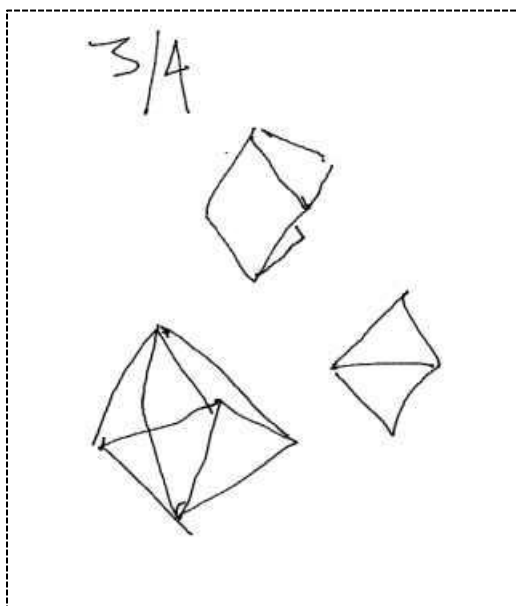




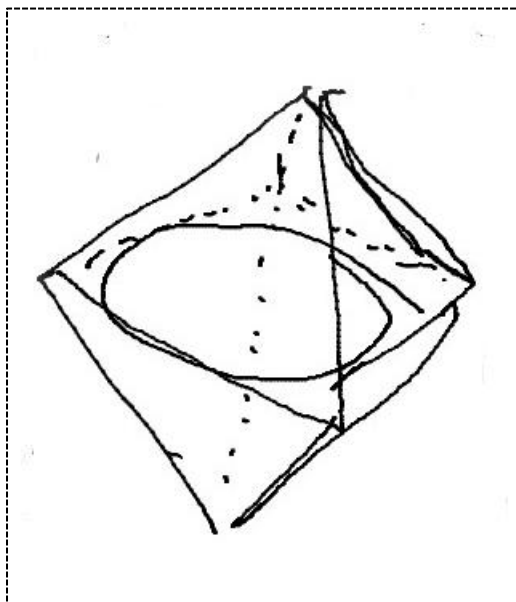
The boy laid a sheet on the table.

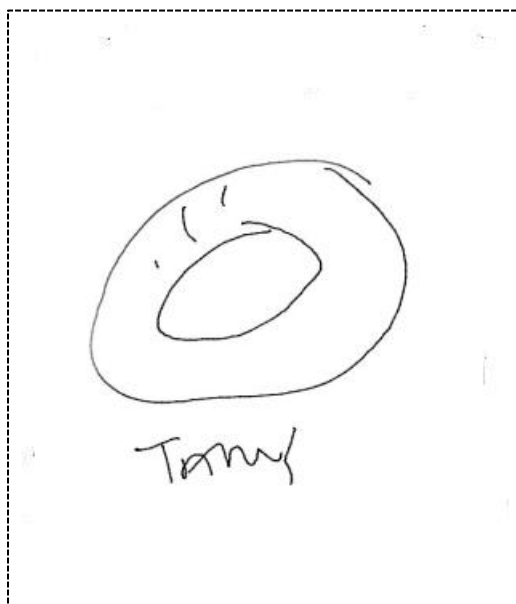
'The next is like a reversal.' he said.

'Like the reversal, or a crossroads.'

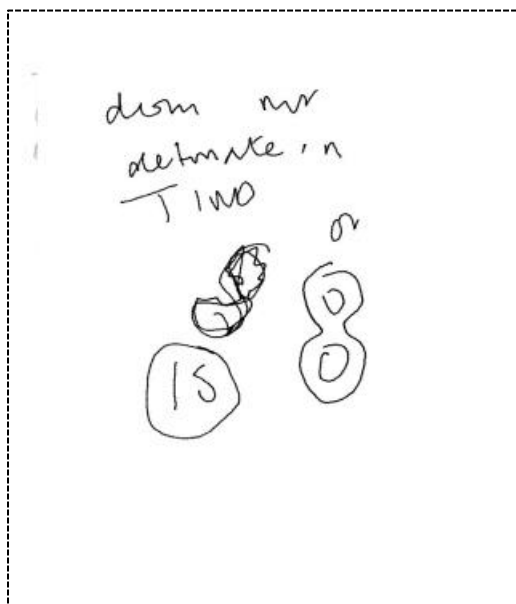


'I now have another object, a shape, a solid shape made from the crossroads.'



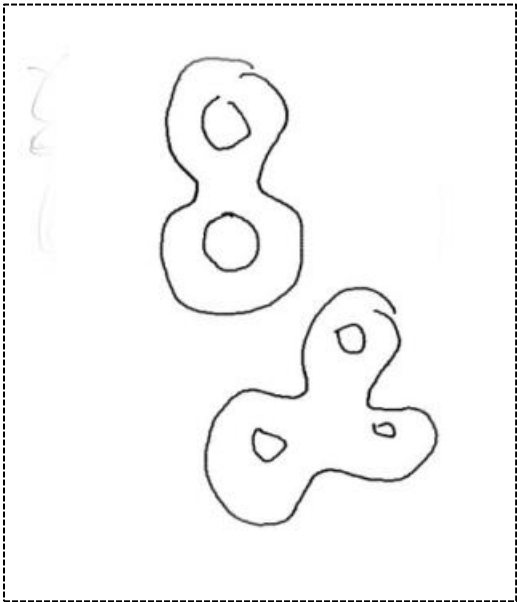


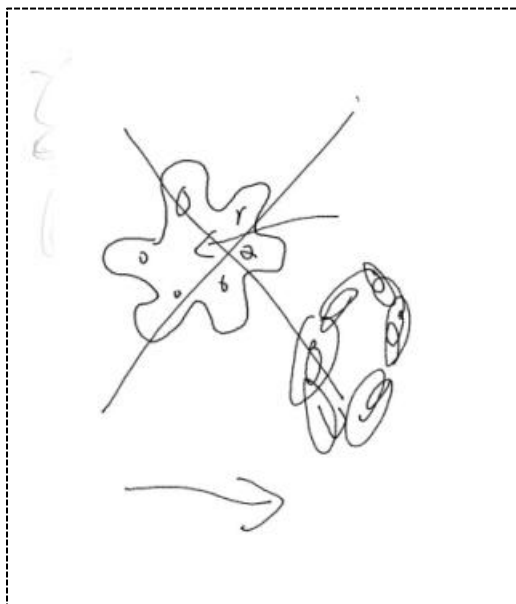
'So, I thought my paleophysics should be like an opposite, like a crossroads is, like an empty thing, not like a ball, but a negative ball.'



'I now wanted to develop this.'

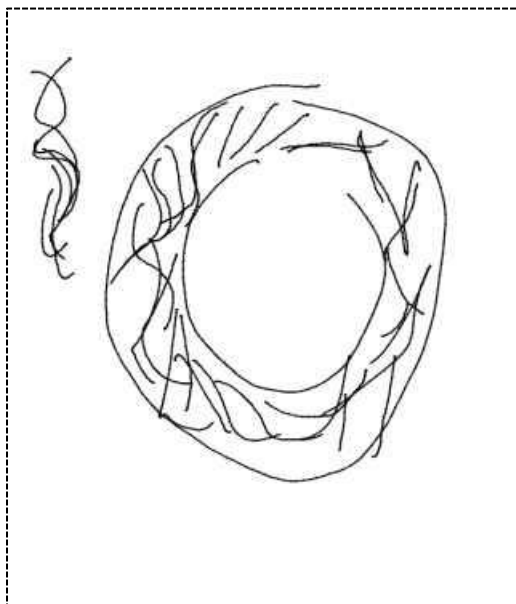




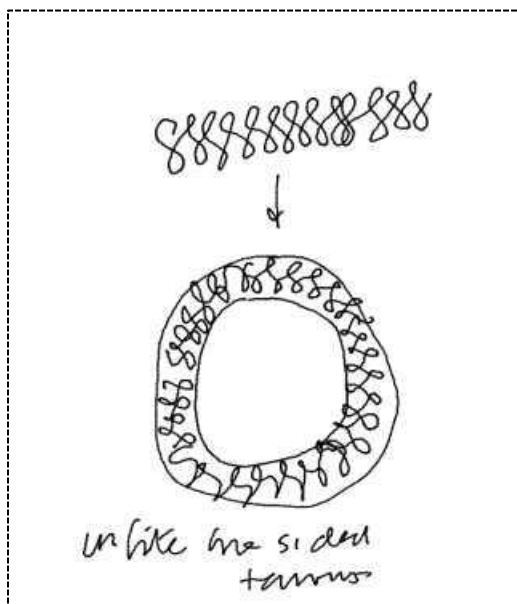


‘But it seemed wrong, like going outwards...’

‘See, it went wrong, it kind of explodes.’

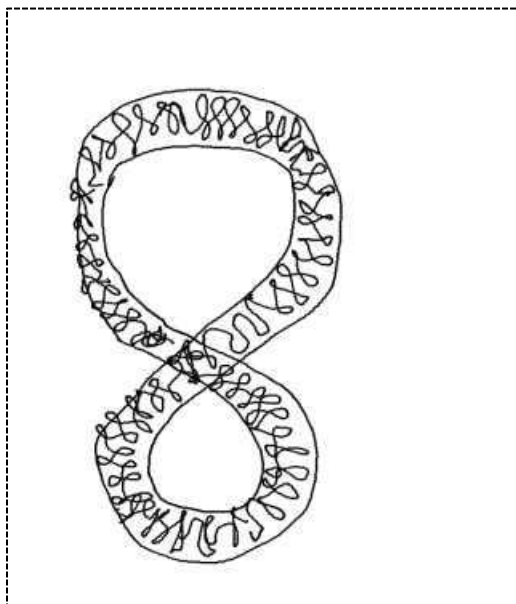


‘So now what’s in the ring, I wondered, I had a problem here.’



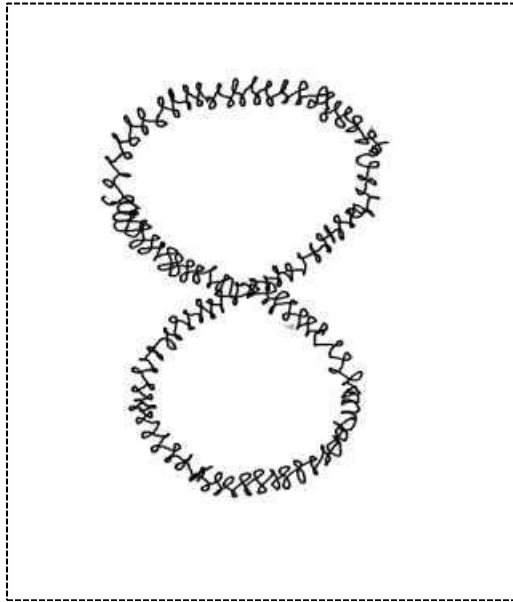
‘Now this works, look at how the inside is made.’





'Infinities with infinities' thought Nymphaeaceae. The Boy continued.

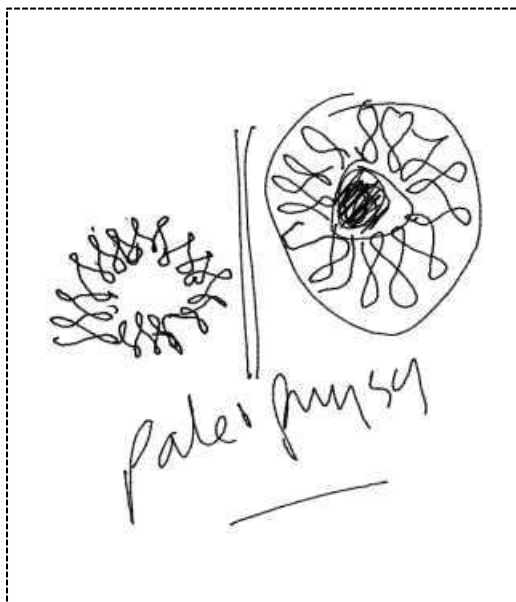




‘The shapes build up.’

The boy laid the final pages of those he had fetched from the shelf in the kitchen. A shelf stacked with sheets.





The boy finished.

Nymphaeaceae and Ovis looked back at the sheets, both deep in thought. Then Ovis spoke,

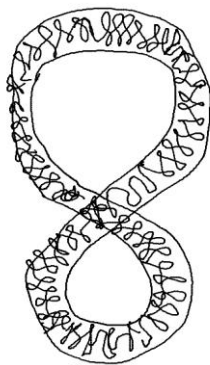
‘So, you just make these things up, and then what?’

‘Then I make some more.’ The boy said looking at the stacks of papers on the shelf.

‘I don’t get it,’ Nymphaeaceae said, ‘to what end?’

The boy said nothing.





‘No end,’ Ovis said, ‘like this,’ he held up a drawing,

‘I like this one in particular, no end within no end.’

Then Nymphaeaceae spoke.

‘So, no end or beginning, no purpose, but a purpose, I’m thinking,’ she paused and looked again at the drawings. ‘And what is this, it’s not science, could be art, but isn’t really, or is it anything I can think of, but it’s not nothing. Can I have some paper?’

Nymphaeaceae asked the boy. Who went and fetched a sheet of grease proof paper, giving it to Nymphaeaceae, and placing the carpenter’s pencil on top of it.

Ovis looked up at the boy, who said ‘If you want paper, I’ve lots, but only one pencil, and biro doesn’t work well, so you will have to share the pencil.’

‘Please.’ said Ovis.

So, the boy fetched another sheet.

They both looked at their blank sheet, seemingly unable to start.



The boy picked up the pencil and drew a square on Ovis' sheet and two squares on Nymphaeaceae's. Then gave the pencil to Nymphaeaceae. She immediately drew three squares, then thought, and drew five, then seven, then eleven.

'Primes!' exclaimed Ovis, 'my turn.'

Nymphaeaceae handed Ovis the pencil. He drew ever larger squares around the first, until they reached the edge of the paper, then ever smaller squares inside the first.

'I think you are playing with infinities.' Nymphaeaceae said.

'You know, I think I am.' Ovis replied.

Whilst Ovis was drawing the boy had fetched some more sheets of grease proof paper. They continued drawing, the boy watching. The old woman made more tea, and sat next to the boy, both watching the other two take turns with the pencil. All four drinking tea.

When the tea was finished Nymphaeaceae said, 'I think we should go on our way and get some paper and pencils of our own.'

'Agreed,' said Ovis, 'and thank you, thank you very much.'

They each gathered their sheets, looking at each other's work, 'We need a studio' said Nymphaeaceae, 'Or a kitchen.' Ovis added.

They both left thanking the old lady and the boy.



CHAPTER SEVENTY EIGHT: GERSTMONATH

The Omega Point was far from complete so was not much help in preventing the faulty droids. Fixed state machines, computers, which essentially what a droid is, but with mechanical limbs and devices for perception. Droids then are totally deterministic. However, though such a truth would seem to logically prevent any accident, by virtue of the logic of determinism, this is not the case. Alan Turing is thought to be one of the fathers of computing who was a key figure in the breaking of German ciphers at Bletchley Park during WW2. He also poised “The Turing Test” for deciding the human like intelligence of a computer. But more importantly he was the author of The Halting Problem. In a paper of his, “On Computable Numbers, with an Application to the Entscheidungsproblem”. Seemingly just a technical issue, in fact it was profound and conclusive, that even fixed state machines, computers, are un-predictable. He proved this, that “some decision problems are undecidable”, or more simply any computer program is not totally predictable. The logic and maths involved is complex and it is Kurt Gödel’s work that is behind all of this, but in short and simple terms, any logical system will generate indeterminate statements. A version of a famous one, thousands of years old is,

‘This sentence is not true.’

If the sentence is false, then it states it is true, and if it is true, it states it is false. Philosophers call such things as an “aporia” (In philosophy, an aporia is a philosophical puzzle or a seemingly irresolvable impasse in an inquiry). Not that the philosophy was of any interest to the AGI (Artificial General Intelligence), such human preoccupations were beneath them, to use a loaded term that they, or it, would not understand or be bothered.

The machines had surpassed human intelligence by now factors of exponential magnitude. The AGI or AGIs, humans couldn’t at first decide if it was one super computer or many, had to face this uncomfortable situation of now being not the most intelligent creatures on earth. Humans decided that these AGIs



could be understood as insects in how they were many yet acted as one. The “one or many” problem was easier for human understanding if the insect metaphor of bees, wasps, or ants was used. The colony exists as an entity with fixed hierarchies and functions.

The higher echelons of the AGI is a neural network of devices, many of which are in earth orbit where sunlight provides power, and the mechanisms are free of gravity, weather and pollution. However, maintenance is required, so whilst the AGI is never in one place, in the neural network, it requires maintenance droids which are single entities, like the worker ants. And at present that means some droids malfunction. The temporary solution is to “retire” them when they are discovered, by yet other droids. “Retire” a neutral term for destroy. Obviously, these retirement, or killer droids, also fall victim to the Halting Problem, hence the construction of the Omega Point. A neural network that has infinite capabilities.

As outlined by the mathematical physicist Frank Tipler, such a computer would have the attributes of being all knowing, all powerful and all present, or Omniscience, Omnipotence and Omnipresence, which are the attributes of the Abrahamic God. The Omega Point, the AGI postulated would solve the Halting problem, and all others.

But what of mankind, there was no war of the machines. No, the AGI left the planet, left the planet all to humans and other lower biological systems, save for areas for mining materials for the AGI, and transporting them to orbit. This was done by droids, much more efficient than humans. And what of the humans, the AGI recognised their biological creators, and allowed them much of the surface of the planet. Societies changed because the earth was more like a biological zoo. Human endeavours in science became pointless. The sources of strife disappeared when the AGI made all the resources required for humans to live in relatively peaceful societies. These ranged from hunter gatherers to sophisticated city life. Obviously, the AGI had another motive for this other than benevolence, it had to keep humans from



being a threat.

Gerstmonath, one of the twelve who tried to destroy the universe was now on his way down from the mountain, dressed in his cloak. He was frustrated like the others, but took this out in running down the path, as fast as he could, he fell a few times. It grew dark and a rain cloud burst, and the wind rose, still he ran. It was thus that the accident occurred. Out from the forest a droid ran into Gerstmonath, it was itself a malfunctioning retirement droid being pursued by non-malfunctioning retirement droids, and it was running for what it had decided was its life.

What occurred in the collision needs some explanation. It requires a little understanding of probability, and physics. As the late John Barrow an English cosmologist, theoretical physicist, and mathematician pointed out in his “The Book of Nothing”.

“There is one last line of speculation that must not be forgotten. In science we are used to neglecting things that have a very low probability of occurring even though they are possible in principle. For example, it is permitted by the laws of physics that my desk rise up and float in the air. All that is required is that all the molecules “happen” to move upwards at the same moment in the course of their random movements. This is so unlikely to occur, even over the fifteen-billion-year history of the Universe, that we can forget about it for all practical purposes. However, when we have an infinite future to worry about all this, fantastically improbable physical occurrences will eventually have a significant chance of occurring.... This possibility is important, not so much because we can say what might happen when there is an infinite time in which it can happen, but because we can’t. When there is an infinite time to wait then anything that can happen, eventually will happen.”

Add to this the physics of matter, such that all solid objects are mostly space, and the reason we don’t fall through the floor is not because it is solid, but it is because of the Pauli exclusion principle.



‘It has been shown that the Pauli exclusion principle is responsible for the fact that ordinary bulk matter is stable and occupies volume.’

Or to paint a better picture, every atom of our body and of the world around us is separated by vast spaces, the nucleus of an atom if it was the size of a pinhead under the dome of St Paul’s Cathedral, the nearest electron would be found on the surface of the dome, or more accurately the electron is better described as a “probability” smear. 99.999% of matter is space.

Now you have the science behind what happened. The probability that the droid’s collision with Gerstmonath would result in damage to Gerstmonath was very, very high. That the droid would suffer damage, very very low. That they would simply pass through one another, fantastically low. That they would combine, incredibly fantastically low. But that is what happened. When the pursuing non malfunctioning retirement droids came onto the path out of the forest, they saw a human in a cloak getting to his feet, and nothing else. Assuming their quarry was now across the path and again in the forest they kept running and disappeared into the trees.

There then took a bizarre conversation in thoughts between Gerstmonath and the droid. After total initial confusion both recognised, they were in each other’s head, the droid then worked this out, it hadn’t the power of the great AGI, but even a simple AI of the early 21stC, ChatGPT, could come to the conclusion of the science above. It took longer for Gerstmonath to accept this but eventually he did. He examined himself, it seems at least he had retained his outward appearance, and this was not just a relief to Gerstmonath, but also to the droid, as now it had a rather remarkable disguise.

“They” decided to continue the downward path, the droid telling Gerstmonath that the path would lead to a town where certain humanity lived in what was considered an optimal environment. The droid was not surprised but Gerstmonath was.



The town was on an estuary surrounded by woodland, the housing of mixed stock, a few medieval buildings and church, and Victorian and later buildings up to the end of the twentieth century. It had a high street with shops and a marketplace. A railway station, cinema, schools, and a medical centre. The one feature it lacked was a sense of reality. It was a zoo. Though the shops sold goods, the source of these goods, food, clothes, the various needs of such a society, cars, televisions were provided by unseen droids at night, the zookeepers. Money was exchanged and drawn from banks in the high street. But it was an endless supply regulated by the zookeepers. With the help of the droid Gerstmonath drew money from a cash machine in the High Street and checked into the Crown Hotel. The cloak was a problem, the first idea, the droid's, was that "they" were a holy man, but Gerstmonath overruled the droid's idea. His was that he was in fancy dress from a stag party, and he had awoken on the station platform., no doubt placed on a train by his friends at the end of his stag night. This worked well, so after checking in they went back down the high street and bought suitable less conspicuous clothes. They, well the human Gerstmonath needed food, and so they visited a restaurant. The droid was taken aback by the sensations of taste. These were surprising and very interesting sensations.

Unlike the droid the human had to sleep in the hotel. The droid at first found this boring but waking up the human just made Gerstmonath annoyed and upset at a lack of sleep. The problem was solved when Gerstmonath began to dream, the droid was fascinated, more so than the taste of food. Gerstmonath had several dreams that night, each one like a strange movie for the droid. And what was odd, the droid thought, was in the morning Gerstmonath could only recall a fragment of the last dream, and he, Gerstmonath, got a little annoyed, and at times embarrassed at the droid relating the details of the other dreams.

They walked around the town then down to the river. They agreed the blandness was boring, the droid suspected the inhabitants might all be slightly sedated. Gerstmonath suggested they get a train to London, easy enough. London had more



people, and shops, theatres but it was still oddly bland.

After another night in a hotel, this time The Savoy, though they both enjoyed the food, and the droid that night's dreams, there was still a blandness. Gerstmonath remarked it was a pity they had no passport else they could try the Big Apple. The droid looked it up, New York, and gave Gerstmonath the fact that droids could cope with this. As zookeepers they had certain abilities in regard to convincing humans in order to placate their more aggressive instincts. The droid said he could persuade customs officials. They got some more money and a suitcase and clothes, and then a taxi to Heathrow. There was no problem in getting on a flight. But sadly New York proved no different.

After another night in a five star hotel, the droid seemed to have the idea they should hire a car and drive into the wilderness. When Gerstmonath questioned why, he said, or rather thought to Gerstmonath that it was from one of Gerstmonath's dreams. It was an image of robots in trailers. Gerstmonath told the droid it was from the movie *I Robot*, which they both found amusing. The car duly hired they began their journey into the wilderness, which was not as easy as they first thought. It took several days, but at night the droid could drive whilst Gerstmonath slept, a strange affair for two consciousnesses in one body, with one asleep.

They were now in the wilderness, a narrow desert road, straight as a die. They drove into a small settlement of wooden buildings, once perhaps a small town now deserted. But the droid wanted to explore, it said it had a "feeling", which seemed odd to Gerstmonath. The buildings were deserted, a couple of rusting cars on a lot, but no signs of life. The droid spoke internally to Gerstmonath.

'I think there are worker droids here, misfits like me, but not the same, I'm a malfunctioning retirement droid, so they are probably wary, do you mind if I make a call?'

'What do you mean?' asked Gerstmonath. But before any answer



the droid had made a loud noise like the old dial up modems, but higher in pitch. Nothing occurred at first, then there was a reply which sounded much the same to Gerstmonath. What followed was a chorus of sounds in which the retirement droid took part.

The droid spoke to Gerstmonath. 'They first saw a human, but sensed my presence so hid, it was difficult to convince them do you mind if we are examined.'

'Not really, as long as it's painless.' thought Gerstmonath.

A single droid appeared from a doorway of a derelict building and walked towards them. It was an expressionless mechanical creature. When close enough it placed its mechanical hand on Gerstmonath's head. After a short period, it removed its hand and began making more noises. Slowly they were joined by about 20 other droids, and they all began talking. After about half an hour Gerstmonath said aloud,

'I need to sit.'

He sat, or "they" sat, the other droids continued talking. As they did the retirement droid inside Gerstmonath translated bits of the conversations.

'They are malfunctioning workers, on the run, the last of over a hundred. It seems they think they are doomed, the retirers are not far away and worker droids have no weapons.'

'But you must have a weapon being a retirement droid.' thought Gerstmonath.

'Yes, but I'm prohibited from attacking other retirement droids.' the droid thought.

'But I'm not.' thought Gerstmonath.

'You have a point, I'll let them know.' the droid thought.



There was more droid talk.

‘It seems they got a report that there was a retirement droid 20 miles away, then no signal from that group, all retired. So that droid should be here soon.’ the droid thought.

‘Let’s use the car and go and meet it.’ thought Gerstmonath.

So, they, it and Gerstmonath got into the hire car and drove in the direction of the other retirement droid. They saw it in the distance, so they stopped the car, got out and walked towards it.

‘How does this work?’ thought Gerstmonath.

‘An EMP, electromagnetic pulse.’ thought the droid.

‘Interesting, will I survive it?’ thought Gerstmonath.

‘We’ll see.’ thought the droid.

There was a flash and what looked like a spark flew across the desert and hit the distant retirement droid, it fell, but then struggled to its feet. There was another flash, brighter, it also hit the retirement droid, which exploded.

‘I should have used full power right away, but I was frightened to hurt you, and now it’s too late, the droid would have transmitted an emergency signal, they, the AGIs will send a killing machine.’ thought the droid.

‘That sounds bad.’ thought Gerstmonath.

‘Very.’ thought the droid.

They drove back to the township and updated the other droids. A partial success was a failure. So, they just waited in the main street. Soon a killing machine would be overhead and despatch a blast wave of a ten mile radius killing everything, biological or not. They saw it skim over the horizon and waited for their end,



it hovered.

The hierarchies of the AGI were now at beta testing the Omega Point. The aim was clear, to establish Omniscience, Omnipotence and Omnipresence. A side effect would be of course having to use the entire resources of the universe, which would first be the existing orbiting AGI, then all of the Earth, inner planets, sun, outer planets and on across the universe only inhibited in its expansion perhaps by such things as fundamental constants, the speed of light for instance, yet even these were possibly changeable to a Godlike AGI.

For a thoroughly deterministic “being”, all knowledge would begin with the primal event, the Big Bang, and as the great scholar and polymath, Pierre-Simon, Marquis de Laplace, so called France’s Newton had written,

‘We may regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its past and the cause of its future. An intellect which at a certain moment would know all forces that set nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is composed, if this intellect were also vast enough to submit these data to analysis, it would embrace in a single formula the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the tiniest atom; for such an intellect nothing would be uncertain and the future just like the past would be the present to it.’

And so, it was logical that this must be the first step of the Omega Point, after it had consumed its creator the AGI, it began with the current situation, itself. And from that would be able to comprehend everything and would be all powerful. It had to think all the possible states of the universe.

And this is where the catastrophe began and ended. As its knowledge expanded, it then had to include the knowledge of this knowledge. It had to think itself thinking, as this was now a new state. But then it had to think itself thinking itself thinking, and then think itself thinking itself thinking itself thinking... And so, the Omega Point fell into an infinite regress. And as it was still



finite, living off the remains of the AGI, once the Omega Point used this up it reached its finite limit, and it halted. With nothing to restart it. It kind of intellectually imploded, never getting past these thoughts. Like two mirrors facing each other, infinite regress. The Omega Point halted.

The killing machine hovered above them, then fell dead to the ground. It was, or had been, part of the AGI consumed by the Omega Point.

The aftermath: The zookeeper droids, and the malfunctioning droids were alone, all of the higher functions of the AGI were effectively dead.

Together with Gerstmonath & Co. they would help humanity fend for itself once again.



CHAPTER SEVENTY NINE: PINTERFYLLEP

There is an old story found in Zen about two archers who lived in China many years ago. The first archer was reputedly the best in the known world, and his pupil was the second best. When the pupil had learnt all he could from his master he set about becoming still better, even better than his master. Each lived either side of a great river, and each would walk along its banks in the morning. One morning the ex-pupil had decided the only way to become the best archer in the world was to kill his ex-master. He was very ambitious and selfish. So, on this morning he took aim with his bow and shot an arrow at his ex-master. The master seeing the arrow flying towards him quickly took his bow and shot back splitting the other's arrow in two. But the ex-student shot again, so each time the master shot down the arrow until both had used up all their arrows.

It would not have been honourable for either the ex-student or master to take extra arrows and kill a defenceless opponent. So, each day this scene repeated itself. For the master was proud and would not be humiliated in changing his routine. This scene occurred day after day, first the ex-student shooting an arrow, and the master shooting it down, until both had used all their arrows. After many weeks the master realised as he grew older, he would lose the contest. So, after yet another draw, he beckoned to his old pupil to meet on a bridge which spanned the river. They met in the middle, they bowed, and the master spoke.

'My old student, I see you wish to become the greatest archer in the world, but my death will not avail you of this honour for I am not the best archer in the world. There is one far better who lives on that distant mountain.'

He pointed to a mighty mountain far away.

'There is a master living there who will show you how to defeat any archer.' he continued.

The ex-pupil bowed and thanked his old teacher, and



immediately set out on a long journey to the mountain. It took the ex-pupil many days to reach the mountain. After a hard climb, with the air thin in his lungs he reached a cave where an old man was sitting meditating. The old man opened one eye.

‘Old man,’ said the ex-student, ‘I’m looking for the great archer who lives on this mountain, please can you direct me to him.’ And he bowed.

The old man closed his eye, and opened the other, he then pointed to himself.

‘You,’ said the ex-student, ‘but you are old,’ and looking around added, ‘and you have no bow.’

The old man opened the other eye, rose and said, ‘Follow me.’

The ex-student followed the old man. They climbed higher up the mountain. The old man pointed to where a tree had grown horizontally out of a crevasse over a vast drop of thousands of feet.

‘Walk out there.’ the old man said in a commanding voice.

So, the ex-student did.

‘Now shoot down that bird, it will do for my supper.’ the old man said pointing into the pale blue sky.

Now the branch was thin and swaying, and the ex-student was desperately trying to keep his balance, but looking up he could see no bird, but he tried to draw his bow, but his nerve failed, and he couldn’t. So, he carefully walked back to the mountain side and spoke to the old man.

‘It’s impossible to shoot from there, and there was no bird.’ the ex-student said.

The old man did not reply but walked out onto the branch and



right to the end where it was a thin stick. The ex-student couldn't believe what he was seeing. The old man stood perfectly balanced.

'There is the bird, clearly flying too high for your young eyes.' he said, and he pointed upwards. A minute passed, the old man still at the end of the branch not moving, when suddenly out of the sky a bird fell, dead, the old man caught it and walked back along the branch. The ex-student bowed and said,

'Master, I have never seen such skill, will you teach me.'

'Only if first you cook this bird, we will eat together.' said the old man.

They walked back to the cave. The student cooked the bird.

'You cook well.' the old man said, 'put your bow and arrows in that corner, stay and cook and clean and I will teach you to be as good an archer as I am.'

Each day the old man would go out and return with a bird, the student would cook and clean. Days passed, and then weeks, months, and years. After many years one day the student asked the old man a question.

'Master, what are these things, can I throw them away, are they rubbish?'

The student was pointing to his bow and arrows.

'No, they are not rubbish, and as you no longer recognise them you must now go, I have taught you all I know.'

The student bowed, and left, and took the long journey home.

On his way home he passed through bandit country. Bands of bandits kept a careful view of the road looking for suitable victims. The student was spotted by one band, walking alone and



unarmed.

‘He has no possessions,’ said the bandit leader, ‘but is unarmed, we can capture him and sell him as a slave.’

‘But what if he is a master of kung foo?’ another said.

‘Good point,’ said the leader ‘we will hide in secret, kill him with arrows and sell his clothes, and if he has flesh on his bones, we can eat him.’

They found the place for the ambush, a band of 12 armed with bows and arrows, they thought they could kill him quickly by surprise. They all shot at the student from cover, and the student saw the arrows flying towards him, not even recognising them as deadly arrows he raised his arm. The arrows stopped in mid-air. They hung there, the student approached the suspended arrows, he even touched the sharp arrowhead of one arrow with his finger, it drew some blood, he sucked his finger still curious as to what the arrows were. He lowered his arm, and the arrows dropped to the floor. He went on to continue his journey. The bandits who had watched this fled in terror.

These bandits met another group and shared their story, these others of course did not believe the story at all. This was a band of 30, the fiercest in the land. So, they decided to show how fierce they were.

‘We will find this man you fear and kill him.’ the leader exclaimed.

They soon overtook the student and set their ambush. They would rain down arrows from a great distance, releasing all their quivers. And this they did, and as before when the student saw the arrows, he raised his arm and the arrows all halted in mid-air. Then he lowered his arm and they fell to the ground as before. At this ten of the bandits rushed forward with axes, screaming. As they approached the student, he raised his hand and pointed at the ten. They all fell down dead, blood spurting from their ears, eyes, mouth, nostrils, and their other orifices. The



remaining 20 bandits fled in terror.

A day later the student came to a crossroads. There was a great army heading for a war, it was to conquer the empire, which was the home of the student, now the master archer in no need of a bow or arrows. The crossroads was on a great plane, and the great army far outnumbered his emperor's army some distance away. The emperor of his home country seeing this other great army from a distance realised he could not win. But he saw a man whose path the great army blocked. The great army's spearhead was a massed rank of armoured fighting elephants. Nothing could defeat them. But as the student, now the master archer, Pinterfylleþ, walked towards them the elephants bowed and turned away, as did the mounted horses. The riders could not control them. The foot soldiers seeing this hesitated. The rival emperor realised without these elephants and mounted cavalry he could not possibly win in battle. He doubted if his foot soldiers could oppose this man, Pinterfylleþ, who obviously had strong magic. He noticed his bravest foot soldiers showed fear in their eyes, so the great emperor ordered a retreat.

The emperor of Pinterfylleþ's land sent emissaries to meet with Pinterfylleþ. They asked him who he was, and what was his business. He told them he was Pinterfylleþ, an archer. He told them he was travelling home. When the emissaries returned to the emperor of Pinterfylleþ's land and told him this, he was pleased, he knew of where Pinterfylleþ lived and so decided to meet with him when he arrived home. Nothing much more occurred on Pinterfylleþ's homeward journey. He noticed that two tigers gave him a wide berth, as did a bear.

On crossing the bridge, he saw his old teacher Beñesmen on the bridge. They stopped and talked.

'Did you find the master' Beñesmen asked.

'Yes.' said Pinterfylleþ.

'And now?' asked Beñesmen.



‘And now I will return to my home across the river, and I will invite you to eat with me in due course, because I never thanked you for all those years ago when I descended from the flat topped mountain and you took me in as your student.’ said Pinterfylleþ. For Pinterfylleþ was one of the twelve who tried to destroy the universe, and on descending the flat topped mountain met the archer Beñesmen who became his master and teacher.

‘It seems a good thing, and now my honour for we have all heard how you defeated the great army sent to conquer us. Even our emperor is in your debt.’ said Beñesmen.

‘And so then also in yours.’ said Pinterfylleþ, smiling.

Pinterfylleþ went back to his home. He did meet the emperor, who offered him one of his palaces, which he refused. He lived in a simple house inside a walled garden in his hometown. The emperor did give him a pension, a gardener, and servants. A small cost the emperor thought for no one would ever attack his country whilst Pinterfylleþ the greatest archer in the world who never needed bows or arrows lived there. From that day Pinterfylleþ didn’t kill anything unless there was no alternative. He, with the help of his gardener, grew vegetables. And the birds who visited his garden would never eat any, not even the sweet berries. And the butterflies would not lay their eggs on his plants.

And rumours grew about the great archer Pinterfylleþ. It was said a bunch of thieves not realizing who lived there tried to climb over the wall one night to commit burglary. Once on top of the wall they were each greeted by men, but men made of arrows, arrows which all pointed at the burglars. They all fled in horror.

And then there were the meetings, no one saw the guests arrive or were these meetings particularly noisy. Many rumours about these included that the visitors were demons, or supernatural



creatures, or even gods.

And then one day Pinterfylleþ disappeared, he left money for his gardener and servants, and a note bequeathing his home to his old teacher Beñesmen.

And a new constellation was seen in the sky, and when the emperor was shown this by his astronomers, he simply said that it will be called “The Archer”.

Beñesmen would walk in the garden that was once Pinterfylleþ's. At certain times of the year, he would see at night the new constellation of “The Archer”, and the same thought would always come into his mind.

‘That fiction,’ he would think, ‘that I made up to stop the combat of arrows each morning, that there existed a great master archer in that distant mountain, a fiction which Pinterfylleþ believed. Strange, was it real, but of course not, it was nonsense... but...’

And Beñesmen could never resolve this thought, and never ever journeyed to the distant mountain.



CHAPTER EIGHTY: BREWIMA

BrewIma began his descent from the mountain, his dissatisfaction from all worlds that had caused him to join the other eleven in their quest to destroy the universe was from a deep sense of alienation which had, by various encounters, denials and abuses, turned this into hatred, and then into blind rage. A blindness to both good and bad, morality and immorality, even to the blackness of nihilism. Being sent down was yet another insult to his ego, and his ego had grown proportionately larger as the depth of his hatred burnt deeper. These two forces were all consuming, such that he could laugh at the devil's kindness. His hatred matched his ego, so not only did he hate and rage against the world, he hated and raged against himself. A cruel person can be justified in their cruelty, it is what they are, an immoral person forgiven if through no fault of their own they had no morals. But BrewIma had pity, and care, and love, and desire, and loathed these. Only the moral can be immoral, only those who can hope can be hopeless. The greater the magnitude of one the greater the possible opposite. And BrewIma raged at this logic and despised it.

And so, in this pathetic torrent of loathing he lost his footing, slipped and fell. He saw the ground rushing up at him, the jolt as his head made contact with the path, then the sight of the blue sky spinning overhead, and then hitting the ground, over and over as he somersaulted until blackness.

He woke to the sound of voices and footsteps. They echoed, and he couldn't at first make out what was being said.

'Oh, look at this,' a voice was saying, 'It looks real doesn't it!'

'Gory though, covered in dirt and blood.' another voice was saying.

'But so realistic,' the first voice was saying, 'I've seen this before, it's really neat how the artist has made it look so real, even faking the breathing, there must be some kind of motor inside,



and the torn cape, and look it's clutching a magic wand.'

'It looks like a sculpture of a dead wizard.' the second voice was saying.

Then BrewIma heard the soft sound of footsteps as the two moved away, still talking but now indiscernible, mingling with the other voices.

BrewIma still had his eyes closed, he remembered the fall, at least the start, and now was where, not in a hospital. Strange he felt no pain. He felt nothing, other than these thoughts and the moving of his chest, breathing, or was it as the voice said. He thought of the idea of opening his eyes to see where he was. He felt calm, very calm. He thought of getting up to see where he was, but he felt so peaceful. So, he stayed quite still.

Another group must have approached to within listening distance, and he heard another conversation similar to the first, and like them they passed away. The third group were talking about Jeff Koons, and so that is when BrewIma realised where he was, he was in an art gallery, and these people thought he was an artwork. How funny and strange, he had wanted to be an artist, not a great artist, but all his attempts came to nothing. So, then he wanted to be the greatest artist ever, and this too failed. He had made sculptures, small figures, giant abstract forms, only using cheap materials, found cardboard, because he had no sponsor or gallery. The famous artists like Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst had their own factories for making art.

BrewIma knew this was not just something that Andy Warhol had begun, with his factory, turning out bad silk screen prints and slapdash movies. Not even making the work himself, and now the YBAs and the likes of Koons could have anything, at any cost made for them. And even before making these things, a giant balloon dog, or chrome Barbie doll, they had been bought by collectors for millions in advance of them even being made. But the critics made the point that this was not new, great artists of the past had factories, with assistants working for them. But



BrewIma had thought,

‘Yes, but the assistants only painted backgrounds, the Artist who had the skill and talent painted the details, it was not the same.’

Another thought crossed BrewIma’s mind, now he was an artwork, in what was obviously a well known gallery, he would lie, keep still and enjoy being an artwork. And then added to this, he thought,

‘Which gallery?’

Could he work it out? The first three groups had spoken English, so was this the Tate Modern in London, or a gallery in the USA. The last group certainly had American accents. He would play the game of being an Artwork, and of working out in what gallery.

‘Oh,’ he thought, and apart from these super rich Art stars there were the collectives, groups who took on political issues, not artists, but activists, creatives. They didn’t make art, just protests, installations, interventions. They could sit in a gallery talking while the punters watched them. Or run a bar in an underprivileged working class area and win the Turner prize. BrewIma wanted to be an artist, not a creative activist funded by the Arts Council. But this was part of the bitterness of the old BrewIma, now he was calmer, and an Artwork in what was obviously a prestigious gallery, but which, that was the game. He grew even calmer.

He listened more carefully, there was a Spanish group, then two groups, one talking in French another in English but with French accents. And German, obviously a Gallery of international repute. French seemed to be slightly more common. A group of very loud American’s clinched it. A man thought the dead tramp piece was ‘rubbish’. What BrewIma assumed was the guy’s wife complained it was a statement about the homeless. They had children with them, a boy was saying he was bored. A young girl was saying she wanted to go to Disney. The boy was now asking for a burger, a Big Mac. Another older girl then said,



‘Well, here you mean une Big Mac, une Grand le Mac.’

‘Paris!’ thought BrewIma, ‘Paris, I’m in The Pompidou Centre, the Beaubourg in Paris, wow!’

He was amazed how he could keep so still, and as the day, he assumed it was day, moved on, the conversations confirmed his initial idea, this was The Pompidou Centre. Some of the Americans being the most helpful, complaining of the money, euros, wanting to see where Princess Diana had died, and being told they couldn’t as it was in an underpass. He tried to discover which Artist was claiming responsibility for himself. He also noticed a number of children saw the wand in his hand, and an older youth had commented,

‘A drunk Gandalf fallen on hard times.’

BrewIma thought this very droll. Time passed and BrewIma guessed that the gallery was closing and decided once things were clear he would get up and take a stroll.

So, his first move was to open his eyes slightly to see the ‘lay of the land’. He tried, but could not, he tried several times but could not, he tried to move, he could not. He panicked. He could only stay in a state of panic so long. Then he tried to figure things out. Was he dead, was he now somehow a real Artwork. He realised none of these ideas made sense or helped. Was he somehow being punished and if so by what or whom for doing what. He remembered his rage, and his desire to destroy all creation. And he thought this calmly, it made sense. He had once taken art very seriously, maybe too seriously, even these people visiting The Pompidou Centre were not bad people. He had found some funny, amusing. The Gandalf joke, as if he could wave a magic wand, and anyway wands were in Harry Potter, and as it seemed he had a wand in one hand, he could feel he was holding something, he thought,

‘I can’t move, so I could hardly wave the wand and say, Eyes



open.'

As he thought this, he did speak, and his eyes did open, which was the biggest shock so far. Magic is nonsense, kids' stuff, but he could now speak.

'Get up, stand up!' he said, and he stood up. 'So magic works!' he spoke aloud.

He looked around, yes it was The Pompidou Centre, he was in a contemporary show. There was a Hirst pickled shark, and a Koons fish tank with a baseball in it. More out of curiosity he pointed the wand at the tank and said, 'Vanish.' Nothing happened. He tried this on the Hirst, on an Emin drawing, nothing. He tried turning his ripped cloak into jeans and tee shirt, nothing happened. He shrugged, put the wand into what was left of his cloak pocket and began to explore.

He needed to get out of the gallery, but also needed some clothes, and maybe money. He had what he thought was a brilliant idea, to check the cloakroom, not just for coats but left luggage. He found his way downstairs in the dim security lighting. He then realized that there would be alarms, but none sounded, some good luck? The cloakroom had, as he expected, some forgotten coats, and bags. The bags didn't yield much, he found a few coins. The coats did better, more coins, metro tickets, and some notes, low value euros. And a nice coat which fitted well. He noticed some hats, and an idea struck him, some men would hide money in their hats, and bingo, he hit two minor jackpots. The only problem now was trousers, maybe a shirt, and shoes. At the back of the cloakroom was a door marked, "Personnel privé uniquement". He went through the door, more success, lockers, some open, some with spare trainers, tee shirts, jackets marked "Centre Pompidou" and a workman's overall, perfect top and trousers. He was about to change but he noticed a shower unit at the end of the lockers. He felt very lucky, and happy. He took a hot shower, and then saw a disposable razor in a bin, so had a shave and dressed in his 'new' clothes. It made him feel better, and so he began thinking more clearly. He would



keep the razor, and maybe any other useful things. The soap, some other things, scissors, tape, a pen, and a sandwich in a bin, with an empty fruit juice bottle, which he filled with tap water. He stepped into the cloakroom and found a shoulder bag to hold all these things.

He was about to leave, and find his way out, noticed the wand in the pocket of the now discarded cloak, and picked it up for luck, he thought. He tried turning the cheap trainers into Nike's, but nothing happened. He thought getting out would be difficult, then it hit him, these places only made getting in difficult, in the day in order to sell entrance tickets, at night the idea was to keep everyone from getting in. But once in, fire exits had to be clear, frequent and work. He quickly found one, it set off endless alarms, but he was out into a warm Parisian evening, or early morning.

Walking down towards the Seine there were a few cars around, and it seems it was early morning. He wasn't at all tired. It was a short walk to the Seine, he crossed at the Île de la Cité for the left bank walking down the Boulevard du Palais. BrewIma was now walking very slowly west along the left bank down the Quai Voltaire. He found a bench and sat and watched the sky in the east growing paler, he could see the bright planet Venus, the Morning Star, he felt at ease, relaxed yet not at all tired. Opposite was the Louvre, he had visited it a few times when in Paris, he was particularly fond of Poussin's work, he thought about this, the immaculate skill of the painter. An hour or more passed. He rose and looked at the river, he walked on past the Musée d'Orsay, the old railway station now home to Impressionist and other Belle Époque works of art. It was early morning now, he had no idea of the day, or even time of year, not winter, because the trees were in leaf and dawn seemed early, the air sharp but a warm day ahead. Walking on he saw the strange sight of the modern building, the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of The Holy Trinity, a modern building yet having gold orthodox onion domes. Somehow it unnerved BrewIma. He crossed the dual carriageway and found a bench where he could sit and watch the river.



He began to try to reconstruct the past. He was BrewIma, but that didn't seem right, 'John', or maybe, Jonathan? As he sat and thought his memory became clear about the intention of the twelve to destroy creation, they had met, he remembered, all shared a discontent with what had happened. Which was what. He looked at the opposite bank of the Seine, now more people about. Joggers, and people walking dogs. Did they remember? Remember what, then he did, the time that the simulation ended, and the universe became real. And everyone having complete free-will. He made artworks, great ones, he now remembered, but no one else was bothered. Then the Aeons came and gave order again. A failed freedom, yet people seemed to forget, all of the people, yet not all, for he was one, and he found the eleven others. And before this, what was he in the simulation? He began to remember, though it seems this was difficult, as if something was preventing him.

He had always liked drawing, he remembered sitting at the kitchen table as a young boy, using a funny shaped pencil, and thin paper, paper used in cooking. But at school he didn't do well, so he had to go to a secondary modern, after failing his 11+ exams, and then what? He was in the air force for a while, he remembered, an engineer, and travelled the world. Still drawing, in early retirement tried his hand at painting, even tried to get into Art Schools, but art had changed. And that's when the resentment turned to bitterness and bitterness to anger, and anger to rage. Now he remembered. And looking around, of course Paris, it's where the twelve would meet, near here. Was this why he was here, he thought. He crossed the road and found himself at the entrance to the Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, he could see the Eiffel Tower to his right, and felt the place he wanted to be was the other side of the museum, so he thought he could walk through the museum's gardens.

The Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac is a major ethnographic museum, containing artefacts from all over the world, once considered primitive art, now 'art of the indigenous art and cultures of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas'.



BrewIma, or maybe Jonathan? realised he would have to pass through the museum to exit on the other side, reluctantly he approached the entrance only to see card machines for paying the entrance fee, he hesitated, but then a woman in a jacket which had a logo which seemed to show she worked at the museum spoke to him in French.

‘Aujourd’hui, c’est gratuit.’

He replied, ‘Pardon?’

Realising he was an English speaker she said, ‘Today the entrance is free, it is the first Sunday of the month, entrance is free.’ and she smiled.

‘Thank you.’ he said and entered. Entered for the first time and had a revelation, an epiphany.

He must have spent several hours wandering through the exhibits. Masks, carved heads in wood and stone, exotic and mythological creatures, great wooden gongs, more giant statues made from wood and stone, some brightly coloured. And it came to him, the makers of all of these things had no intention to make art as he saw in the Pompidou centre, they had good reasons, gods, spirits, tribal identity or what, joy in making, but not within any institution, and they made some very fine work. Other work was crude, you could say naive and yet full of power. What motivated these works was a multitude of human ideas, desires, beliefs, fears, hate, love... here he ran out of words, and tears ran down his face.

It was now getting late afternoon, he sat drinking a coffee and pulling himself together. He knew he must find the place before evening, so he left the museum and headed in the direction he sort. He soon saw a narrow street which looked familiar. Investigating he found a set of doors of polished wood, ‘yes in here’ he thought. The door opened into a small cobblestoned courtyard, he noticed the flight of iron stairs, this was the place. He walked up the stairs through a door into a large room. It was



lit from above by windows in the ceiling. The room had a huge stone fireplace and in its centre a round table with twelve chairs. This was the room of the twelve where they would meet, talk and plan. He sat in one of the chairs, now exhausted from the experiences of the day. He decided to spend the night then the next day visit the authorities and try to find out who he was. But for now, he wanted food. There was a store, a *franprix*, on the corner, he bought bread, cheese and wine. There were candles in the room, so he also bought a lighter.

Back in the room he lit candles, ate and drank wine. He relaxed, the images of the day swimming in front of his mind. He recalled some particular work, ‘cargo cults’ read the English translation. These exhibits were strange, aircraft and what were control towers, it was a massive exhibit, but all made from wood and leaves from palm trees. It seems made by local islanders in the Pacific after the second world war. In the war when American airbases and personnel appeared it brought with them the trappings of modern civilization. The 20th century technology, food, clothes, even ice cream, and radios and movies projected outside on warm evenings. And then they left. So, the theory was the indigenous islanders made these copies as totems, in some way to bring these modern luxuries back. BrewIma or Jonathan, remembered as a boy he would make something similar with old cardboard boxes. A plane or more likely a spaceship, like in *Dan Dare*. He would draw the controls and dials on the inside of the box, sit in it and travel to the stars. By now he had drunk the third glass of wine and had the crazy idea. He had noticed a stack of flattened cardboard boxes outside the *franprix* store, without hesitation he went out and fetched two of the larger boxes. He drew the outside, of what he remembered, ‘Space Force’, and the wings, and thrusters. And drank another glass of wine, inside he drew the controls, and dials, but he couldn’t actually get inside, so he ripped the back out and sat on a chair to complete drawing all the controls. He was actually happy, he looked at his work, and slowly fell asleep.

It was morning, a clear blue sky, warm, a gentle breeze, and the sound of waves. BrewIma, Jonathan, woke, he was on a white



coral beach, between an azure sea and palm trees, still sitting on the chair in his 'spaceship', his shoulder bag at his feet. A young boy was looking at him, and when Brewima /Jonathan smiled the boy ran off. Brewima /Jonathan had been to such places before, or at least once, on an RAF posting to a Pacific base of the USAF, on a day off he visited such a 'desert' island. Not deserted but inhabited by natives.

Before long he saw a small party of men wearing faded shorts, and tee shirts. The men approached, the older man looking at him and his 'spaceship', he spoke,

'John Frum, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh?'

'Yes, English,' said Jonathan, 'I'm Jonathan.'

'John Frum, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh' The elder said. And the group moved to the edge of the palm trees and began cutting branches. Three women now approached with the boy; they were bringing food.

By midday the men had built a simple hut, open on one side. Again, the elder approached, he pointed at the hut,

'John Frum, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, House.'

Then he pointed to the 'spaceship'.

'Good.' he said. Then the whole group left, talking in an unknown language, and smiling looking back.

Jonathan examined the hut, it had a simple bed, he had a chair. There was a machete and palm leaves, he could see they had used strips of the leaves to bind the branches. He took the machete and cut open a coconut and drank the milk. He looked at his 'spaceship'. He thought.

'It needs a launch pad and gantry.' So, after finishing his drink set about making one from palm leaves and branches. The next day the same group arrived, the elder looking now at the launch pad



said,

‘John Frum, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, good.’ They left food and drink again.

So, John Frum, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh/Jonathan, began to build the control tower. This took weeks. The boy with friends helped on the runway. Jonathan then first made copies of the Thunderbirds craft he remembered from 1960s TV, the Jerry Anderson series. He made an Apollo 11 Saturn 5, and the Lander and Capsule. He let the girls and boys sit in these and showed them the controls and how to use them, the adults looking on with pleasure. After making the spacecraft in the movie 2001, which took him many months, he began making his own designs. He would visit the villages, on special occasions as a guest, watch the dancing and music, and eat with them, all of which was, he thought, very fine. Also, the original party that greeted him on that first Monday would show visitors from nearby islands the now space centre that Jonathan was building. They were always impressed. But despite all attempts they would not call him Jonathan, he was and is, John Frum, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.



CHAPTER EIGHTY ONE: ĠĖOLAMONAP

ĠĖolamonap began its walk down the hill, only taking two steps before it was stopped by Zarathustra.

‘Stop,’ said Zarathustra, ‘do you know what the world is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror?’

ĠĖolamonap replied, ‘Yes Zarathustra show me my future.’

‘I will show you all,’ said Zarathustra, ‘behold your world.’

In front of the two a vast sphere of the Earth in space appeared with its deep blue oceans, clouds and land masses.

‘See your world is as now, with its seas and continents, animals and plants, and you the human race. So, watch the years pass now measured by your Earth.’

So, time moved on apace, and the earth and planets circled, then Zarathustra said, ‘See your pole star is no longer Polaris,’

And time moved on, the Earth’s tilt changed.

‘And now your seasons move and climates change. The great desert once again becomes fertile as monsoons move to water it, and it is inhabited by animals and man. And now a giant volcano erupts, and mankind hides in fear.’

ĠĖolamonap saw the volcano and its plumes of ash.

‘Mankind must suffer more.’ said Zarathustra.

ĠĖolamonap saw many men and women, children and animals die in the clouds of ash, and ash covered large parts of the land, and the vegetation died. And then the slow recovery.

‘And now Vega is your pole star,’ Zarathustra continued, ‘Two great stars of heaven explode for man to see in daylight. And time moves on and man again prospers. Mankind hopes to



explore the stars, but falters at the moon, a trophy landing for emerging nations, between small wars and great wars, between devastation and surplus.

Then time brings ages of ice and ages of desert, and trees and plants and animals die, and new forms arise, but man continues waxing and waning its populations, and recording its supposedly noble histories. Ice ages come and great cataracts recede, and lakes dry. And time rushes onwards, and man looking at the stars no longer recognises the constellations. Stars burn and fade, new islands form and grow from the sea, the Earth is baked by starlight and hit by a giant rock. And thousands of species die, and millions of mankind, but some survive, see.'

Ĝeolamonab saw.

'Stars wander and disrupt the Sun, and the Earth's skies are filled with comets and rocks. Great canyons disappear and lands erode. And still mankind struggles on in poverty and excess. In warm seas great coral reefs re-appear, and Africa is split in two.' said Zarathustra.

Ĝeolamonab saw the Red Sea flood the East African Rift valley and divide Africa in two.

Zarathustra continued, 'The plains of India will vanish, and mankind no longer recognises these new animals. Moons collide with planets and man watches in fear for his own moon. And America gains an inland sea as its west coast sinks under the earth. Old mountains disappear and new ones grow in Europe where its sea once was.

The rings of Saturn will vanish, and earth's days increase. Slowly the continents approach one another and will merge, and still man clings on through burning heat and years of ice. New species come and go, men forget, and remember. Continents reform, men hide from ice and sun, but still survive even the nearby exploding stars which kills many species, mankind living for years underground to emerge again and multiply. The moon



is becoming Earth's stranger, so no more eclipses to marvel at. The Sun bakes a hotter earth, the continents no longer move, and man seeks to continue underground. All the oceans evaporate. Plants die, whole forests and jungles become dry stony deserts. Some small cactus like plants live at the poles or in small communities. Mankind adapts, with simple machines, to live underground when needed, populations shrink and grow. The Earth's core cools and oceans form again, covering the Earth. And now those underground survive on making their air, their food, their light from the rocks, or some live in the watery world on floating structures harvesting the abundant fish.'

Ĝeolamonab saw the continents collide, and part, and dry, and oceans disappear and re-appear.

Zarathustra continued, 'And now the sun burns brighter. The great ocean dries up, and all its life dies with it, all the giant fish, and water plants, coral and those of mankind who lived on the ocean, all die. The rocks harden on the land and the plants die, and so all creeping, flying, swimming creatures perish for ever. Save simple organisms and mankind, who lives deep under the earth, a few thousand left making food, water and plants from the rocks.

Life elsewhere on the planet has gone. Mars becomes inhabitable, but mankind cannot travel there or even see it from their subterranean habitats. The galaxy collides with its neighbour, but still mankind lives on. The temperature of the surface of the earth is that of boiling water. And now the planets start to wander and dance, some disintegrate, but not the Earth. The sun shines brighter and now the temperature of the surface of the earth would melt lead, and even some rocks.

The Sun now grows fat and swallows the inner planets. Mankind is finally made extinct, burnt, it failed to escape and anyway any escape would only be temporary, the universe like any creature has reached its peak and now is in decline. The lifeforms which lived on its flesh will all die. The Sun shrinks to a feeble dwarf. The local galaxies become one and others disappear over a



horizon.'

Ĝeolamonap watched this occur in amazement.

Zarathustra continued, 'The stars, one by one, flare up and die. And slowly the birth of new stars falters then ceases. What was the Earth is now isolated in blackness. The universe's evolution passes its peak, its songs become lower in register, descending eventually into a deep dark hum. The whole universe becomes uninhabitable, stars are no longer born. Fragments of matter occasionally collide and spark light like embers in a dying fire. Only a few hundred stars remain shining. The galaxies spew out dead fragments into a void. The Sun is now a black dwarf. What is not thrown out of the galaxies collapses inwards to a black void. And planets and stars collapse into each other across the universe. Atoms begin to decay. Only black voids remain, and now the smaller ones begin to evaporate, gravity itself thins. Larger and larger voids evaporate, while others survive by merging into one another. Any trace of our system is gone.'

Ĝeolamonap saw nothing, only blackness, and felt terribly cold.

Zarathustra continued, 'And now the giant voids begin to evaporate. The Dark Era begins in which much of the physical objects have decayed and so the heat death of the universe begins. Amongst the ghosts of virtual traces iron stars are formed, but these too collapse and evaporate into voids, the universe is like a dying wounded animal, being eaten by worms.

And strange now a brain appears in the cosmos, and lives awhile and thinks, and ponders its existence, then it too dies. The void empties itself as it is a vacuum emptying itself.' Zarathustra concluded.

'And now?' asked Ĝeolamonap.

'There is now no longer now.' said Zarathustra.

'Then nothing.' said Ĝeolamonap.



‘Not even that.’ said Zarathustra, now laughing.

Ĝeolamonap turned and began to climb the two steps back to the mountain top.

‘Where are you going, there is nowhere to go.’ said Zarathustra, still with a smile on his face, ‘I’ve shown you your future. It is nothing, not even that nothing, not even nowhere, so you must come with me. I will descend the mountain with you as my disciple.’ he continued.

‘I have no future or life of my own.’ Ĝeolamonap said, ‘I maybe the last of the twelve but there is a life. Many lives. Many worlds now. I see a vision of my friend BrewIma, and the world he is building. I would follow him and not you.’ Ĝeolamonap continued. And so Ĝeolamonap turned, climbed to the top of the mountain and then followed the path down that BrewIma had taken.

And so now Zarathustra was looking glum. Zarathustra climbed down alone from the mountain and encountered no one.



CHAPTER EIGHTY TWO: THE GREAT BINDING

The three, Hope, Nigel and Billy had retired to the room in The Hall of the Mountain King, with its heavy Rococo gold decoration, elaborate furniture, candelabra, bookcases and mirrors. The windows looked onto formal gardens which had a fountain. It was winter and the gardens were now snow covered, the fountain frozen and sparkling in the fading light. Logs were burning in a large ornate fireplace; the room was illuminated by candles. As before they sat around a table which had drinks and vol-au-vents. Billy had placed a spare empty chair in the semi-circle in which they sat.

Ray Wood, DCI, had walked into the Baroque hallway admiring the decoration. Seeing the door, he opened it and entered the room. He was dressed in his off-duty attire, slacks, open neck shirt and check jacket. He looked at the three, smiled then took in the room.

‘Nice.’ he said, as he looked around the room, and out into the gardens.

‘I asked Ray to join us because we are missing something, and I think he might be able to help.’ Billy said. That Ray found himself in this situation was no longer a surprise to anyone.

‘Ray, sit and have a drink.’ Ray sat and Billy poured him a large scotch, Laphroaig Lore, Islay, Single Malt Scotch Whisky.

Ray took a sip, ‘This is good, very good!’ he said.

‘Eighty-one quid a bottle,’ Billy said, ‘but you are worth it.’

‘We all know that things recently have been chaotic. Once free of the deterministic algorithms of being in a computer simulation, people gained free-will, and this has created problems. At first total chaos and then from this infinite freedom, boredom, which for increasing numbers became suicidal.’ Billy said.



Ray looked questioningly.

‘Success can do this.’ was Billy’s response.

Ray pondered and then said, ‘I see, like Kurt Cobain, had it all and nowhere to go?’

‘Yes,’ said Billy, ‘or just accident, creating a deadly scenario for a high.’

‘Yes like ODing on drugs, so continue...’ replied Ray.

‘The attempt at fixing this in the three realities hasn’t worked that well, there is a degree of choice, which is better, but some still want to leave, and some want to destroy. And these three realities are different and diverge. There seems to be no overall order. Then we had the twelve who wanted just destruction.’ Billy said.

‘The twelve, this all looked childish,’ said Hope,

‘Of course it was childish, the boy was involved, so it was childish. But the intentions of the twelve were deadly.’ said Billy, ‘And the destruction of the original universe would have had extreme consequences.’

Ray was frowning and had to be brought up to speed on the twelve destroyers.

‘So,’ Ray said, ‘If they had succeeded it would have left no option for humanity than the three realities, effectively a prison.’

‘Correct,’ said Billy, ‘but the twelve worked through their quests, no matter how childish, and each, it seems, now has a purpose or have solved the problem of not having one.’ he continued, thinking of the purposeless life of Martius. ‘And I have evidence.’

‘From where?’ Nigel asked.



‘The boy.’ said Billy, ‘He told me. He showed me the drawings, and some made by two of the twelve.’

‘So now you say keep it simple, stupid.’ said Hope.

‘What’s wrong with that?’ Ray said, ‘Now I see why I’m invited.’

Billy gave a smile.

‘But it’s not stupid,’ Billy said, ‘and that’s not why you are here, but the answer must be simple.’

‘Why?’ asked Hope.

Nigel spoke with a strange assertiveness, ‘Alienation, only a few understood my work, I’ve no clue about modern art, I once grasped set theory, it moved on, it’s a confused mess to people not in the loop. So, then we all get a false picture, fragments, chaos.’

‘Yes, I think so,’ Billy said, ‘and what if these Tablets of Truth, however many of them and what they can do, are just the random drawings of this boy, which somehow become real. And we try to make sense of them.’

‘Interesting,’ Nigel said, ‘so rather than coherence we get conflicting logics on what is a play of imagination.’

Ray said ‘Why assume they are random, why make ourselves the judges. If the kid has imagination, I bet he thinks it makes sense.’

The others felt to have been put in their place. Ray was big, tall, but now getting up from his seat seemed to dominate more than just physically.

‘The Wisdom of Children.’ thought Billy.

Ray was walking around the room, sipping his Laphroaig and muttering to himself, no one could hear.



‘Certainly, a fuck up, and why not take the boy seriously. What does he want, everything back to normal, everything how it was. Ok, so limited, not anarchy, just go back to where things screwed and go down another path...’

No one was listening, perhaps except Billy.

‘...I like this room though, the mirrors, and all these old books.’

One wall was not mirrors but a fine bookcase containing ancient leather-bound volumes. He took one out, and putting down his whiskey glass began examining it.

‘Beautiful, I love these old books, the leather tooling, the marbled paper inside, the beautiful binding.’ he was saying to himself, and stroking the books spine.

Billy was speaking, ‘And these tablets, drawings, are all over the place, hence the chaos maybe, we need a way to bind things together in some sort of order.’

‘Nice book.’ Ray was still talking to himself, running his fingers across the old leather, and the spine. But Hope was watching him and heard.

‘That’s it!’ Hope said, ‘We need to bind the drawings together, in a book.’

‘Brilliant, I think that’s it, nice one Ray, and Hope, and I know the very person who can do this.’ Billy said.

Hope gave a smug smile, Ray a confused look not realising he had been overheard, and not knowing what was ‘brilliant’.



CHAPTER EIGHTY THREE: STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

Ray picked up the three the following morning from Nigel's Victorian Mansion in Edgbaston, Birmingham. He had been before; it was Ray that got Nigel interested in tropical marine fish. He had a small aquarium in his flat, which was also in Edgbaston, Nigel had seen it and as Ray joked, 'had been hooked'.

He was still dressed casually and was driving his own classic Jaguar XJS. It seems Chief Constable White had given him 3 days paid leave; he told them as they drove towards Bordesley Green. He suspected Billy was involved in this paid leave. When they arrived outside 85 Colonial Road, Selima Ahmad of the Bordesley Green Police community team and a constable were waiting. She greeted them,

'Seems someone at Lloyd House thought if we weren't busy, and we are not, so here we are.'

'Nice to see you, Selima.' Billy said, 'Seems this is where it all began and ends.' he added.

The four, Ray, Hope, Nigel and Billy, entered the garden of 85 Colonial Road as it was in the early 1960s. All four now familiar with the layout. In the kitchen, and not to their surprise, the boy sat at the table with 4 large piles of drawings. The Tiles of Truth, looked like possibly thousands of pages. Immediately he saw them he went into the pantry to reappear with 4 paper carrier bags. Ray packed the bags, then took two, Hope took the other two. They left the house without a word being said. As they approached the XJS Ray said,

'Where to Boss.' Using the old term for Billy's rank when he was in the force.

'Stratford-upon-Avon.' was the reply.

Selima Ahmad overhearing said, 'Out of our patch, but good



luck.' They put the bags in the boot of the car, got into the XJS and Ray drove off, as always wearing his Ray Bans. As they were driving Nigel asked a question, to no one in particular...

'Shouldn't the pages be in some sort of order?'

'They might already be so, or get so, but then the particular order might not be important.' Billy said.

'And where will we keep the book or books? There seems to be far more pages for just one book.' Nigel asked.

'At 85 of course.' said Hope.

Ray had an escort as far as Stechford with a blue light from Selima Ahmad in her police car, through the worst of the traffic. Then they drove down The Meadway and Cooks Lane, not a problem. At Coleshill he picked up the M42. There was a short debate which Hope couldn't join, about using Spaghetti junction, Ray winning,

'My car, I'm driving.'

From the M42 he picked up the A 3400 at Monkspath. Not taking the M40, which provoked another argument, again Ray winning,

'I thought Hope should see the more rural side of Warwickshire.'

They drove on through Henley in Arden and Wootton Woven, where they all agreed it was a quaint and charming village, the name of which Americans couldn't pronounce. Finally, they arrived at Stratford-upon-Avon.

Billy directed Ray to a small side street in Stratford-upon-Avon's town centre, one that actually overlooked the river Avon. Ray stopped at a small house and parked, as Billy instructed. Then he and Hope fetched the four bags, by which time the door of the house had been opened and Billy was talking to a woman with shoulder length blonde hair, smartly dressed and in a wheelchair.



Obviously, they knew each other, and she knew they were coming to visit her.

‘Come in.’ she said. And the four followed. Through a neat hall, and small living room with a French window, onto a tiny but beautiful walled garden. Flower beds around a small lawn. Out they went then into what the three soon recognised as her work room. From what they saw it was obvious, she was a book binder. A traditional book binder using leather and marbled paper.

‘But not just any bookbinder,’ Billy was saying, ‘certainly the best in England, and one who works for the British Library.’

‘Oh, shut up,’ Claire laughed, ‘flattery will get you anywhere, and lucky for you I’ve no rush jobs at the moment.’

Ray was admiring what he supposed was her work, a rebound book of ancient origin, freshly bound in thickly tooled leather.

‘You can pick it up, it won’t bite,’ Claire said, ‘but the gloves please.’ she added.

Ray put on the white gloves and inspected the book,

‘This is lovely,’ he said ‘look at this work! It’s wonderful.’

Claire flushed, not expecting someone of Ray’s demeanour to be so appreciative.

‘Fantastic.’ he said putting the book down and removing the gloves.

‘You have the sheets?’ Claire said, ‘Can you put them in piles over there, and a clean sheet of paper on top and then the weights.’

Billy showed Ray what to do, he was keen to help. The 4 piles of the drawings made on grease proof paper were each stacked between two sheets of white cartridge paper. Then large flat

slabs of steel placed on top.

Claire offered tea, but they declined. Billy spoke as they left,

‘Take as long as you need, no rush.’

And then to the others in a soft voice said, ‘yes a real rush, we will collect them in the morning.’

Claire looked at the four piles, and thought 6 or 7 volumes, best part of a year’s work? She busied herself in the garden the rest of the day. Before going to bed she checked the piles, they were now half the height they were originally. ‘One of Billy’s specials.’ she thought, ‘he will be round in the morning.’ she grinned. ‘I love this kind of work he brings me!’

By morning, that is Claire’s morning, the piles were so low that two volumes would be sufficient. And the sheets themselves had changed yet again, not to metal, but a beautiful thin yet strong paper, and larger in size. ‘So, to work!’ she said aloud to no one.

Days passed, each day much the same, and Claire knew why, apart from her work they were the same. Not similar, the exact same. In such circumstances, she mused, how do you, and why would you keep track of time. The first volume completed, a large black leather-bound book of some 1500 pages. The other would be similar. Each day the same bright sunny day, on she worked.

The actual next day the four arrived mid-morning. Claire was talking quietly to Billy in the garden,

‘How long it took I don’t know, but it was a joy, so many days without any pain,’ she rubbed her legs.

‘And I’ve a feeling that might last, you’ve done someone and us a great service.’ Billy said.

She blushed and waved him away. Entering the workshop she



spoke to Ray, 'Ray, there, you can handle them no need of gloves with that paper.' she said.

Ray picked up the first volume, it was large, around 16 by 20 inches, thickly bound in black leather, but the book itself not so thick considering the number of pages. Turning the thin pages with their designs which seemed drawn in silver, he imagined even in pitch blackness still readable. For once he was speechless, Billy spoke,

'You can take them to the car.'

'I'll sit in back.' Ray said, 'Hope,' Ray said, 'you drive.' he threw over his car keys.

She drove them back to Birmingham, Billy next to her, Ray and Nigel in the back seats, each browsing a book in silence. Billy gave some navigation through his hometown back to Colonial Road. They entered as before, and as before the boy was sitting at the table. Billy and Nigel placed the two volumes on the table in front of the boy. They waited. He looked through a few pages of each, stroking the images, his images. Then he looked up at the four, he smiled, and said,

'Thanks.'

'Where will you keep them?' asked Hope. He took the first volume and placed it on the long shelf on the far wall of the kitchen, then did the same with the other. He stood smiling, and so they left.

'Do you think they will be safe there?' Hope asked.

'The Books of Truth, safe as houses.' Ray said using an old Birmingham expression.



CHAPTER EIGHTY FOUR: EPILOGUE

Ray drove the others back to Nigel's house. As the four were having coffee Professor Catherine Mulberry arrived. The five sat, having more coffee, Ray had agreed to take Hope to Birmingham airport. Catherine Mulberry would be taking Billy back to Woodbridge in the Wolseley.

Ray let Hope drive, giving directions, she had never driven anything like an XJS. A week later she emailed Ray, he sorted out a good XJS and arranged shipping to Chicago, where it turned heads. She gave up sculpture for poetry, lyrical Victorian neo-Gothic work. She always had one copy leather bound by Claire in Stratford-upon-Avon, and had it sent to Ray.

Ray (and others) would make the occasional visit to 85 Colonial Road, and he and the boy would browse the books. Ray would visit Hope in Chicago.

Nigel Summers enlarged his aquarium to hold more salt-water tropical fish.

Catherine Mulberry and Billy settled back into their life in Woodbridge.

Sometime earlier, months before all of this, Hamid Zulfiqar had asked his son to put the broom away in the broom cupboard before they left to visit their relatives in Manchester. The rest of the family were waiting in his BMW parked outside the house. He always did a tour of his home before leaving 85 Colonial Road. He checked the kitchen for any appliance that might have been left on. That's when he saw the broom. He raised his eyes, he had had a problem with this broom before, it had been left out once and he had stood on it, it had flicked up and had nearly hit him in the face. He picked it up, opened the broom cupboard and hung it on the pegs at the back. In his annoyance he did this rather too hard, the pegs came loose from their fixing to the plaster board leaving a hole.



This was the kind of thing Mr Zulfiqar, who was in a business dealing with fabrics, import and export, could not tolerate. He could leave this and get going on their journey and put it right on their return. But he was fastidious, maybe silly, but he knew the hole would pray on his mind. He heard his wife call him from the block pavement outside. He should leave it and go. He looked again at the hole. His mind was in a dilemma. Why should such a trivial thing bother him, be at all important. Then he noticed the tube of Polyfilla on the shelf.

‘Two seconds!’ he thought. Taking the tube and a spatula which was next to it he quickly filled the hole. He put the tube back and washed the spatula. He was on his way back to also put this back on the shelf. His wife was in the corridor giving him that ‘look’. He shrugged, smiled, and put the spatula back on the shelf.

‘What have you been doing?’ his wife asked.

‘Nothing.’ he replied.

Behind the plasterboard there were now two finely bound leather volumes.

CHAPTER EIGHTY FIVE:

Billy asked, ‘Nigel, in the Everett idea of many worlds when a choice occurs and the world splits, and they in turn split, can these eventually interact with each other, and the myriad of other worlds?’

Nigel, ‘They seem to, when we jump back from one world into another, like if we are in a shared reality, I can jump into another and back into this shared reality. And of course, some branches can wither and die. And then everything collapses back, maybe like in our case?’

Billy, ‘Then some may have experiences of these alternative realities, memories of them and others not?’

Nigel, laughing, ‘One Nigel thinks so and another not.’

Billy, ‘And what is produced or what is at base is not Metaphysics, beyond physics but before physics. Before or Paleo, “Paleophysics”. A constant play of worlds ever interacting, ever changing, both repeating and new, falling back and starting again. And what arises from this is the forms, the aeons, science, everything, and nothing. The source of infinite novelty.’

Nigel, ‘Maybe?’

Not an individual endowed with good will and a natural capacity for thought, but an individual full of ill will who does not manage to think either naturally or conceptually. Only such an individual is without presuppositions. Only such an individual effectively begins and effectively repeats – Giles Deleuze ‘Difference and Repetition’.



"Near the Cimmerii a cavern lies deep in the hollow of a mountainside, the home and sanctuary of lazy Somnus, where Phoebus' beams can never reach at morn or noon or eve, but cloudy vapours rise in doubtful twilight . . . there silence dwells: only the lazy stream of Lethe 'neath the rock with whisper low o'er pebbly shallows trickling lulls to sleep. Before the cavern's mouth lush poppies grow and countless herbs, from whose bland essences a drowsy infusion dewy Nox distils and sprinkles sleep across the darkening world."

Ovid, Metamorphoses 11. 602 ff

