EPOCH DAWN

1.10 One piece of two

∞
The basement room was the kind of damp that was more suitable for propagating mushrooms most typically found in tropical rainforests. The harrowed curtains were rarely drawn back. The only view a sloping half-garden topped by a shallow wall which just about masked the traffic in the road beyond. The articles I had been antipathetically posting during the previous days had seemed to shout back voices which seemed to shout off those voices which haunted deep from earlier attempted Great Works. Yet today's was different in its singularity.

'What are you scared of?'

The booming male voice spoke as if across the ether; unknown, slightly harsh, demanding in answer. Almost as though a Masonic sonnet in Grandmaster. Its ghost heard my muttering thoughts which in the shock of the moment didn't really give much of a time in thought process to process reply.

'Being killed in sleep.'
'Then we shall wake you up.'

I stood away from the dining table which hosted a borrowed computer and passed out into unconsciousness. In a colour dream I saw myself as if in centre, viewed from the front in stage, at an angle slightly above. Within a few seconds I awoke from its entrance. Standing up, again, I was knocked unconscious by the unseen epileptic force; again the same vision.

I had been reminded of how a few years earlier a torture team had hypnotised me as I fell into nightly sleep such that I dreamt in terror of that which had been spoken in nightmare. I was unsure whether these new visions made me feel more or less terrified.

Chapter One – Ignition sequence started

He was going to take the national transporter to Brightown, England. Travelling light was always the preferred option. Anything that was too much to carry could be bought or borrowed at the next location. Choosing to journey out of hours while things were quiet, he walked his way along the boulevard to the transporter interchange. Pretty much an average afternoon, bit of sunshine, bit of white cloud, occasional gust of cooling breeze.

His wrist tingled. He cuffed his sleeve briefly, and moved his arm up and back in a swift motion, ending up with his hand on the side and back of his head.

“Hello,” he spoke into the microphone embedded in his sleeve. “Yes, that’s correct,” he said. “Confirmation booking 3:16 Brightown. One-way.”

“We have confirmed your reservation. Please proceed to the boarding area.”

Shaking his sleeve downward, he eyed the impending sensor of the autodoor. The engineers of the sensors had got it just right. You always had that instant of uncertainty of whether or not the doors would open in time.

He boldly dipped through the sliding doors and glanced briefly left and right and tried to guess which direction it would set off in, so as to gain his preferred forward facing. It wasn’t always easy to determine, often the only ones who knew where they were going were the transports themselves. The transport was packed with outers mumbling macro phrases behind their shade displays.

Nestling back into his seat, he was pleased he had guessed correctly. He was journeying to his next waypoint, Brightown Cybertechnic. It was the next stage of his career progression, or education, depending on what the current viewpoint was. The apprentices sometimes wondered if it was all just a buffering queue. He hadn’t so much navigated in this direction, as floated gently down the stream, sort of caught up in the flow of things. At least it felt like a natural progression to him, even if one he hadn’t steered.

The transport hummed into action with a distinct clicking noise. It was like going forwards in an elevator. There seemed only a gradual change in position, and a disproportionate shift at each end of the thrust. The high pitching of the engines dampened into a hardly noticeable ringing, the chatter and busyness of the passengers would mask the sound completely for most of the distance.

He glanced over at the family sat on the other side of the transport. The children were on one side of the table, guardians the other. From the angle he was viewing, the table shone the unmistakable static mist of coalesced imagery that was a group projection rig. Laid out on the table in front of them was the silver slim case of the unit. The multiphased viewing panel was set at the optimum for their four viewers, his range wasn’t in the setup. They smiled and laughed together, the earsets relaying sonics whilst they pointed out fascinations to each other.

He wondered whether those references beloved of filmmakers, where they would cameo a line or two from another film, were totally deliberate or whether occasionally they just didn’t remember that it was just a memory of a previous observation rather than a new thought. Maybe they were like him, constantly reminded of their own childhood dreams in the communications of others. Maybe they had the notion first, and were determined to see it out.

He reached in his backage, rummaged a little, and pulled out the Isotech manual. The manual read a bit like heavyweight Russian literature. Dostoyevsky or someone, where sometimes you had to stop for a while to think about what the last sentence actually meant. Sometimes he wondered whether he was reading the correct language translation, always best in the original he thought.

He had to laugh at the contributing notes, the ubiquitous 555 timer further had its place confirmed in the hardware hacks of history. The sequential timing and pulse/burst generator modes were able to be utilised in grids to perform the functions of even the most pimped up Son-yan Corp ics, although they tended to fry much quicker. Still, at a cost ratio of several thousand to one it wasn’t too much of a problem for most users.

He knew he wouldn’t be able to get any true sleep on the journey. His overwatch senses were never going to relax enough whilst he was in motion. It was still possible to gain physical rest though, and he eased back into the seat and began the downward breathing regulation.

As he blink opened and closed his eyes, the retinal burn of the window view remained longer under the lengthening covers until their undulations rested shut. The placement of his tongue on the roof of his mouth aided the circle of breathing into its more sedated state. He heard his breathing and heartbeat grow louder as he scattered conscious thoughts lapped into a lucid calm dreaming whilst awake. A couple of full nerve fire jolts stirred him momentarily, but after a short period he settled more.

The hours passed sooner and the transport had arrived. He composed himself, and waited until the minute adjustments to full awakensness were effected. He raised his arms from the side position, and slowly stretched them forward to extension, flexing but never reaching full straightness. After all the momentum sways had finished, he allowed the most eager passengers to leave before standing and heading for the now fixed wide open doors, stepping out levelled while visually confirming the signposts to the exit.

Leaving through one of his precalculated routes, he passed this week’s sanctioned busker near the interchange exit. The bard’s old leather hands were strumming victoriously against his steel strung instrument. At the ‘tuning end’, they spiralled about into a collection of bopping dreadlocks which danced merrily along with his impassioned recital. His pursed lips sang out his husking tune.
My mind is full of the real me,  
But is that the one that you can see.  
My mind is full of the real me,  
But is that who I want to be.  
Am I who you think I am,  
Or am I just playing my life’s hand.  

The real air outside of the interchange was cooler than the processed mix of air conditioning and heating that he had been used to for the past hours. He tucked up his collar slightly as protection against the coming night. A brief wander into the central buildings, allowing a few memories to run through and focus his senses on the new environment and the missions in hand.

Reality suppressant. That was first on his mind’s list.

He flashed the credit strip across the local communications terminal. He didn’t want to flag any of his own devices unnecessarily. There was a wait before anything picked up the connection, he clicked through a couple of levels of the on hold game, but it wasn’t really enough to hold his attention, especially given the importance of the call.

“Hello, it’s me. I’m back in town,” he greeted.

“Oh, yeah, hi, how’s it going?” said the human connectant.

“Yes, good, I’ve got a feeling it’s going to be my year,” he continued.

“Could well be. Listen, I kind of know why you’re calling.”

It wasn’t too hard a bet to hedge.

“The problem is, I sort of don’t do that anymore,” said the stockist.

Shit, not exactly a great start. Especially troublesome as he hadn’t arranged anywhere to sleep. The groove would have to be stock up on the reality suppressant, catch up on new times, and hopefully borrow some floor space for a decent sleep.

“Ok, no problem, I know how it is,” he covered well, but the act wouldn’t last long, so he got out of the connection pretty soon after.

A major blow to the big plan. Danny had often said he was his best customer, and rightly so. He knew where he was on to a good thing. Danny always had the best equipment going, and at just the right price. Actually, thinking about it, he was probably everybody’s best customer. Danny’s batches of suppressant were always top notch, always ensured to be industrial strength, not like the watered quarts available down on the street. Suitable for some, who liked the more steady lager like consumption pattern to maintain a gentle long firing, but no good for his purposes.

‘Last time I make a plan,’ he thought. In actual fact, that was as far as the plan went. He had learnt long ago that even the best laid plans were always irrelevant after point two or three, so he figured there wasn’t much point pinning things down any further than that. Combinations were the key. No preconfigured order or arrangement, just enough to have overlapping redundancy for any situation. Make things up as you go along.

Thus, although not exhausted, his options were lessened. There would be no virtual reality today without the suppressants, but he knew there were bound to be plenty around at the first meet tomorrow. It was just the way of the scene. Not that everyone was that way, it was the usual fifty-fifty. Horses for courses. One type suited one type, another yet another. You either used suppressants or you were totally clean, like no caffeine, alcohol or anything. Easy choice for most, but some were the meditative type, aiming to pass the corruptibility tests for failsafe and critical applications development.

The first sleep space was at least warm and dry, safe from the coming winter chill, and the knowledge of at least being amongst friends was reassuring. The spoiler was the refrigerator in the corner of the room. It was a comfortable spot despite the hardness of the floor, and body relaxation was easy enough. The pain in the ass thing was the noise. The bass hum of the transporter being amplified by his window dolby system.

He awoke to the sound of the window rattling against it’s wooden frame. The four-inch masonry nails, that had been hastily hammered in at an awkward angle through the wood surrounding the misted glass, were not enough to stop the bass hum of the transporter being amplified by his window dolby system.

It was carrying used tyres for storage in the old mill warehouse for later recycling. He wondered how they were recycled, or if they were just redistributed to hold down some blue polythene sheeting. Most of the kid’s playgrounds already had the safety rubber fallout zones around the swings and stuff, although making shoe soles from it made sense.

The tyre-burning electricity generators were only moderately popular, despite their calorific value being comparable with that of oil and higher than that of coal. It was probably due to the ‘dark matter’ residue that the process left, as the contractors called it.

It was a brave Elected who initiated the energy transmigration progressions, the fuel corporations had been forced into investing considerably in electricity conversion efficiency by the harshness of the economic conditions artificially imposed on those not doing so. The benefits were quickly reaped in the clean higher population density centres, with hydrocars and ‘park & drive’ transport exchanges. Co-operation was achieved by the long term rewards given by being offered the best of the starting opportunities. Basically, they largely funded the research as they knew their game was
over. The organic photoelectrics and the equatorial solar heat pipe were certainly worth their long development cycles.

“If you’re expecting your own socket AND instant phecking hot water at this late stage in the season then you’d better get real,” carped the broad letting agent, flexing his shoulders and twitching his neck. He was glad he hadn’t gone a band down on the letting lists. Whether the agent was trying to make a point with his motions or whether he had just done too many cliptrips in the past was a mystery. The manner was aggressive, but that was business. Most people’s tolerance filters just kicked in.

Needless to say he went for the dedicated socket option. He didn’t have that much a call for heated water, let alone instantly. The tank was good enough. When he needed more he knew he’d need the wait to readjust back in anyway.

He clattered down the vidlink connection and used the reference to get the map readout. It was walkable, but all uphill. It had become dark, and no-one else would be going that way, let alone on foot. Probably better, as carrying the amount of suppressant he had picked up needed a company license. He was too tired and too keen to get started to go through all the questions, the form filling, and would never resort to common bribery.

He had to hover in a few places when the sky surveillance was paying him too much attention. He contemplated lighting up a cigarette, the scornful outcasting at such a public display would probably give enough cover to divert true focus for long enough.

The journey was real event uneventful, save the direct preventative countermeasures. He had established lodgings to begin his work. A slow start, but hopefully progression would follow.

“That’s the one,” was what he heard spoken methodically as he awoke from the chill of the duvet being casted back. Though not seeing clearly yet, he assumed the two of them were adopting an ends arm and leg carrying position. His mind was screaming out ‘help me, help me’ to any would be rescuers in the street outside, but his lips either betrayed him or were stilled by his would be abductors, and a weakened ‘help me’ was all that whispered past his lips. We accelerated out the window in a shotgun of light. He awoke for the second time. In the instant between sleep and sight he wondered if he would wake up again. But no, this was it, out of his dream.

He attended his cleaning routine in the tank, at least he had set that up right for its heat overnight. It was the day of re-registration for the year. Thankfully it was a ‘modular’ approach to the stages of registration, the keeners went in the morning, the rest of them drifted in and about as and when throughout the day.

One of the tell-tale signs of approaching vr neural imbalance was a change in the learning biases of the brain. Thus one part of the yearly processing was the completion of the Asostral synal mapping.

“New upgrade then,” he said.

“Yeah,” said Brian. “The triaos have really been maxed out on this one. Don’t put your tongue on the mid-chin rest, it gets kind of hot.”

Brian often left the air conditioning on in his rackspace even in summer. Sure enough, his chin did kind of warm up. Whether it was from the heat of the new triaos or the soup vibration heat of an unstable mounting point he wasn’t convinced. Brian always raced to fit the latest bits, but sometimes spent too long so that the rigs weren’t ready for pre-season. A rig toppled over one year, narrowly missing a yawning inductee.

Whilst Brian fiddled with the setup to fulfill his administration responsibilities, the warm female voice of the unit gently described the results in a soft tone.

“Your somatosensory regulation indicates you have an equivalence in your auditory and visual pattern matched learning, facilitating both unilateral and multilateral spatial comprehension. Sequential and time delayed comprehension exhibited equal bias under testing.”

“You have a slight left-hemisphere dominance, although your balanced input response lowers its distinction. Parallel macro and micro comprehension achieved. Abstraction and proof easily interlaced.”

“Pass or fail then?” he said.

“Same as last year by the looks of it. Not much change, average pass,” chuckled Brian. He waited, and joined in with Brian’s chuckling briefly, and then made an exit.

The lift in the corridor made its way up a few floors to collect the waiting passengers. He noticed a pleasant enough nice young thing waiting patiently.

Her fine blond hair flowed down her back. A hand, then an arm reached to her, and her boyfriend circled his hand on her upper hip. Even though he hadn’t convinced himself he was interested, he felt a strange little widening of his mouth, and a small, slightly sharper intake of breath. His eyes undoubtedly reflected this feeling, although their view showed no witness. His reproductive instincts must have given out their slight shock of disappointment at there being one less fish in the sea.

Walking through the reception lounges could sometimes seem like a stroll through the nightlife, with the new intake trying to discriminate themselves against the muted common ground. Even within the fine confines of the rooms, there were as many again cultures, subcultures and countercultures, each interacting and transferring and counter transferring in their tribal chants.

The drone surrounding one particular ‘bad ass’ young man locked his attentiveness briefly. It’s hard rasping guitar emphasising the inflection of the low toned, deep pained lyrics.
“White Winged Dove”

All the people fall in love  
With old Noah’s white winged dove  
But what they don’t realise  
It’s in their heart the devil lies  
Tell me tell me when will I see  
The light the light that shines on me

It was an angry tune, and he wondered how many alcohol braved piercings would be performed that week. Some of them played a more bass felt sonic on their latest fashion players. That was as much a conspiracy as the promise of the big dream, the ingraining while they were intoxicated meant they were addicted as much to the music as they were the cigarettes and alcohol. Some strove for their individuality by always having the latest tunes. Others just drifted, bed hopping between styles and genres.

There were a few stall vans from the local cliptrip firms parked up outside. The hypersmiling wide-eyed sales freaks handled the small queues of sign-ups. The less affluent did it for the money. The affluent thrill seekers did it for the potential kicks gained in accessing some serious high-end equipment during down time. All made possible with Kepler’s organic transistor network.

Kepler used an offshoot of quantum computing indeterminate theory to utilise the ‘chaos’ in the brain. By lowering to total immersion, he found that he could use the otherwise discarded unpredictable excess random firings to solve complex predicates. It sort of enabled people to work while they were asleep, although you’d wake up extremely tired. Anyone who hadn’t run a cliptrip before did so in vr week one, it was essential to gain an understanding of the more slavorial aspects of augmented intelligence, and was usually enough to put most people off.

He hadn’t run many, and when he had overheard the conversation about ‘multi-tasked fryout, just don’t ask what happens if it fries when you’re that far in’, that had pretty much put an end to it. Those without the luxury to make that decision might ultimately work at the mind farms, or contract offering connection shifts on demand. Who knows what shit they’d have your brain processing then though. Still, it gave a whole new meaning to leaving your work at the office, most had no recall whatsoever of having worked at all.

Of course, Kepler’s layers were not enough on their own. It was sort of an extension of game theory. Anyone observing the random walk pattern of various walking or flying insects will notice how surprisingly effective the system is. No walk seems to plot the same course, and equal coverage and mapping seems to occur irrespective of the bounding environment.

He was reminded of the flight of the bats in the small Lighthouse game he had written years before. Even that was designed years before that, but the programming at the time (most probably due to his own poor algorithms), had stopped the project being finished. Their computed random flight feigned intelligence. Were they intelligent at all or just following a fractal equation, like the squirrels scurrying around their hoarding maps. The whole question of intelligence was a tricky one. Some would argue that any tests of it were biased towards an assumed environment, and others pondered where precisely the simple pattern match response system ended and the true reasoning began.

As he passed the next campus complex, he was glad his visits would all be to the buildings which had been extensively refurnished a couple of years ago in the next phase of ‘contiguous refinement’. He didn’t spare many glances towards its drab exterior, it was a bit like ML, strictly functional.

The doors of the public meeting place swung open to allow the passage of The Captain. The warmth of its lures breezed out as The Captain staggered through. No time to spend idly playing 9-ball amid banter and alcohol today though.

“Hello, Captain,” he said.

“Ah, yes, hello,” replied The Captain softly, and tottered off on his merry way, clutching produce of dubious origin beneath arms still toned despite their age. ‘If you do the hard thing first everything else is easy’ he had once been told by The Captain. Easy for The Captain to say. In actual fact, easy for The Captain to do as well, he only hoped that one day his skill would be at least in the same sphere.

Carrying on, he felt a gurgle from somewhere near his abdominal region. Puzzled for an instant, he recalled he hadn’t eaten so far that day. The microshuttle recharge bay would no doubt have a selection of space wrapped foods for his enjoyment, but he wondered whether all the sandwiches would be accompanied with mayo. He needed to make a decision before his legs had carried him past the entrance gap. It was done, he was in the door.

The fluorescent lit fridge shelves supported their bounty. Triple cheese. Triple meats. BLT (slight mayo risk). Ham salad. Nice. Ham (reprocessed), bread (white), tomato (red), lettuce (green), no mayo. He didn’t like mayo. Not the smell, not the look, not the colour, and that’s all flagging before the taste. As for the taste, mayo tasted like it smelt and looked to him. Wrenching. Mayo, salad cream, coleslaw, all from the same bad syndicate in his opinion.

He could still taste from his mind image the revolt and disgust of the sandwich filling he had thought was otherwise when at friend’s birthday party during his childhood. He had already known that mayoslaw slop just wasn’t his thing.
He had bit into what he thought was the safety of generic ham. The standard template construction taste he had expected was not forthcoming. He was far too nice a child, and they were far too nice a family, for him to show disgust, so he made do by leaving big crusts.

So it was to be. A clean sandwich, vacuum packed potato slices, and a silver wrapped juice drink. Luckily some genius had finally solved the straw problem. Half the straw was inside the foil packet, and half telescoped out when ready for sucking. He paid in loose tokens from the booth on the Technic mezzanine floor, to much smirking from a few half-suits.

“Bloody students,” they joked, knowing they had been far worse in their time. At least he had paid. He shoved them into his pockets and left.

A short shuttle and another walk and he was back into the safety of his new lodgings. Not much time to wind down, sleep didn’t need too much coaching.

He awoke to the fading in of his alarm call. Sitting up, he grabbed his bottled water from the bedside table, and gulped down generously. He pulled on his clothes, sat in the chair and fired up his socket rig. The updates continued their trickle and the streams coalesced into view. The rig’s connection melded into the computer and the whole grew, the spike of bass hum like a breath of life.

The init consisted of three custom cross-streamed low-end units, given his modest budget, so as to take full advantage of the wide socket. The global standard statutes had been a bloody good thing all round. The endless formats and stream incompatibilities and third-party standards had held back the advancement of the computer for decades. Instead of solving the real problems, often a large percentage of the development time had been spent in conversion, rendering, and triaps coordination.

That’s not to say the units were similar. In fact, if that had happened it would have been largely missing the point. The big corps were still free to develop their own proprietary systems, and thus maintain their revenue streams, but the point was that everybody’s systems were able to intercommunicate based on the standards set worldwide.

These enabled the applications and processes running on the platforms to have true software as a service capability. This in itself was seen as a good thing, but the system enhanced the overall reliability and survival of the internetworks as a whole.

It was the virus wars which hastened the cycle. One of the problems was that there was no biodiversity in the computer microcosm. Thus when the SUCHEZ virus was released it was able to reproduce and mutate through the networks faster that the antistodal patches could be applied across the system. Thus by the time the entire internetwork had been vaccinated, the virus’s self-modifying code had already rewritten itself to counter the defence, spawning the KNUT and PCMF variants. ‘Les fenêtres est fermée’. Some isolated successes where gained by quarantining large parts of the networks, but obviously this rather defied the point of the whole inter thing.

Free corps and hackers alike began rolling their own systems. Initially some were just tweaks and mutates of existing code trees, but others were new roots and grew their own path. Thus the computer was born, the whole system evolving by the second as the code was refined according to its stimuli. With multiple independent updates rather than a static system, it only took a year or so for things to recover.

It is perhaps worth noting that a big catalyst to all of this was the injection of ready cash by the generous governments. Some would say it was an easy thing to do, using the bigcorp’s monopoly fines to fund new bubble startups. Others might even say it was just another attempt to make something out of nothing, a new market for corps to sell more stuff.

He spoke to the computer, the gestures of his fingers tracing effortlessly across the smooth inputboard. They tapped out precise positionings like the fret dancing of a nimble guitarist, translating his thoughts into the meld.

His eyes flash widened briefly when he saw the ‘Re: Load request approved’ amongst his data inputs. He had been having so much junk lately he almost thought that he had applied for one. He tapped and tweaked, and the source was blacklisted to the abyss.

One of his search aggregate software agents wasn’t performing its filtering capabilities to the maximum potential. He was feeding the results from his aggregation into an algorithm to triaps dataset information just that little more efficiently.

```javascript
$rig.new();
intersphere($rig);
$nr => socket(inner, stm, H38, $rig)
{
    $st.([H38]);
    handle:
        &8 call(stm);
        &15 route(stm);
        &21 sink(inner);
        &88 bypass(stm);
        &100 cont(stm);
    end_handle;
}
```
The mods were done and he sent the sa on its path of instinctive navigation, hunting out the information he sought like the instinctive hunt for food.

He was of the school of thought of not remembering too much so as to leave room for more. He would just store the method of retrieval or its location, performing a linking with the network to his brain memory, pointers indirectly addressing fragments of his memories and consciousness. Sometimes the forgetting of things he knew, and the learning of new things he didn’t, swayed gently in a soft liquid cocktail of thoughts.

A hard tap shut the system. He was already late and he thought he should at least put in an appearance. He was never really keen on the regular presentation lectures. The problem he found with them was that everyone just ended up agreeing on a common consensus after each meeting, so they all ended up steering in the same direction. Even those who thought they were sailing their own course had heard, processed, interpreted, and based any future discoveries on its bias, whether it be a positive or a negative bias. Thus in the freelancer world there were always those who were going to try to 'do a trekkie' in their quest for new discoveries.

The lock clicked shut to his satisfaction as he pulled the front door to. He pulled his jacket about him and zipped the front up as shield against the cold breeze, and flicked up its collar into his neck. He sort of hurried down the path and steps. A young boy was lightly skipping along the street, one hand in his father’s, the other carrying the unmistakable box of a beginner socket rig.

He smirked to himself as he remembered the cardboard box he had used to play with in his early youth. Then he hadn’t yet a real rig, and he played in his imagination, pressing keys on the box which performed unguessable abstract functions. It wasn’t until many years later that their father had bought them the Synclear XZ rig, and begun the countdown for his launch into the invisible world of the computer.

He hastened his pace, aiming to get the journey over sooner.

Chapter Two – Lift off

Well, almost. He had got the timing just a little bit wrong. He seemed to be walking toward the timetabled lecture theatre dome just as everyone else was leaving. They didn’t look overjoyed, so he guessed he hadn’t missed anything that much entertaining.

He chattered idly with a few faces he recognised, and amid the banter they reminded him that there was another sitting in an hour. Ideal. A visit to the canteen and all should be well.

However, the couple of sausage rolls and the milk drink seemed to take a lot out of him. He mused whether he should make the journey back home or stroll on to the afternoon’s late lecture. Actually that seemed to settle it, it was an afternoon lecture. That meant the whole pace of things would be winding down. The bonus of arriving that late was that he had missed the extreme hecticness of the start to the work day, and could instead begin with a nice relaxing winding down lecture.

The amount of yawns and the number of strong caffeine drinks being brought in were a good indicator. Even Taylor was looking less animated than normal, which was still hectic, but noticeably slower. Some said that Taylor was one of those people who never did anything he said he was going to do. Truth was, Taylor often came up with good ideas, but people were so negative to his ideas he didn’t bother pursuing them. Taylor flicked and backed up his work yet again. People may have chuckled at Taylor’s tick like reflex, and ribbed him for backing up so frequently, but the thing was, Taylor needed to backup much more often, as he simply had more to backup from the same space in time.

The tired hum of the attendees quietened into an expectant silence of the forthcoming impartment of knowledge. Either that or their apathy had turned into sloth.

The frowns of the lecture tag team duo echoed the concern of the gathering. It was only Tuesday and everyone looked wrecked. “Hopefully just Tuesday bluesday,” muttered the staff, but they knew what they had to do.

“Right then you lot!” bellowed the shorter, stouter of the two. “Now listen up. We’ve realised that you all live exceptionally dull and boring lives, so we’ve decided to bring a bit of excitement into your lives!” he raved.

A confident laugh was heard amongst the crowd. It was unmistakably Tommy’s.

“Alright Tommy, you excepted,” said the taller, slimmer of the pair. Everyone roared with laughter. There was no doubt in anyone’s mind that Tommy led anything less that a full and consummate lifestyle. Tommy always seemed wide
awake, not hectic, but just alert and fresh, ready for his next intake of what life had to offer. Tommy knew how to rock.

“As part of your continued enlightenment into the radiance and mystery of the world that is the computer, we’ve decided, at great expense, to take you bunch of sleeping beauties to v-industries.”

Tommy laughed again. There was no echo. The silence was now one of stunned, and the spell of sleep evaporated in an instant.

“What about,” inflected an unknown voice. The laughter applauded in again this time.

Even he had shifted a little in his seat when the words ‘v-industries’ were trumpeted out. He had to admit, even he was a little bit excited.

“When then?” asked Tommy. “Or are you a bit like Gina?”

The lag of the crowd’s laughter was just at the right delay to mask the yelp of Gina’s elbow into Tommy’s ribs.

“In two weeks,” confirmed the lecturer.

The rest of the proceedings consisted mostly of background information on v-industries. Most knew the general stuff covered, but the prospect of the visit had rekindled the interest of even the most reticent of learners. From a grounding in augmented learning, v-industries expanded into the number one supplier of legal high-end virtual reality equipment for the space industry.

The connection may not at first be obvious. The moon race had quickly been superseded by the mars race, with the Electorates agenda of transferring attentions away from domestic difficulties, and the big corps agenda of all haggling for the contracts on offer.

v-industries had begun life as a supplier of software to the education sector. They had successfully mapped the windows of opportunity of learning to complex geometric graphical systems. Thus, the optimum windows for each learning task such as language, speech, and trioordinate combination, could all be assimilated at the correct stage of development. ‘Let the mind tell you when and what it needs feeding’ had been the favourite catchphrase of one of their founders. Bless them, by marrying game theory and learning aids they even made it a whole lot more fun.

His hand went again into the packet. Bollocks. He had been distracted too much. He was taking his time over consuming his chocolate honeycomb spheres, but he had forgotten to keep an eye on when the last one was approaching. Thus he had eaten the last one without knowing it was so, and when his fingers tickled the packet, they found nothing but coldness. He was left wanting more. He checked the package again. Those damn pixies, they always pinch the last one.

The increase in efficiency in the learning process was almost as great as the increase in spatial compression achieved in the leap to language. It was possible to impart knowledge at a much faster rate, and the time taken to perfect a particular pattern prior to consumption could be unbounded.

The complexity of the flight systems increased exponentially with the switch from the local moon trip to the much longer mars journey. v-industries managed to grasp the essence of the problem. For a local moon flight, the distance is small and any communications time lag is pre-calculable. However, the mars route could mean a changeable communications lag and a much longer life-support system cycle all round. Nobody wanted another Laika, so much research was undertaken.

The technical difficulties were huge, and the research brought about considerable sideline industries and inventions. Social commentators discussed whether the missions would ultimately enable the tapping of resources of other planets when we had exhausted our own, or whether the funding should just be used to try and solve more basic human issues. Eventually all the disparate projects across the globe were united as part of the international space scientific exploration program.

Various suggestions were made of such solutions as vr systems to suspend travellers under. It was v-industries who came with the solution to the problem. Their full-immersion systems also had the advantage of lowering the net load, as the pilots were not in the craft. Instead they were on earth in what the v-industries marketing department completely wrongly described as ‘intended suspended animation’. Everyone agreed it made more sense than shipping off pilots with heavy vr equipment needed to both control the systems and provide relief from the caged in feeling on long flights.

The navigators would reach extreme levels of concentration during the warm-up period to their piloting session. Once in a total relaxed state of full immersion, control was switched over from the previous pilot. Earlier research had shown that spending long periods of time at this level of concentration could be damaging, so the ability to switch over on Earth was a distinct advantage.

With instant success in the field with their new systems, v-industries attracted a high calibre of staff, and soon gained a reputation as being the best. Being the best and attracting new staff who were the best too made them just better and better.

“Big night out Thursday,” said Tommy, his hand half over his face in an attempt at secrecy. “Up for it?”

“Sure,” he nodded.

The transport rounded the corner faster than he would have liked, the top floor exaggerating its motion. The street lights dazzled in blues of colour in the glaze of the winter night. Along the seafront the sound of the waves mingled with the electrostatic hum of the traffic, and the lights along the promenade and pier hazed into jagged blurs of colour.

They had ingested one each. The warm glow instantly noticeable as it had hit his tongue. The blue flecks were tingling to be set free, and the white base even now starting to dissolve slowly and release its eloquence. The other three still sat in Tommy’s open palm, their fate undecided.

“I’ve a pocket in my wallet, should do,” whispered Tommy.
“I’m not so sure,” he said. “Maybe I should put them in my boots, should be safer there.”
“Ok, your town, you know the tricks,” confirmed Tommy.
They continued along past some high set windows. The restaurant they fronted was set up a little bit higher than street level, so that its diners had an uninterrupted view of the sea. In the present case, they were also being treated to the displays of the night, the glowing and pageantry of the nightlife scene.

Across the transport lane and past the railings. Joining the other eager party goers. The queue was moving slowly. Slow enough for the rushes to mount up in the center of his spine, pounding like hands of fingers flicking to be released upwards across the shoulders and spiral tapwards.

“Hello lads, so where you from?” inquired the puffer jacketed outer security.
“Up the road, woodtreine,” he said.
“Oh yes, so what brings you here?” security stated without emotion.
“Well, we’ve heard it’s a good night so we thought we’d come here and take a look,” he said. The play and counter play continued briefly, and slowly the security discarded him as a threat.

Another wait. But at least he could feel the vibration of the impending hall. They filtered through one by one, each having another round of questioning followed by the skim search.

It had become a strange mix of safety and intolerance. Whilst anyone caught transferring inside would face stern expulsion and possible sanctions and repercussions, to the right the chemicalers were keenly testing the regularity of the dosages and highlighting impurities.

Their previous concerns would have been unnecessary but for one thing. They liked to rock, and the user license was for one per person.

The physical skimming was fairly tame, it was more the reaction the seasoned skill provoked when reaching a hot zone. They had honed the recognition skills in years of training and experience, the slightest of tells would betray the overloaded.

Then the moment came, the sweep lay at his feet. A slight inspection and a flick of the boot’s laces were all that he was delayed for.

“Good job we booted it,” he said, striding confidently through the double doors. He thought he heard for a moment a whisper behind him, but he wasn’t sure who had said it.

“Funny how we always know, isn’t it,” it had said.

They left their winter garments at the bay, and excitedly cantered across the hall and down the steps into the pit. It was a stone-lined swimming pool of great extravagance. In times gone by it had been a meeting place, and the ceiling-height glass windows had let the daylight flicker over the water’s top. Drained in recent years, the concave and curved walls now let the music flow around in currents.

The bass of the sound system hit him like wind, and for a moment he thought he was outside such was its breeze. He sighed with the euphoria of the tune, feeling its joy and sadness all in the same breath. Its intensity uplifted them into a dance of joy. Quality tracks and dancing into the groove. The flash and pump of bass from the sonic cathedral of sound seemed to widen his eyes and wake him up more with each hit, even though he was already fully awake.

The night was long and full of fun. They rounded off with a campfire in the shadow of the pier, the dancing flames being replaced with the dancing rays of dawn. They feasted on potatoes baked in the fire wrapped in metallic foil. He sharpened his stick and placed a fresh marsh mallow on its tip. Near contentment.

The weekend had been pretty hectic, but there had been time to chill as well. It was a new week, and it was the day of the field trip to v-industries.

They somehow managed to get themselves together and get on the transport. Backage stowed or clasped tightly with both hands in secrecy guarding fashion, seats sat in and hacked for, snacks and drinks positioned in accessible but unobtrusive places. Those final bottom wiggles to push the cushioning of the seating into comfort.

As the power of the actuators ground into action, the transport’s audio rig span out its tracks.

“Standing on the Outside Looking In”

It’s everybody else except me that’s having all the fun
It’s everybody else except me that’s doing what is done
(‘cos I’m) Standing on the outside looking in x 2
(I’m) Standing on the outside looking in x 2
Playout Standing on the outside looking in-

There was a bit of gossip going round the passengers, most of it started by Gina. A lot of it was about Gina too. He read his eyelids and rested patiently. After about three-quarters of an hour, they reached the security checkpoint of the tour branch of the v-industries research facility.

These guys seemed to have a really big thing about glass. Even before they had deployed from the transporter, the size of the doors was apparent. They were projecting a fanfare welcoming from an unseen internal source. Realtime colour holographics, all in a transparent medium which could be set to clear after the display.

As the tour party were escorted through, he could only guess that the half-metre or so thick doors were tracked on some sort of magnetic monorail system, although the track was flush to the floor and only betrayed by the path of the
doors themselves.

Inside the structure the height was breathtaking. It wasn’t so much tall as high and tapering, a marvel to the eye. As they passed through the initial sections of the tour, they were enraptured by the beauty of the engineering and attention to detail v-industries went to.

Each following display sector was subtly different, it wasn’t just a change in the colour scheme, but a change in the whole essence of the space. Different lines or different curves, all creating a flow designed to uplift the inventions into the visitor’s consciousness.

From gyroscopic balance rigs to fluid suspensoriums. At times the students listened intently to the descriptions and explanations given by the guides, at others they queued for half an hour just to live a few minutes in the immersion technology. His turn was next.

The eye lightening faded out as the reality suppressants began to reform. An aching ear abdominal descending bass reverb, the taste of dry saliva, unprogressive wrenching with its mild burn companion. Heart-depth sigh, astonished panic like falling love. Consciousness. v-industries highest performance rigs were like being born into an electrolyte world where you lived amongst your lucid dreams. His turn in the rig seemed short. The next student stepped up.

The tour continued to the sector describing the international space consortium. Part of the display was a miniature full working replica of the injection moulding space layer print system. They stood and watched in silent awe as the machine created its perfection.

Beginning with a blank sheet, the molten metal was printed up in layers, the two-dimensional sheets forming up into a three-dimensional craft. The composition of the metallic ink was key. In order that the spacecraft did not exhibit any wear and tear between journeys, the whole thing was reused by ‘melting’ it down and restarting again. The nanomachines within the chemical brew helped to form and bond the structure into a single solid piece of the hardest material known to man. Its designer must have felt as Matthew Smith at the sight of the miraculous brilliance of what had been created.

The marketing team models came down the stair case with its white piped handrail. In a line, then a ninety-degree change of direction in a curve, down the steps onto the level of their assembled party.

Though he was still hearing he wasn’t processing. Standing steadily, the corner of his eye had glimpsed her earlier, the back of his finger had tapped the air involuntarily as if a tell to her of his would be interest. She was suited stylishly, her slender grace and poise were obvious. Yet to the eye caring enough to examine closely, the subtle discomfort in her wear revealed it wasn’t her normal dress. Special attire given visitors no doubt.

She was now in fuller view. He could only observe as he stood in stasis, save the timeless turreting of his head to track her path. Simultaneously seeing and sensing the shimmer that surrounded her, his sexual selection had determined its target. Was she a pattern match to a random image of averaged symmetry determined in the womb, the sum of the whole of parts of past loves, or the undeniable beauty of true love. He knew at once. Dragon and Phoenix.

She had the look of someone who knew someone was looking at her. Head and chin slightly raised, face slightly in profile. She must have noticed.

As she stepped nearer to the group, her sight caught his momentarily. His eyes dropped first, her’s followed soon after. She could see the mild flush in his face, and felt her own warming. She could see he was beholden. She knew the generics of the situation, such was her beauty she had captivated the look of others before.

Yet despite this she too felt the nakedness of the instant, as though he already knew all her secrets. With the trepidation came the soft warm glow of his presence. She felt a wave of change across her, as though she had just lowered herself into a warm bubble bath prepared by her lover. Not that this would phase her in the slightest, she was a cool professional. She pondered if the minute raise of her eyebrows had been detected.

Had he been looking, he might have noticed the minuscule shift, shake, and slight raising of her body and head, as she strove to compensate for her temporary feeling of vulnerability. However, his mind was engaging in a conflict of its own.

Having dropped his look in a reflex action, it wasn’t the image of the floor that flickered across his sight. His mind had sensed the survivalist nature of the situation. It was rapidly reanalyising, reprocessing, reinterpreting his image library of memories, trying to obtain a pattern match from the past to formulate a response to the current predicament.

Amongst the twilight of joy and disappointment, he remembered the carefree dancing at a nightclub years earlier. Then he had matched eyes with another. They had exchanged small kisses as they danced their tribal mating dance. They had become separated in the crowds. She had asked his name, and said she would see him later, but he hadn’t held any expectance. When he saw her getting out of a shuttle a short walk from the venue, his eyes had dropped then. ‘I look like shit’ had been his mind’s reply, and he had walked on.

He saw the girl he had chased around the playground with when he was six. He had been shy of her kiss, even though she could be leaving. On her return from foreign lands years later, the better climate had faired her much better than his. She had grown and was a healthy specimen of flowering woman, he was but pale in comparison. His mind’s self-image refused the match.

But he either didn’t have enough data to correlate a response, or he couldn’t process the amount of data necessary to reach a response in the narrow window of time given.

He wasn’t even going to attempt to say anything, he knew it was hopeless to manage any kind of coherence in the situation he found himself in. He had been caught unaware. He hadn’t expected to see her here. Surprise, shock, and joy all in one.

She said something in his general direction. He dared to risk raising his eyes to contact. Her stunning lashes made
his eyes reflecting her beauty widen even more.

“Yes,” he replied, and attempted a small, gentle smile, as though in truce.

Thankfully the professional smile she held in wait of his answer curled into a signature on the treaty. She was empathetic toward his plight and she wasn’t going to push it. She glided on and continued to play her small part in the marketing parade that had been laid on for them.

It had been moments, yet an eternity, since she had looked upon him. He felt summer clouds were depriving him of her light, and he already longed for the charge of her warmth again. Luckily she had her plan. Before the party left the hangar, she positioned herself with intent. Just enough time was prepared to give them chance to exchange a couple of succinct stares, and the unmistakable head to toe to head look of attraction. Her soul was filled with the joy that there might have been even enough time to relay a few smiles.

“She is lovely,” he thought.

It would be an easy lookup for her on the company visitor roster. His would be a little more tricky.

He had managed to see her name badge amidst the rainbow and showers earlier. Unfortunately he hadn’t a total match, but a partial on the last name should be okay. He had broken the ice and he was busy tweaking the first log files to mask his tracks. The relay hadn’t received many upgrades to its intrusion detection system lately, but to be fair, his translacing matrices would have made short work of them anyway.

The wayhacks had deliberately left a hidden network of sleepers. When any of the members needed a silent link they could alarm a node and mirror the wake-up responses to form an almost invisible grid. He was going to use a two second window on each petrinet today, after all, if they traced him it would only be to one of their own terminals. Sneaky he thought, have a very long piece of wool that just leads back to the ball.

“For fuck sake,” shouted Tommy in a whisper, as he ducked his head back in from the doorway, “Why can’t you just ask girls out like normal people. And try something better than telling them the sun contains 99.85% of the mass in the solar system.”

“Just keep an eye out. You know you owe me from when I helped you and Gina out last week,” he muttered, turning to look at Tommy and give him a rather harsh stare, his fingers continuing their dance on the inputboard uninterrupted.

“I thought this was some sort of info crack or something,” mumbled back Tommy, his head nipping around the door frame briefly yet again. “We are in probably the most advanced facility in the country, and you’re probably one of the best code deviants in the country, and we’re standing here, fucking around, risking our bollocks just so you can find the network node of some tart.”

“And another thing,” moaned Tommy. “The reason why I was so bloody convincing about ‘lying’ to that guide about needing an urgent piss, is because I fucking need an urgent piss.”

“Don’t piss me about, Tommy,” he said.

“Ha-ha,” mimicked Tommy, screwing up his face and angering an expression.

“Favours I get from Jonny don’t come light you know, Tommy,” he continued, still tapping the route through the system. “Next time you’re letting Gina drive the micro under your license, sort out your own fucking fine retract.”

“Ok, look, I’m sorry. I know you helped us out. And me and Gina are really grateful, you know we are. Especially with her dad and all that. It’s, well, just I need a piss.”

He thought and fought and broke a breach. Nice manual. The author had interwoven the simplex and the complex view within the sentence structure. Cleverly crafted to produce a clear description whether it was word read or image read (in periodic mode). He danced through its subtle weave, its fine granularity gleaning understanding readily. The rapidity reached a peak, and he became unsure of his own thoughts. He was understanding at slightly a faster rate than his active consciousness could instantly comprehend, and at times it became confusing as to whether he was thinking or listening. No time now, he could remember what he had learnt later.

“Fuck it. This one leads into a honeypot,” he sighed. “Let’s go have that piss. I’ve routed this one into the buddy node, so we should be able to run it from the transport on the way home. I trust Gina has her usual supply of clean caller id’s for her phone. She really must get off that natter habit of her’s, you know.”

“I know,” tutted Tommy. “She’s a good girl though, ain’t she.”

He ticked down the system, and left his note: ‘if you were an artificial intelligence how would you answer this question?’

Toilets like that confirmed v-industries status at the pinnacle of the best. No one matched them, they had it all, they were the impossible duality, and the best.

Luckily he had picked up an extra few hack credits when he was sorting out Gina’s problem. Typical though, any gain he managed to wrangle out of deals for Tommy and Gina always seemed to get used up fixing another hack real quick.

Gina nodded and passed over the first handset. He plugged in the intercard and peeled off the antenna label cover to boot it into transmission. He had got his copy from Jonny’s secure download store. Jonny was originally just another paranoid geek, and over secured his systems way beyond any real threat. Thing was, Jonny had a natural ability for calculating the veracity of crypto algorithms. The long and short of it was that Jonny’s lines were magnitudes safer for those ‘special’ downloads, as Jonny liked to put it, never failing to wink or tap his nose when offering such a service to his more discerning customers.

He figured he had another ten minutes or so of hack time before the honeypot distractor was discovered and they
started to scan the outer ports for the real incoming trace. He winked to Tommy to start the timing. Tommy may have been a bit of a fashion victim, but at least you knew he had a hardcore watch that wasn’t going to give a false readout.

North-five, easting one-twenty. Relay signal found. From the trace it looked like one of Dave’s vans. Nobody believed he was able to determine the members id’s just from their relaying path. Actually they did, they just liked to make him think otherwise, just to try and spark a bit of uncertainty so they hoped he wouldn’t always know exactly where they all were.

The members had a good system. They all liked cruising around in their microshuttles, so using them to form a dynamic relay web was an obvious idea. Each shuttle had three or four dynamic scan relays, giving at least eight secure channels at a time. By hopping between thirty or so during a one or two second interval, it made it practically impossible to form a location trace to any of the hot switched networks. Bloody handy if you needed a lift anywhere too. It was the kind of local area network that sa’s would stream of.

Mandy had been giggling a while. She was now blatantly laughing. Everyone had ignored it so far, as Mandy was prone to bouts of giggles for no obvious reason. However, it was now becoming apparent that Mandy was in fact laughing at something to do with the current situation.

‘Why oh why were there so many distractions,’ he thought. Tommy pissing, Mandy laughing. Transport cornering, Gina yapping.

It was done. He had cracked the inner keep. Now everybody laughed as Gina’s phone relay sounded the tune of ‘Rule Britannia’. The information he needed was sucked down the straw, and he switched the routing to a dummy noderset to give them even more safety.

“You guys!” howled Mandy. “You make me laugh.”

“Huh?” said Tommy.

“Yeah. You hackers. You make me laugh.”

“Yes, we know, Mandy,” he said. “Hackers are funny. Funny to look at.”

“Yeah, I mean no. You hackers, you make me laugh!”

“Yes, Mandy,” Tommy rasped impatiently.

“Yeah, hackers. You’re hacking v-industries aren’t you!” giggled Mandy.

“Shit, Mandy, shut the fuck up,” angered Mark. “Walls have ears.”

“Who cares about you losers hacking v-industries. Like they don’t know exactly what you’re doing,” laughed Mandy.

Tommy threw a look of concern at him briefly, and then hid it before he could scowl back. If it wasn’t for Jonny then maybe they would have been in trouble. Tommy really knew there was no need for worry, it must just have been that piss thing earlier he comforted himself, but Mandy was laughing at something other than such a wind-up that no-one would go for.

“Yeah,” Mandy screeched. “That girl you’re hacking for. I know her. She works for an agency my mate works at.”

“And just for that, Mandy,” he said. “The hack was logged under your account.”

The shock look on Mandy’s face, even if only for a moment, was enough to restore balance. As if he would do such a thing.

At least Mandy’s pranking had achieved one thing. Well, actually two things. In fact, one was bad. It meant he had to do something, as Mandy would surely intervene and blow any minute chance he had if he didn’t act soon. He had analysed her data and figured it was possible, albeit a long shot. He rated it at about 48%, although admittedly that was the result of rolling percentile dice rather than the output of an algorithm. It also meant that he didn’t have time to do anything complicated, which was a shame. No time for the science of art. Hopefully she’d get some good data on him before Mandy distorted it all.

It could only be one thing then. Fannying about down the florists. There was good reason for his reluctance. Flowers were good, and he even could enjoy sending them. Romance was good. Problem was, it was easy to be romantic the first time, but failures could sure make them look wilted. He hadn’t much luck with flowers, once being dumped soon after, another time having them licked and munched by a pet dog even before presentation.

The entrance to the florist’s confronted him. An image of the owner saying, ‘Here again?’, flicked through his mind, but it was a false one built from his nervousness. He blanked his mind, breathed, and changed his perception to being about to enter a floral garden for the first time.

“Hello, Sir,” said the assistant. “What can I get you today?”

For a moment his mind continued the perpetual visitor paranoia, but it was just a normal greeting, she had meant today as today, not as a day after yet another yesterday.

“Something nice,” he said. “Something special, please.”

“For your girl?” she read easily.

“Erm, yes. Something to reflect her beauty,” he strained, the memory of her form slowly overcoming his embarrassment. “With a vase. Glass, please,” he braved. He figured she was a busy girl, and having the arrangement delivered in a vase would mean she could enjoy the gift without worrying about its disposition.

He looked about. He saw the matching product he required. “How about something like that?”

“Ah. A good choice,” enthused the assistant, hardly having to force herself into a sales pitch.

As the assistant fed the destination and payment details into the microterminal, he wrote the note with the words he had agonised over.
Now the wait of torture began. Even though the exact certain destiny had already been determined, it was unknown to him. An unimaginable magnitude of events had surpassed, billions of years of evolution. The years of his own life. The result was already known, but to him it was all that any could ever be, it was either one or the other, 0 or 1, yes or no, true or false, fifty-fifty. Unknown and unknowable to him until the moment became revealed.

He couldn’t believe it. It was worse than he thought. He was in way too deep. She had topped him. Her perfumed card remarked she had enjoyed the lilies and roses, the white purity coupling with the passionate red of love. Her card had been attached to the cylinder parcel, which had been of a good diameter.

She had sent back a single orchid, its beauty such as only God could give, growing in timeless elegance from a well-crafted stand made by hands of fairyness. Her p.s. read ‘I hack you too’. So it was her who had triggered his red counter.

Despite their initial nervousness, the dinner at Triangles went well. The menu was written in a pattern he didn’t understand. He was never much good at real languages. The number of patterns he could code in was probably over double figures, although he did like to stick to his more favoured few. He never really got the hang of foreign languages. Probably that old thing of being able to think in the language, he could never do it, and always had to translate between his tongue and any other, which took too long to be satisfying. Different with code, code was in his native language, he would have chuckled to himself.

She was good. She knew a few languages, some of her very own, and even when confronted by a listing in a pattern she wasn’t fluent in, she could still converse enough to inflect a description of a banquet with ease.

They talked heartily, their bonding growing as they interspersed their stories amidst eye locking gazes and playful banter. He was endlessly fascinated by her.

All bits were definitely lit.

Chapter Three – Boosters firing

At times things were not getting there quite as he wanted, so he used the old hacker’s tricks. Motivation was sometimes hard to come by for the long and laborious writes. Although totally necessary, it could be incredibly difficult to be bothered to do them, as they just fired nothing in his brain whatsoever.

He kept stacking, waiting for the rush to come. The wave of euphoria hit him, and he tried to settle into the tasks. He almost had to fight against the level of reality suppressant in the system, so that gave his mind something to fire on.

It is not that he found the work hard, he just found it hard to work.

Later that week he was idly scribbling with his notes, sort of pretending to look busy. She seemed anxious about something. Whether it was the show that night or something else, he wasn’t sure.

He watched as her essence changed. He seemed to be more distant from her, and she seemed to be acting out a snippet of an event from her past. He watched while it ran its course, her mind attempting to understand and deal with the problem which was previously out of her control, and had caused a blockage.

“That’s the problem with you geniuses!” she said.

“Eh?”

“You think it’s enough to simply be a ‘genius’. You have to actually do something as well you know. Sitting on your arse all day doesn’t count!” she continued.

“You mean contemplating,” he retorted.

“Call it what you like, to me it looks like you’re sat on your arse doing shit all.”

He got up and looked busy. It was obviously necessary for her at that point, so he did it.

“Sorry, poppet,” he said. That seemed enough. In her replay she had changed that which could not be changed, and thus broke the hold it had over her mind.

She froze for a moment, and then looked at him lovingly. Their eyes told each other all, and there was no need for any further words on that occasion. She placed her hands on the back of the chair that she was standing behind, on the opposite side of the table to him.

“I’ve got some sorting out to do, babes,” she said. “Why don’t you pop out for a walk and get some fresh air into your thoughts?”

She was obviously needing a larger space for the waves in her mind to meander within, so he agreed, and thought it best he didn’t cloud her space with his static.

“Just pop out for half an hour or so,” she said caringly. “Then we’ll do something.”

“Oh, I’ll have a wander.”

“You’re made of love you are!” she said.

“Made to love you, baby,” he replied. She had spent most of her life helping others, and he was so glad he was able to help and love her. They exchanged a quick kiss.

He thought he’d take a walk into town. Past the railings by the church, and the school outing in the park. He watched as the children learnt by observation, a week later it would be their own opinion. Spring was coming and the days were getting brighter, although the wind still had an icy chill to its breath.

As he was walking along the pavement, a little girl ran out of the shop, across his path and towards the female
figure.
“Mummy, mummy!” said the girl excitedly. The woman bowed down towards the child and played her part in the act.

“Look at these wonderful things, they make your hands and face so soft,” mimed the girl. The targeted marketing of the interactive advert continued its projected figurine, the woman roleplaying as if the girl were real.

He continued along and down the street. Oh, that was a nice surprise. He saw Jonny walking up the street in the opposite direction. Actually, it was a surprise. Jonny was never up this early. Jonny still lived the life of the coder, and had no need for day and night. Now he was with her, he had to remember to manage his days a bit better, three-day coding fests with pop and pizza weren’t always her dream date.

It wasn’t like when he was younger, he used to be a real night owl. It probably started off with it being easier to work off-peak when the socket tariff was cheaper and the pipe wider. In those days the networks were more localised, so there were busy and quiet swings rather than the constant pulls of today’s demands. Therefore most coders tended to get into the habit of staying up late. For a lot, it coupled up with the daylight avoidance thing. It’s not that the coders disliked the sun, it’s just that when it was a bright day it would reflect on the display screens. For others it was more of a stillness thing.

When he had explained to her about the background static, he could see that she hadn’t quite got it. Night coders tended to have a naturally (or unnaturally) high frequency brain wave pattern, thus they didn’t need the extra electrical stimulation from the sun to set their synapses firing at the rate of activity they required. In fact, for some their minds were so active that daylight actually seemed to hurt them. Whether it just caused the eye dazzling because they were used to dimly lit rooms, he himself always ran in a very low brightness mode so his eyes didn’t bleed at the end of the day, or whether the added stimulation to their brains just made them ache, he wasn’t sure. He always made sure he had a pair of shades handy on those bright days though, it was always embarrassing to have streaming eyes from the over brightness of the day. ‘It’s just another excuse for you geeks to stay up late, being naughty, and obsessing with your toys,’ she had remarked.

Jonny looked hurried.

“Hey Jonny,” he said.

“Yeah, hey,” said Jonny. “So what shit you been into lately, say in the last 3 months?”

It was now clear it was both hurriedness and agitation. He wondered what shit he had been in to. Jonny hadn’t paused for pleasantries. A few ice checks. Tommy and Gina’s usual hacks. Maybe one or two for fun, but nothing heavy. Certainly enough to spark a mild pang of guilt, but nothing heavy enough to interest or upset Jonny.

“Have you been speaking to Gina?” he said.

“Shit, this isn’t a game of hack whispers, you know,” fumed Jonny. He hadn’t seen Jonny this upset since they discontinued the S700E series. Jonny had bought up all the remaining units on that occasion. In fact, a few months later he released the improved design into the network.

“Erm, nothing that would blip you, Jonny,” he said nervously.

“I’m not flipped by your geek games,” said Jonny. “If you weirdos want to go round playing node draughts I’m not bothered, I know you guys are sensible enough not to take out anything scoped.”

“Thing is,” continued Jonny. “They knew the perp was using my equipment.”

“They couldn’t trace it then,” he smiled.

“Exactly, they had no idea! It was a crystalline beauty, according to them!” cackled Jonny, forgetting for a moment the main thread as he remembered the fireworks of the crack. “Like a knife through butter, they said,” laughed Jonny.

“Heated nanofilament through ice I corrected them!”

It started to dawn on him what Jonny was on about.

“So, if I say,” said Jonny, pausing for hacker effect. “A certain *cough* vee *cough* company. Your logs would be snowy, yes?”

He felt like a scolded child. Not a real belt whipping or anything, but he definitely felt as though he had been playing too loudly on a rainy afternoon and was about to be given chores to do by his elders.

“Erm,” he said.

“Look, you know I know it was you. And you know I know that because I couldn’t trace it either,” said Jonny. He almost had to bleed his tongue on his teeth to stop a smirk of clean crack glory.

“Now,” said Jonny, changing the angle of his head, peering down his nose. “If I couldn’t trace it, then it was either you or The Captain. And guess what?”

“Erm, I have no answer,” he said.

“I asked The Captain, and he said he had done it.”

He knew this one was going to cost him, and he could feel himself starting to wince.

“I’ve been playing fox hole for three days for your skinny arse, you know!” said Jonny.

By that he knew Jonny had spoken to Tommy. The success of getting the hack whispers source on day five was completely watered down by knowing he had made Jonny run the fox. The phrase ‘skinny arse’ was the key to that round of hack whispers, the geek real world game where you talked about a subject not normally discussed, and inserted a key phrase, and then used that phrase to track who had talked to who. Gina had of course been banned as she was impossible to trace. A day-fiver was a good score.

“I’m sorry I made you go on the walk,” he said, genuinely. Fox holing was simple, but very time consuming. It involved going round attempting to bump into the members of the network, as many as possible, so that any trailers
would be set to false. Thus the true fox could be tipped off, and to any observer it just looks like the whole world is made of foxes.

“And The Captain,” said Jonny. “He’d have taken a badgering for you!”

“He’ll have to rack that guy vertically,” he said. “He’ll still be fighting on his feet.”

He was embarrassed however, if the trail had led to The Captain, The Captain would have taken the bites of the hounds for him.

“So, Mr Crack Fantastic,” said Jonny, with ever so just a hint of sarcasm. “What was the download?”

Shit. Jonny was being really harsh, which wasn’t his usual persona. Either he was really pissed off or he knew the download, and was just milking it for fun factor. Actually, Jonny had already cracked him. It may well have been The Captain, The Captain was so good, Jonny wouldn’t have know whether it was a false positive or not.

“So how did you know it was me and not The Captain.”

“OK,” he said. “Well, even without the blatant tell you just gave me, they said the guy was a real gentleman,” laughed Jonny.

“Yeah, invisible smoke,” he said. They both paused for a moment, and they almost felt a hundred coder veterans dodge by them invisibly in the wind. Respect.

“Look, I know you’re good, and I don’t mind you showing off now and then. I’ve gotta have that little bit of respect for your manners, knocking then covering up once inside, rather than using hammers. But really, you should control that see-sawing ego of yours, you can’t keep compensating for arsing around and not creating something beautiful by pulling off neat cracks.”

“I know, Jonny. You’re right. Things are different now though, I’m more grounded,” he said. You would have thought he had told Jonny that he had invented a time machine or something. Jonny’s face betrayed a certain lack of belief.

“Down to the final layer of abstraction then,” said Jonny, wanting to get it out of him. “The download?”

“Well,” he said. “It was data, personnel file data.”

“Yes,” said Jonny.

Shit. They must have hassled Jonny real bad, as he looked as though he was hoping for a share of the fee for the crack, or at least the chance to have another piece of data to add to his vault of bargaining tools.

“Jonny,” he said. Jonny didn’t need him to say any more, Jonny had already looked away in disbelief, and was shaking his head and waving his arms about a bit.

“If there’s no payoff then it can only mean one thing,” said Jonny.

“Well, look, we could invite you round for dinner,” he said.

“Ah, I see. Well, now. You should have said,” gleaned Jonny, stopping his dance of uncontrollability. It was kind of strange, he never had to apologise to Jonny, well, not in the ‘sorry’ sense, well, not unless it was major, like that crack six months ago, but that was different. Jonny seemed to take a dinner invitation for him and his wife as fair compensation. Well, that’s the real world stuff, he knew he’d have to sort out something for Jonny another day in the network.

“I guess I’ll have to let you off then, since it’ll save us having to get that agency membership for you!” teased Jonny.

“So how is the girl who you almost got us all flagged for?”

“She’s an E3, Jonny,” he stated, looking Jonny straight in the eye.

“About time,” said Jonny. “We thought you were going to start crossing continents or something.”

“Patience, Jonny. Patience. That’s all it took,” he said.

“Yeah, we noticed, you’re so fucking patient I get the goggles knocking on my door!” said Jonny. “Guess we won’t have the problem of you doing boredom cracks anymore, as she’ll have you dusting her rig!”

“Thanks, Jonny,” he said. “Where’s the next fox?”

“Lecture dome five,” said Jonny. “Actually, it’s like the old days. I’m getting a certain satisfaction out of it.”

“Nice,” he said. “Should be a good time for a game of lecture bingo.”

“Yeah, always. Ok, play safe,” said Jonny, with his trademark tap on the nose.

“Wilco, Jonny. Tap, tap.”

“Tap, tap,” echoed Jonny.

He couldn’t believe he had almost made The Captain take a hit for him. Although The Captain could land with no wheels, and probably with no wings either, he was concerned by his poor show at putting The Captain in that position.

He was walking at a much faster pace, and his annoyance at himself was still rising in him, upping his temperature, almost breaking into a sweat across his forehead. Through the gate and down the path, opening and entering the front door in one motion.
“Hi babes,” she smiled.
His mind stilled in an instant, he had entered a different universe, and was enveloped in her presence. The static noise in his ears of the outside world was silenced. He felt calm and relaxed in her sphere of influence. He flashed his eyes around the room in a scan for indicators, all seemed normal. Their warmth drew each other closer, the final steps like two magnets snapping together as the final pull impounded.

After the mixtures of their minds had balanced through their gentle hugs and soft kisses, they broke into chatter of the morning’s trivialities.
She cunningly lifted his t-shirt and thrust her hand onto his butt in a single pickpocketer like motion. Although she wasn’t over keen on his looser trousers, they did have their advantages. Such a pair would invariably mean that they were drawn more across the stomach when fastened, so when hanging on his hips there was plenty of room for her to get a hand in and go for a decent grab, which she did. He reacted no more than if she had reached out and held his hand, but they were in their space, and so were less guarded of analysis.
Relaxing her sumptuous hold, she toyed with the softness of his bum cheek.
“Early lunch?” she suggested.
“Top plan,” he said.
“Great!” she smiled.
“Although one thing.”
“Anything for you, my darling!” she said, flapping her eyelids flamboyantly, and although she was probably being truthful, she played the scenario as though it was a blatant false and shallow overact.
“Could you possibly, please, get me something for The Captain?” he begged earnestly.
“Again?” she laughed, tossing her hair back. “I thought you had left your wayward youth behind you!” she teased, throwing a torrent of sarcastic glares into his face.
“Well, I sort of have, baby,” he said.
“Oh yeah!” she said, continuing her tease.
“This one was from a while ago,” he explained.
“I see. Must have been a biggy then, if it’s taken them this long to track,” she said, extrapolating the information she had chipped out of him about previous cracks.
“Yeah,” he smiled. She was a total geek babe, what a treasure.
“And if The Captain was involved, it must have been a risky one!” she said, hoping to pry another morsel.
“Major crack, baby,” he smiled.
“Wow. Important one huh!” she said, admitting defeat that he wasn’t going to tell any more.
He just smiled again and kissed her.

She drove to the seafront where they joined Tommy and Gina at the beachcomber café. It was a bright day and the sun’s warmth was starting to be felt.
“Well, I sort of climbed the mountain only to find there were many other mountains, and no-one else had picked the same mountain to climb,” he said.
“Ah, poor babes,” she sympathised.
“Fuck off,” said Tommy. “You thumbed a lift up the first mountain, thought you deserved a rest, and then hacked every other mountain nearby till you got caught.”
He laughed. Tommy was funny.
“Hack your sorry ass,” he said.
“Tommy’s of the climb mountain school of thought,” chittered Gina. “He likes to get off his arse, sweet bap that it is, and go do something.”
“Yeah, Gina likes to think about why you want to do something, or why something is what it is, sort of the nagging school of thought,” laughed Tommy.
“You’re such a bitch, Tommy,” whined Gina.
“C’mon, you know I is joking, baby,” crawled Tommy.
“So what makes a great coder then,” said Gina, going for the blatant subject change.
“It’s all to do with having a concurrent appreciation of the macro and the micro,” lectured Tommy with an air of aloofness. “Being able to focus on the small, yet maintain the big picture in your imagination.”
“Ooh, I love it when you talk all techy,” said Gina, proceeding to put two fingers towards her mouth in a down the throat action, pretending to wrench. “I’ve heard having a big ego helps too.”
“You don’t make a great coder,” he said. “Coders are born hardwired.”
Tommy chuckled.
“I don’t mean freaks like you and The Captain!” said Gina. He took that as a compliment.
“Yeah, I guess,” he said. “I guess I kinda do most of my work when I’m not working.”
“You’re a walking fucking Kepler!” laughed Tommy, and they all joined in.
“Bit of a stereotype though isn’t it, the geek coder,” she said. “It’s not all woolly jumpers and sandals is it.”
“Certainly not!” said Gina, blinging her bling. “Good job there’s us groovy chicks to add a bit of colour to all these grey boys!”
“Really though, we are all unique when we are born, it is society that turns us into stereotypes, depending on what advertised dream we buy into,” he said.
“Okay,” she said. “So it’s my round, what you wanting, poppet.”

“Fizzy pop,” he smirked. They laughed.

“Oh really, water for you it is then,” she blinked.

While she was at the service counter, he took a swig from Tommy’s. The wince he let out when Tommy flicked his ear was enough to alert her to the deception. He figured Gina wouldn’t have been able to hold it in anyway.

She got her revenge by pretending to bugger off without him. Whilst he was visiting the toilets, she had arranged with Tommy and Gina to make sure he was last in the microshuttle. He did think it was a bit strange when Tommy pushed the seat back after Gina had got into the car, and had gotten into the front.

He was just wondering where he was supposed to sit, when the solution formed in front of his eyes. The microshuttle drove off with her poking her tongue out, Tommy making v-gesticulations, and Gina capturing the moment on her photocorder. Could he be arsed to waste an afternoon trying to hack it off her system.

He hoped they wouldn’t have gone off completely, and to his relief, when he rounded the corner there they were. Tommy was gesticulating rather a bit enthusiastically he thought, come to think of it, so was Gina. He had just enough time to rig Tommy and Gina’s alarm to give them a jump thirty seconds after entering their flat. He would have set their wake up alarm, but they surely always double checked it now, and he reckoned Jonny had put a scope on it for them anyway. They dropped off Tommy and Gina, and continued home, merrily chatting and smiling away.

She had heard his gentle barefooted footsteps, and heard the change in breeze his movement left in the air, his slow steps but his swift and clean motion. She was standing at the left-hand side of the bedroom window, looking out, her body angled at roughly forty-five degrees. He watched her hair shining in the sun, its dark brown colouration lightening in its glow. Her delicate dress illuminated her exquisite curves, the pertness of her breasts captured perfectly in her elegant pose.

She knew he was watching her, but for a moment acted as if she was unobserved. She felt the expanding warmth of his love taking in her sumptuous beauty. Their desire had already sparked off its instinctive reaction in each other. Temperature raising slightly, deepening of breath, the increase in heartbeat. The burning heat of lust. He had to have her, and she had to have him. Not a random wanton lust of selfish desire, it was a pure lust of passionate love. He felt a physical lust to give pleasure to her. She felt a physical lust to give pleasure to him.

As if all were not enough to drive him wild, she feigned her act of unobservation just a little longer. She pressed her hands down on the window ledge, tip-toeing a little, pretending to strain slightly to watch a furry animal or bird continue its scamper along. She knew her alluring slow rhythmic movements would compel him to continue his mind’s match of her beauty to the full length of her figure.

They both knew her play was to entice. He wasn’t fooled that her act was anything less than an expression of her love for him, and she didn’t mean him to be. She knew that every delight she gave him, he would reverberate multiplied.

He even loved her ankles. The dress smoothed over the divine architecture of her buttocks and legs. As he drew closer, he imagined he heard her nipples expanding against her dress as it moved in response to her change of stance.

By brushing a curl behind her ear with her fingers, and flicking her ponytail upwards, she cast her line. With an over the shoulder glance she penetrated his eyes with such power as to almost knock him backwards. Her look eyed his body up and down.

Her growing smile tweaked mischievously into a smirk for a moment, as she imagined her hook catching on the eyelet of his zip. With her look fixed with her playful thoughts, when the imagery cleared she could clearly see him growing inside of his trousers gate. The burst of nerve impulsing was too much for her, and with a enrapturing flutter of eyelashes and a flick of her head, she reeled him in at speed.

His last steps towards her seemed to be in acceleration, her class three lever in action again he thought. He placed his arms around her waist, and lowered his chin slightly onto her shoulder, nuzzling and kissing her neck with his warm lips. She nuzzled back, letting out a half-giggle half-mmm noise. She pushed back slightly against his upright body, letting his embrace draw her against him.

He nibbled and kissed her neck in long poutings, allowing the occasional taste of her skin with his tongue. Her summer glow made her skin soft and supple. The minute sweating moistened her body, lending it an amiable aroma.

He massaged her waist, first along and back around her hips, then to her front again, only this time upwards. Changing the angle of his hands, his massage continued its caress into the cupping of her breasts. Touching and massaging delicately yet deeply with his fingers and thumbs, he set her bosom afire and heaving.

His gentle eagerness led his hands up to her shoulders. He was almost stalled by skeletal logistics, but with a gracious dance she lifted her arms in the air, freeing his arms to move round so he could massage her shoulders more fully from behind. She swayed her head and kissed his hands appreciatively when she could as he continued the shoulder and neck massage.

Deepening his massage into her shoulder blades, he parted her shoulder straps and let her dress fall to the floor, shimmering against her body. As he loosened his hugging massage, she twirled round to match his lips. The spice of their kissing ignited their bodies with fireflies of passion. Parting their upper bodies briefly in a hinge like motion, she peeled the t-shirt from him effortlessly like the magic table cloth trick.

As she let the inside out t-shirt fall from her grip as their bodies closed once more, she felt his hands making their way round to her back. She knew he would soon be attempting the unlocking of her bra, and as he was still going to be an article of clothing ahead, she wasted no time in taking his belt firmly in her hand. He knew what was coming next. It
was unfair he thought, he always wore the same belt, each of her bra combination locks was unique.

With a deft action perfected with passion over the endless encounters between them, she unclipped and loosened his one lever locked belt in a single movement. His task was more difficult, at least three pairs of lever locks, each with an individual and secret combination required to unfasten.

Luckily he had two things going in his favour. Firstly, whilst she had managed easily with a single hand, he was going to use two. Secondly, she was sympathetic to his plight, and drew her shoulders together slightly so as to slacken the fit.

She had become strangely amenable to the action ever since he used the multitool she had given him to simply cut the strap. He found it strange that she was considerably unimpressed by his ingenuity. After hearing that the bra was in fact a one off she had been awarded by 'one of her most favourite' designers, he was also less pleased with his endeavours.

'We all know where your face is going to be every day for the next month, don’t we!' she had said on that occasional in a stern tone to mirror her stern stare. His momentary recollection of the not totally unpleasant after effects was dispersed by the success of mission unclippable.

The softness of the cotton was replaced by the smoothness of her breasts. Her nipples massaged against his chest as they both grew into full erection. The throbbing ache of her groin echoed in her ear drums as they wrapped themselves in each other, pulling and pushing the entire lengths of their bodies against and together.

The handmade wrapping paper of their underwear seemed to insulate the heat of their groins rather than separate it, but it was a layer between them that just had to go. In a perfectly timed dance they revealed their gifts as they maneuvered in time to each other, working their cuddles and kissing around the tasks in hand.

He pushed his hands down onto her buttocks, grabbing them firmly, catching the elastic holding her knickers in place with his thumbs, lowering them slightly. Massaging and groping, he thrust his hands down further, sending her lace veiling to the carpet. The dance came to her turn to lead, the ‘grand unveiling’ as she would graciously call it if she had been particularly pampered that day. She stretched the waste band of his boxers, moving them down and around like a hula hoop, enabling his hard shaft to spring into action now released from its caging.

She led him to the bed, smiling, caressing his hand in hers. As she lowered herself gracefully onto the bed, he changed the vector of his touching to catch her off balance. Turning her as she fell the last step of her lowering herself to the mattress, he moved beneath her so as to catch her in his embrace. She yelped as she landed across him, the thrill of his hardness killing her any longer. She gradually increased the rocking of her sidewards motion, and then turned and twisted them both round like a hula hoop, enabling his hard shaft to spring into action now released from its caging.

She felt as though he undid every knot in the muscles of her body with every tender touch, and tickled her worries away with the caressing of his hands. As he rose back up her body with the ripples of love, he again cupped her breasts in his hands, and he allowed his cock to hang between her legs.

Behind and slightly on top of her, as he ascended he clamped her body between his shaft and his abdomen. His cock was sandwiched between her clit and the soft bed. With their blood flow pulsating in tandem, he gently rocked upward, writhing every inch of its length against her, her running her lips against him.

Biting and groaning into her ears, she was tensing her groin in anticipation. She wasn’t going to let his heat tease her any longer. She gradually increased the rocking of her sidewards motion, and then turned and twisted them both round until she faced him. He was poised over and slightly lower than her. They held each other in arms and gaze as he entered her without hesitation.

They wrapped their arms and legs around each other like spiralling plants, thrusts entering hard and deep, and their clasp of each other ever closing. The muscular waves of euphoria sent him ever hardening and her ever tightening. Their deep abdominal groaning urging each other to greater heights of ecstasy.

At long last their bodies answered each other’s call, and the two of them convulsed in orgasm together as one. Shockwave after shockwave of their love for each other reverberated through them.

The waves eventually receded to a gentler ebb and flow. When through fatigue they could not hold the tightness of their embrace any longer, their bodies opened gently like a story book, their embrace still held at the spine as they relaxed in the bliss and exhaustion.

“I love you.”

“I love you.”

They lay panting, and she felt him still hard against her. She knew she had satisfied him, but it was nice to have the extra proof that he was still throbbing minutes after, as was her own beating body.

He hadn’t reckoned he had slept much, but somehow she was awake before him, her head rested on the hand of her bent at the elbow arm. They must have been snoozing half an hour or so. She drew her hug closer, starting with a slim hello, and then going for the full on kiss with her lips. The passion in her warm kiss instantly flicked his cock into full erection, and their kisses slackened as their breaths grew deeper.

She rubbed her body against his side, and clenched his leg between her thighs, performing a pole dance like maneuver as she continued her embrace. She drew herself over him, and stared her eyes into his.

As she mounted him she let her hard nipples tickle across his chest, their soft spiralling sending his nerve endings
into a crescendo of firings. She descended him hard, and let every millimetre of her hug every inch of him.

They bounced and jostled together against each other, and as they conducted each other’s music, she let her hair flow over his body, brushing and caressing. He ran his fingers over and round the surface of her supple skin, teasing, massaging, and clutching.

Their opera of love reached its peak as they came together again. They gently kissed each other to sleep.

Chapter Four – Floating in space

“Come - ON!” she insisted.

She was all ready, pristine yet with no vanity, and there was he, still hiding under the duvet. They had spent most of the day in bed, and their exhaustion and contentment had led them into a loving sleep.

“But,” he muttered, his bark muffled by the warm blanketing.

“Don’t even bother,” she retorted in a firm, but he even he had to admit, fair, tone. Given even a millimeter of chance he would have relished bursting into his excuse, ‘honied through repetition’ she called it.

“But it’s because I was born premature so I’m entitled to extra time in the warmth because I missed out, and the…”

His sentence was dropping off even before the pain hit home, for he knew that he had risked the consequence of his utterance. Bending back and twisting at the same time, she pinicered his little finger on the threshold of teasing pain and the firing of screaming, the pinnacle of pivoting where the ‘aaaaa’ became the ‘aarrrrggg’. He knew she meant it, and his body rose from the bed, following his finger that she lifted slowly upwards. He should have remembered, ‘hands under pillow’, but then toes could be even worse.

He didn’t mind getting up too much. He knew that tonight was important to her, and thus it was important to him too. She was to be a model of perfection tonight. He showered quickly and made himself ready. She made him properly ready.

The microshuttle was waiting. She muttered something about if he wasn’t so bone idle he could drive, but he figured that was just her nerves. They seated up and the journey was underway. He made sure he jumped up to flick his credit strip across the payment handler before she moved, to compensate for his guilt over being a pedestrian.

They hugged and kissed, and he gave her that extra little squeeze. He took his seat out front, and she scampered off to somewhere behind the scenes.

The chitter-chatter quelled as the lights fell low, plunging the room into silent darkness. First one, then two, then four, then eight performers. No sound save the cut that their forms made with the air. Gliding, drifting, spiralling in a radiance of lights. Bursting out of the shadow into a glow of electrostatic luminescence. From the empty void the bolt of light as it rebounded internally towards infinity. The sheaving of the fibre seemed to be selectively transparent in places, working, the light entering from the chiplasers and refracting internally in a waveform, travelling along the fibre length and as it rebounded internally towards infinity. The sheaving of the fibre seemed to be selectively transparent in places, whilst not in a recognisable pattern, it seemed to allow light to escape according to some complex fractal reasoning.

She had checked where he would be seated, true to her advanced hackplan style. Flashing her gaze at him like the sudden strobe of a lighthouse, she saved a secret moment in her performance just for him. Only noticeable from his precise aspect, she traced out her love note to him in the air, a turning helix pattern as they efervesced across the stage.

As rapidly as the dressage had started out of nothing, the first part of the show had disappeared once more. Their initial introduction performed, the models returned one by one in waves, parading and twisting in finely crafted movements so delicate they could have belonged to a long forgotten martial art. Elve disks of expanding reddish light glittered above them, amongst the lightening electrostatic flux.

Her glow shone the brightest for him, to him the others just sang a harmony to her lead. Her garment consisted of two parts. As the light lessened over the length of her hugging body suit, the change in colour streams shimmered like a sun of rainbows shining off a salmon’s jumping back.

From her arms the glowing fibres of light seemed to weave in a pattern like a spider’s web. They followed different design principles than the original objective of keeping all the light in. He pictured in his mind how the optic fibres worked, the light entering from the chiplasers and refracting internally in a waveform, travelling along the fibre length as it rebounded internally towards infinity. The sheaving of the fibre seemed to be selectively transparent in places, whilst not in a recognisable pattern, it seemed to allow light to escape according to some complex fractal reasoning.

She sat with the event programme over his lap, it was big enough he had decided, so he wouldn’t need a precautionary extra. As the spell of the circle she had transcribed in the air reached him, he could hear her whisperings of love. He knew he was her one, her his oxygen.

Tonight’s show spectacular was over. The gathered audience sat momentarily in a mixture of stun and awe, and then gave generous applause.

Five or so minutes later, he saw her, her costume changed. Their eyes met and called each other together like the plastic cups on either end of a piece of string. She came across, and placed her arm delicately around his waist. They each managed to position their legs in the prelude to her embrace, his right leg against her thighs, so they could both feel the warmth of each other’s excitement, although veiled to any onlooker.
“Enjoy the show?” she whispered teasingly, feeling his heat against her.

“I loved those side-split fibre nanolasers which created those aura patterns of light around the garment,” he said, spluttering out his nonsense like the enthralled geek he was. “You know what?”

“What, hun?” she asked, expecting him to suggest another of his childlike improvements.

“Well, The Captain would love some of that stuff for his den,” he smiled.

“You!” she exclaimed, squeezing him in a light pinch.

They raised their glasses and laughed together as they watched the champagne bubbles popping upward.

Chapter Five – Low orbit

Reality suppressant helped ‘smooth the transition’ when immersed in virtual reality. This enabled the brain to fire faster, and helped maintain the ‘suspension of disbelief’, ‘belief of disbelief’, or whatever you wanted to call it, so that it could cope with enhanced abstraction. The small clear vials sat on the table in front of him.

He stopped and tensed his brain. Then let it relax. Warming up. Preparing for processing. It was always easy for instant recall for shorts, but for longer reasonings purity of concentration was required.

She contorted the left side of her face upwards from her mouth, until it made her eye squint slightly. She then somehow rolled it across to the other side of her face, with a kind of nose twitch in between the bob extents of the swing of the pendulum.

“You working today then, my love?” she said, casting her glance at the vials of suppressant.

“Yup, some more work to do, baby. You know how it is,” he said.

“Yes, I sure do, I have to recalculate this month’s lightlaser settings and sort out all of the crap that Thomas left,” she said. She wasn’t trying to beat him for stuff to do on this occasion, she just had stuff to do.

“Oh, I hope you manage to get it all sorted, should be a breeze for a girl like you,” he said.

“Oh, poppet,” she said in between kisses. “Don’t spend too long in your games.”

He laughed. How did she know Tommy had lent him that new piece?

As he strolled along the corridor to his den, through the window he noticed a cat playing gainfully in the garden. He remembered how Billy the cat had played as a kitten, almost seeming to instinctively train himself in his kitten games of hunt and pounce.

The rig awoke and he gave the inputboard a tap, tap. The eye lightening faded out as the reality suppressants began to reform. An aching ear abdominal descending bass reverb, the taste of dry saliva, unprogressive wrenching with its mild burn companion. Heart-depth sigh, astonished panic like falling love. Virtual consciousness.

Some would say it was a pretty easy task to match pre-recorded brain scans to each other to show regions of similarity, but it was Steinburg’s key algorithms which provided the vital unlocking of the realtime mapping systems. One of his most famous insights was the discovering that there is no particular region dedicated to high-level thought processing, thus the components are almost always a distributed network. It wasn’t so much the location but the connectivity of the triasm which was paramount. Keplar would later use Steinburg’s theory and practice to develop his organic transistor network.

v-industries used these theories in the development of their high-end virtual reality systems. Coupled with a healthy dosage of reality suppressant, it was possible for coders to produce systems in highly abstracted languages. These weren’t at all like the so called high-level languages used to implement the first systems. Although their syntax and semantics may have been unclear to a layman, they were in fact merely small subset mathematical notations of natural language.

The benefit of working at v-industries was that whilst you were highly likely to have a great idea, the person next to you was highly likely to be having a good idea too. If you put a bunch of these together, then you’re going to get some pretty tasty recipes.

Steinburg’s team realised that as the programming languages were precise fixed subsets, there was ultimately a finite set of connected components. In order to eliminate the severe delay in processing caused by the need to produce and interpret human language, v-industries developed a condensed language based on a system of images, which could be used to both program and control their systems.

This afternoon’s worksheet was to run through a few of Steinburg’s algorithms, and gain some more precise individual patterns for use in the next course. Noticing it was sized at an hour an a half, he accessed the learning clip and tapped. The reality suppressant trickled through his synapses.

The associative pattern matching brain was more adapted to reading images than reading words, post proof soon came after realisation of reading the fourteen pages backdown upforth diagonally. All that remained was to create forty-thousand picograms, each with its meaning self-encoded into it, such that any new added to the pictocabulary would innately be understood.

Steinburg may have been a genius, but his augmented learning segments sure pumped out a lot of data in a short space of time.

The transition had left him cold and tired. Maybe even hungry.

He checked the fridge door for any notes she may have left, she was very good with reminders on days that she thought he might be going in full immersion. She knew how it sometimes took a while for the short term memory systems to get back to peak efficiency after a morning with Steinburg, Keplar and co.
was right. Unfortunately there was no challenge today, so he stacked a little more suppressant into the system.

Remember the extrapolation of the solution.

Challenge and therefore offers no reward, so the brain stopped firing before completion, or didn’t seem to be due to the fact that as it was apparent before completion that the problem is easily solved, it posed no further worries, increasing the abstract thought comprehension of the brain, without becoming cluttered by matters of ego.

He clicked it in and waited. He found he wasn’t seeing letters, but pattern matching whole words. Storing each word as an image rather than a set of letters. Made it a lot easier. He could read whole sentences like a word. It maxed out after about ten to fifteen seconds though, so not for really big books. He read the entire page without bothering to process any of it. The fifteen image felt wrong for a moment, the processor pipe paused briefly as it ran the parallel comparison of the pronunciations of ‘fifteen’ and ‘fifteen’.

He switched tasks, and thought in three dimensions, flying over a landscape of geometric patterns and watching a triangle pass overhead. He pumped in some sonics, and crossed it with the graphical rendering. He could not tell whether it was a straight line or a curve so he flew out further and observed over millennia. With gentle patience it became clear that the dot was transcribing a circle. Left or right he could not remember whence he had commenced. Unknowable then if the circle was clockwise or anticlockwise, each was visible from his neck tilt views. A circle or an eight. One or eight. Backwards or forwards. 8 as a pair of o, two wholes, or from another angle and unwound perhaps a O after all. Twisting or unwinding. He let his mind wander a while in the electrostatic flux, then closed the app and tapped off the rig.

A little break and a pace upside down. The warming up done, now for the real work.

Inside the outside again. The geometry was spiralled all neat, as though all pre-rendered. It reminded him of the barbecue that had been delivered one summer. All the parts were kind of shrink wrapped by plastic onto a cardboard schematic, all clean and neat. They even supplied the screwdriver and tools needed for assembly. Nice.

The abstract pattern matching four set four-dimensional parabolic curves flew into his face, spinning and spiralling. The system calibrated to the next task. As the delta waves flickered, he remembered Tommy’s japing earlier that day. ‘That’s the difference between arty artists and coder artists. Arty’s look at other pieces of art for inspiration, as code isn’t real, coders look into their own minds for inspiration!’

The way of the coder. The dovetails locked and he entered the zone. The code streamed at him from many directions, and he began the abstracted iteration of continuous refinement. It was a bit like writing a story book. The different parts emerged from his imagination in abstract segments, sometimes seeming unrelated. By focusing on each micropart in turn and adding a little to it, the whole gradually grew into a complete system. Not that any system was ever really complete, but you had to know where to stop the polishing, and avoid becoming lost in the ego of your own creation.

The patterns changed their weave to highlight a discrepancy in the code. He tapped and refocused. The error he saw was almost a typing mistake if you will, although in imagery. But by his attention being drawn to his typo, he noticed another error in the picture in close proximity. He smirked to himself. ‘Nice that you left a note to point the error out to me after all. Go with the code.’

He knew The Captain was right, but The Captain had already proved himself. Although he always set his own standards, it was sometimes his confidence that suffered. At every moment of every task his perception of perfection was always greater than that possible in the form he was in. With every action instant, a better method was already calculated, making that already done second best.

That was one of the key factors with reality suppressants. They enabled the mind to free itself of the everyday trivial worries, increasing the abstract thought comprehension of the brain, without becoming cluttered by matters of ego.

The Captain was a genius. He was more of a lazy genius, or a contented genius. One of the individual traits to which he had to tailor his Steinburg calibrations involved this problem. The Captain had analysed his biases using software he had developed based on his own experiences. His reward system seemed to fire just before the thought completion. This seemed to be due to fact that as it was apparent before completion that the problem is easily solved, it posed no further challenge and therefore offers no reward, so the brain stopped firing before completion, or didn’t actively try and remember the extrapolation of the solution.

‘What you need is a challenge!’ had remarked The Captain, the readout from the testing rig in his hand. The Captain was right. Unfortunately there was no challenge today, so he stacked a little more suppressant into the system.

Additional module study unit computer interface design control programmatical and systemic functioning

The reward firing of his brain at the completion of the assignment joined with the reality suppressant and sent a burst of joy across him. Feelings and faces and patterns and places. The wave of euphoria felt a little like being loved.

“Hey, Tommy,” he said. They had popped round to Tommy and Gina’s for the evening.
“Hey,” said Tommy. “So what’s the story?”
“You know how it is geezer, tap, tap,” he said.
“Tap, tap,” said Tommy, rolling his fingers in a crescendo of tapping onto the table top.
“So how’s things with you and Gina?” he said.
“Oh, yeah, we’re good. She’s a good girl, you know. Well, you know,” said Tommy, with a hint of a wince.
“Yup, I know how it is,” he said.

“Hey Gina,” she said.
“Hi girl!” said Gina. “Nice of yous two to pop round.”
“Always good to pop round to see one of the good crew,” she smiled.
“Bling it up,babesby!” tinkled Gina.

“Gina’s got another one of her empathy rigs set up!” bounced Tommy. “It’s a neat one, sort of a group learning response theory thing. You tell ‘em Gina.”
“Yeah, babes, that is it. It’s like a group learning response theory thing,” said Gina, blinging it up while mimicking the walk of a monkey.
“Don’t fall off the barrow, Gina,” barked Tommy in response.
“Come on, I thought you two were cool,” he said. “I wanna see Gina’s rig.”
“I bet you do,” she said in fun, slapping his backside playfully. He just looked at her, as though she had spoke in a language unknown to him.
“Yeah, let’s climb in,” said Tommy.
They tapped into the group rig, and Gina led the pattern. Gina always had her bright colouration in things, took a little getting used to. She laughed as he and Tommy flipped in their shades.

As Danny’s special mix led them into a warm cool party of Gina’s gossip, the cares of the day drifted away into flux. Gina tapped the pattern to let them indicate their acceptance of entry into her empathy setup. They tapped in.

It started off slowly with basic question/answer pattern responses. Gina led the patterns, and showed the statement one, statement two, statement one enhance format.

As their friendship bonded them closer, he understood the reasoning behind the repeat pattern match response machine. By the response, the nature was shown, and by seeing the nature, is was possible to learn. It was almost as though everybody was becoming everybody else’s problem, showing and learning in a group growth.

“Nice one, Gina,” smiled Tommy.
“Yeah, works well,” he said.
“Bit of touchy feelage,” laughed Tommy.
“Neat and nice, Gina,” she said. “When’s it due in?”
“Next week. Just a bit of gold-plating and I’m done,” winked Gina.
They laughed. They had a tired feeling, a hungry feeling.
“Pizza or Indian,” laughed Tommy.
“Erm, food please, Tommy,” she said.

A new dawn and a new day. He was reading an old report from v-industries, which was a critique on Keplar’s early works into neuronisation. Keplar was explaining the narrow borders between genius and madness, and how often it was the bounding environment that influenced things. The random rapid firing of neurons in the brain could lead to greater peak potentials, thus forming a greater chance of them being fused into new unique thoughts. In some ways it was similar to physical evolution, in that sometimes it was the imperfections that caused the improvement in the system. v-industries capitalised on this research in the development of the self-sustaining genetic algorithms for self-healing code.

By harmonising these frequencies, it was possible to both prevent the overload misfirings and also enable ever peaking standing waves to be generated. There was also something about discussion on activity wave potentials, daemonstrating how single firings only make loose memory, secondary firing connection starting, and tertiary firing fusation occurring.

“So what’s in your day then, sweet bum,” he said, admiring her sweet bum laced in her knickers as she bent over, retrieving some object from the floor.
She turned and saw his eyeing. She tutted, as though she was off put rather than flattered.
“Working out a complex one this afternoon. Maybe we could work on it together?” she asked.
“Sure, I’ve not much on today, was maybe going to do a bit of readinput and research, nothing too strenuous,” he replied.

He fiddled about in the morning, whilst she was out and about ‘doing proper stuff’. In the afternoon they relaxed a
little and ran through the work together. He was never quite sure why she sometimes asked him to help, as she was far better at it than him, but they both enjoyed the learning and working. It was easy for them, there was no layer of abstraction between them, no hidden secrets or diversion routes, no office ego. It just seemed like they were playing like children, having fun and discovering new things.

Chapter Six – Experiments in zero gravity

Her next modelling assignment was in some city state of the former Russia. Though rather cold, it was a nice place to go. Very tranquil and safe. Most of the city states had now stabilised their economies, and the pride and commitment had returned to its workforce. This had reversed the mandate of a generation of young men who previously didn’t commit to long term jobs as they frequently saw their neighbours years of hard work disappear overnight.

He would miss her dearly whilst she was away, but he knew she’d be safe, and it gave time for him to concentrate on his work.

He started awake, his ears hearing the distant siren, his eyes fixed staring into his own lap. He was slumped in the chair. The base of his spine and his hips ached. Remembering he had a neck to support his head he straightened it. The group readout unit was still flickering, displaying its multitude of channels in a collection of spiralled options. Must have been the morning after the first night she was away, maybe not go so heavy tonight. That was the problem with the street stuff, he couldn’t get smooth enough of a transition without increasing the feed so much that it gave him a headache. At least he hadn’t wasted any of his decent stuff in the nice night of binge.

After cleaning himself up, he did some stuff, and then set about another journey into the rig. He thought to himself how it was funny that society emanated such a great aura of time control. Night and day were never really that distinct for a real coder, and he often worked late or even sometimes around the hours. Yet, even though he didn’t have to conform to any nine-to-five routine of daily work, it still somehow exhibited its pull over him. Days always seemed hectic, mornings especially, cleaner to work later in the day. He still felt a little guilty at staying up too late though, and would sometimes dim the lights at the front of their house even though he was all awake and processing. All part of societies conditioning he guessed. No wonder he had felt so tired at school, work in the mornings was just unnatural. Well, non-Kepler work anyway.

He did a few calibrations and speed readings, checking blurring/pattern matching, and what percentage of the information recognition was necessary for understanding. A little research as well, on a good day in the rig it wasn’t necessary for him to search for the information, the information had a way of finding him instinctively, as though the internetwork was thinking for him.

He half remembered some nightmares he had been having in his spells of lucid dreaming, but he just treated them like a film clip. He was used to a bit of weirdness after a lot of reality suppressant. Generally he felt dreams were just training for unknown situations, the brain working stuff out, trying combinations and scenarios. Different parts of day melded with old memories as the wires carried the data to be processed, analysed, reprocessed, reanalysed and associatively indexed. Probably a bit of milestone calculation and goal setting too, that seemed to be the nature of things, having more wants and needs drove us and made us get up off our arses and do something.

Drifting to thoughts of the economic game, his mood patterns altered to exhibit a degree of cynicism, disliking how the artificial layers of the monetary system perpetuated the ecosystem. Really he was just working to maintain an environment in which he could work in. He sighed as he saw the adverts for products he would never want, all displayed in their price bandings to both create affordability and aspiration. A nostrum for the imperfect world perfected through millennia, once escaping the parodied instinctive hunt and gather, leaving only a self-propagating system unfulfilling within its own transparencies.

He didn’t have her to balance him and he wandered aimlessly in his thoughts, trying to understand what the world meant. Using the reality suppressant as a substitute, he slipped into vr for comfort like Tolkien’s Frodo putting on the ring.

Raising and lowering the meniscus of consciousness, the burst of electrical activity attempting to generate a new thought from old, but the moment was instantly lost again and his mind couldn’t remember. It seemed the thought was logically relevant, not just a euphoric illusion, but the method of storing/maintaining the memory didn’t seem to be functioning quick enough. It reminded him of early feedback experiments connecting the brain to the information pool. Feeding biases the wrong way round meant that there was so much information it was incomprehensible, information overload. When cross mapped or reversed, conceptual searching was possible, with the information finding the searcher.

He scanned a few research pages, matching against the idea of thought generation when the brain fires, firing at a faster rate to increase frequency of new thought, and trying to link an explanation of how a new thought is pattern matched to a response system with its internal random chaotic factor.

Some part of him realised that the way forward with his project on the virtual applications interface was not to create a generic one size fits all solution, but to create a configuration specific to an individual. Thus the early years of indoctrination learning could be spent on the development of capturing and storing thoughts as concepts rather than as language constructs.

Obviously normal human language development would be augmented as well, but the eventual effect would be the ability to learn in abstract pattern matching four set four-dimensional parabolic curves, as well as using traditional
language and notation. Thus it would not be necessary to learn self-evidential proofs in order to perform high-level thought processing on advanced data sets. This should enable the holy grail; zero the mind static and allow near-instant calculation of the transformations necessary to perform high-level conceptual searching and triordinate correlations.

Excited by his new reasonings, he patched through the data and tapped in the reality suppressant. His skin itched with the sensory overload. Had he learned something new or just remembered what he had forgotten. He did not have time to taste the dried blood and nasal secretions before rippled convulsions expelled what little liquid remained in his stomach cavity. The acid chills came as the damp sweat flew away. But it was too late, he couldn’t store the mind pulse of electricity fast enough and the solution faded from mind’s eye view.

A side effect of the reality suppressants seemed to be some sort of sleep disorder. Although often extremely mentally tired, only short spans of sleep would come. It wasn’t so much waking up not sleepy, as waking up incredibly tired but with the electrical thought potential already raising for the day. He figured he eventually narrowed it down to being an increased secretion of the chemical responsible for waking up the mind, in compensation of the thud knockout tiredness of long spells in the vr pool.

Something felt wrong. He knew his head was laid on its right cheek on the pillow, with his arms underneath, face down, elbows bent, hands flat. He could hear himself breathing, but he could not feel himself breathing. It was like he was above and behind himself, listening. He had the sensation of sensing himself from the back of his brain.

He knew to find the solution to his project it had to be functional and practical, yet blend abstraction and theory rapidly into the framework. For the electronics and control technology domain segment he developed a configuration program which automatically calculated the left/right audio/visual adjustments for an individual. He wasn’t the perfect combination of a fifty-fifty, so he adjusted to compensate. A perfect fifty-fifty could have prevented tangential reasonings anyway, so maybe just as well. He tapped out his project plan.

Key: Programming application to provide internal reflection analysis and brain mapping, gaining cartographical analysis of regions of perception. Subtasks augmented reality autocompletion. Audio system generating sounds in response to a particular brain mappings. Input as sound, output as electro reading, learning filtering and abstraction techniques.

He filed his project summary and began the process to full immersion.

The bioelectrical signals were peaking and flowing, but it was all fucked up, by the time he had hot switched the data entry pads between the machines and started inputting, he couldn’t remember what the neural firings were. The not finishing sentences was leading to misinterpretation.

With the reward coupling already firing, the augmented reality autocomplete wasn’t fast enough to keep up with the speed of his processing. The delay was such that the faster the thought, the language conversion delay was such that the end of the sentence dropped off due to time lag in the vr system.

He tracked the brain sensory analysis under different conditions, noting the change in visual/audio/left/right hemisphere bias readouts. Thalamus amygdala hypothalamus pituitary gland adrenal normal. Economic and social manipulation. Lure of nature. The heightened processing also heightened his human emotional responses. He figured the sense of being watched was arising as rarely often firing regions were firing. He wondered, if kittens had their instinctive training stored in their mind, what did he have stored in his.

He awoke to the feeling of a square sheet of frozen metal tightening across his back, and a cold wind skimming up his neck.

The task was complex. The going was becoming tough. He could only manage a level of ten or so minutes of fixation before he had to break off as the readout plateaued and progression couldn’t be gained. He didn’t know if increasing the reality suppressant dosage to compensate was having an effect or just making him want more. Requiring more to fire his brain at an increased level, was his work progressing or did the firing cells just make it seem that way.

He smiled to a stranger in the street. The stranger didn’t return his smile and his hope faded. He missed her.

He daydreamed the solution to the self reflection imagery program. It wasn’t a three-dimensional graphical representation, it was an unbound abstract free thought area, a multimodal, multiplanal, multimedia, multi was good.

By first of all not finishing sentences, he thought, then by only a few words of the sentence, and then almost only needing to capture the thought itself, and not waste the extra time needed to convert the thought into language.

His sleep pattern seemed more disrupted. He only seemed to sleep a four hour segment, and then have alternate segments of one hour asleep and one hour awake. Soon this narrowed to simply a maximum sleep period of four hours. Sometimes a sleep period would only be ten minutes long, when he managed to escape consciousness momentarily. His ears popped and the pressure difference made his spine shiver.

Sometimes he seemed to be asleep for a long time, and to have dreamt many hours worth of dreams. But on waking only a very few minutes had passed. Switching off the alarm clock before he went to sleep so he got more than ten minutes of sleep.

With perseverance his session notes revealed the answer to his project.

‘I can picture a picture and I know it is a picture, but I can’t picture the whole picture only a subset of its total data, and this itself has no direct visual component, yet creates an imagined image which is not a picture and yet has the
emotional attachment/feeling of being a picture.’

The solution for the virtual reality system seemed to be clear. Although memories were stored as images, they were not ‘pictures’ as we know them, they were a set of descriptive data of an image. The key was to find the syntax that this data was written in, thus being able to directly give feedback via a thought process rather than an image or language construct. Communicate with the brain in its native language, its microcode.

Chapter Seven - Toward the event horizon

He had run out of reality suppressant to power the vr system, so after the intense discussions with his peers, the rest of the day was to be taken pretty gently. He would not be using the vr system again until he was restocked. The meld of the long spells in vr gradually faded through the evening, the numb contentment of controlled blanket ignorance lessening towards the harshness of the cooler world. ‘Quite an apt time for a system warm-up from our uncle whiskey,’ he thought.

The hinges of the drop-down panel gave out their distinctive sound, a bit like the door from a cartoon intro sequence, a drawn out creaking, only more metallic. He couldn’t remember a time when they didn’t ring out with such a cry, so maybe it wasn’t age, but design. The relaxed lowering of the drawbridge left the gateway into the safe haven of the drinks cabinet open, wherein warmth and joy were assured. Surely a ritual repeated in various forms throughout the millennia.

The lowered panel now formed an impromptu table. It was at a nice height for measuring. Placing the glass on its steady surface, he spun off the lid of the whiskey bottle and bent slightly so as to avoid too much parallax error in the measurement of his dose.

Pouring but a small starter into the glass, he could almost hear memories of the purists crying out as he applied liberal cola. A hangover from the habit of consumption, without cola there just wasn’t enough to keep the addictive fire cycle quelled, and it’d be gone too quick. Which would have been ok for another, but he hadn’t been spending many evenings with whiskey lately, so maybe too much too soon was best avoided. Thus the starter was just that, a small sample to whet the appetite.

The panel to the medicine cabinet was clicked shut once more, held in place by its magnetic catch. The fizz of the cola bubbled in his mouth, and he let it linger a while before swallowing. The dark, treacle like concoction of fizzes air, additives, caffeine and kick, were enough to garner a sensation from even the harshest treated taste receptors. He sank the mouthful back with a satisfying swallow.

He calmly strolled about the room for a while. He mused briefly on everyday trivialities, sometimes sitting, sometimes standing. Relaxing and drinking his drink.

But something had tickled his throat or his stomach after he had drank down. It was but a small measure, not enough to provoke queasy uneasiness surely. Yet the tumbling turn of the stomach was unmistakable. The warning signs were such that there probably wasn’t enough time to reach that flushable ceramic receptacle of spew in the bathroom. So he sped quickly to the kitchen sink, and assumed the position. He was leaning forward, arched over the basin, hands and arms providing stability of aim.

With a reptilian like regurgitation, the first waves of wrenching ensued. He went into the well rehearsed routine for coping with an alcohol induced vomit. A bit of spitting and hawking would often smooth the expellants sting, so he let lose a few volleys.

There wasn’t long to wait, and a small amount of liquid was expelled in two or three bursts. Each started low-down, and forced a real urged wrench jolting his body and back. At the moment of production his eyes were clasped firmly shut in avoidance of sighting any previous good riddance.

Whilst waiting in limbo in the half cold sweat half fever stage, he noticed something on the sink base that accompanied his projections, and was near to where he was sending his remaining spittle. It was draped atop the wire mesh which was presumably some sort of vegetable drainer and general sink accessory basket.

It was a slender thread. A piece of string. He felt the dizziness of post-puke relief, gained from knowing the vomit process was all but over, but what was this new thing. A piece of string. How long is a piece of string? ‘Twice the length from the middle to one of it’s ends’ he thought, remembering the schoolboy jape he had used years before in his comedy answer to this question of paradox. String theory.

Evaluation, processing, race, acceleration, trying to understand overload. A piece of string. How long is a piece of string. Poor Laika.

At that moment he felt as if an archaic knowledge had been revealed to him. He had lived his life thus far in complete ignorance of this secret. Yet there were people who had known the secret all along, perhaps since the beginning of time itself. There were those who knew and those who didn’t. And there were those at the point he was, somewhere in the vacuum that was the in between. Knowing and unknowing, seeing that there was a secret, but not being aware of its form. His body had spoken his individual message to him in answer to his questioning, but he had no idea what it meant.

His somatosensory cortex received information from itself at such at rate that it was unable to comprehend the enormity of everything.

The rupturing of his internal umbilical cord provided the imperative impact of cascading interleaved realities to bring forth such conflict as to tempt the nature of the spine. Intertwined destinial parabolas reeling within the outside
warping influences. Disparate myriad memory myriads connected into wholes for the mind's own sake, transient truth and contiguous days of nights.

His brain was a sponge that had been soaking up everything, attending to every detail, and now it had been squeezed in two hands, the stored fluidosity released in a fraction of the time it had collected. A big bang, the singularity of his mind exploding, sending wave upon wave of high impulse energy across his cortex. As the thoughts and memories fell like hail from the sky of his universe, he didn’t know which to catch and which to let slide through his fingers.

He tried to adapt to survive. His mind tried to create a construct, like the ancients trying to prove their dominance over the moon and the sun by capturing the light in their hedges of stone.

The day had been Monday. Moonday. Mootday. Meetday. They had met today. They must have known. They had referred to it in their discussions. Yet how could they have discussed it, for it wasn’t known yet. Even more so, the meeting wasn’t pre-arranged, it was an impulse thing. Or had it been. Had it all been arranged.

The pronunciation and meaning of language changed. His whole mind fired, synapses melting and reforming. He knew it didn’t make sense but his mind wouldn’t let it go. Rerunning and reanalysing, correlating, predicting possible pathways and attempting to fuse connections. Raising and lowering the level of the incidence of coincidence. His mind was spidering and reindexing. But why him?

He lay and watched the story of his life. Everything was shown back to him, the love, the joy, the hope. The hate, the hurt, the despair. It flickered through his eyes, even though it was dark they just shone in the light of the story from within him.

In his memories he saw the piece of notepaper ripped from the pad. It was pinned to the noticeboard amongst the organised mess of academia, 'Love/hate'. It stated the swing. The pendulum of emotion, the two sides of the coin. He had been asked if he had liked the garment, but her question had been leading, and there was only one answer which really fitted the logic, even if that may not have been the one he wanted to give. It was a perceived choice. Like the two chocolate bars owned by the same company.

But why him? He had chosen to be with her as she was intelligent. Had he been chosen because he was intelligent? He loved her as she was intelligent. God loved him as he was intelligent. I think therefore I am. I am. I was, I am, I shall ever. That was the meaning of I am, God was, God is, and ever shall be.

Everything was the same and yet open to different interpretation, everything seemed to mean something else than what it had meant before. If God had chosen him because he was intelligent then he would be able to think his way out of his torturous purgatory.

The pendulum swing of emotion. The more given to hope, the more given to despair, the ever greater the swings and ever greater the period between them. The harder the force used to push towards one, the greater its weight given to the swing back.

Times and places and feelings and faces. He matched them. Events in his life were similar. They fitted to his life, yet to him some were wrong. His mistakes. The chances he had missed and the wrong decisions he had made. He believed in a single life. Outside of being, but still with a soul, born into the world, and after the life live as the soul again. Some believed there were many lives. Born over lifecycles.

He watched and saw himself born again. Each time he grew and lived, and each time the same choices and mistakes were made for him and by him. None of it offered any change. Reincarnation offered no hope for him.

His mind knew no language to describe the expanse of emptiness where no light escaped. The dire oblivion of feeling every decision ever made being played out through eternities and shown to be the wrong one. Not a single point, but a consistent succession of mistakes and failure. To see, to live, to experience, to feel, the sadness and disappointment as at every turn. The perceived choice, even though doom was always unavoidable. All enough to render the steel of any heart to liquid that drains away. To live such life not once, but over and over again, being born again and again to make the same mistakes. Seeing and understanding, hurting and learning, but never being able to change a moment.

None of it created any change. Without any perceived change in state, there was no motivational force. Even then it was sometimes difficult to remember that he did not know it yet. Linear time progression merely provided experimental proof of already discovered reasonings. Wherein problematic all revealing only to thine self, sooner happening that misalignments and out syncing were common, some irreparably distanced along planes, never permitting a journey back or a circumnavigation.

His mind was lost, it was always lost, always making the same bad decisions, and always being defeated by forces beyond his control, outside of his sphere of influence.

He had to try and go to sleep. As part of his usual routine, each night after undressing, he would lay out the cross and chain he wore around his neck on his bedside cabinet. He would lay the cross at the bottom, and the chain in the shape of a cross too.

He had laid out the cross and chain. Now what to do with the piece of string. His skin itched. His skin was broken in places on his palms and ankles.

A cross. A straight line. A circle. A figure of eight. The Christian fish. A line pivoted in two like a pair of compasses. A triangle. Which shape to lay the string. Loop the loop. Tie a ribbon. Rope. Draw the line. He laid in all. Then either. Then more. Hours passed arranging the changeable shape that had no box to sort into.

He hadn’t slept but he didn’t feel tired. He wasn’t sure what sleep was anyway. He wasn’t sure that if he went to sleep he would wake up the same. He got up again.
It must now be Tuesday. Tuesday blueysday. Tuesday. Choosiday. Choose what you want to be. Happy. Heterosexual. Christian. Human being. What did they want him to do. What did they want him to be. Maybe it was because he wasn’t joining in with the illusion. They wanted him to spend money. Maybe they wanted him to buy something. He didn’t know what to buy. He wasn’t sure if there was anything he wanted. In his pocket were a few loose tokens. He walked along the muddy track and the grass seemed to be as green on each side. He was in the shop, but he still didn’t know what to buy. He looked around. The newspaper. The news changed everyday. A national newspaper, yes.

He was back at their house with the newspaper and some other stuff he had bought. He sat on the sofa sideways, one leg half crossed, the other on the floor. He laid out the newspaper on the middle seat of the sofa. He flicked through its pages. Some of the things in the newspaper seemed familiar. It was a bit like lecture bingo only more so. As he scanned through the pages, patterns were almost forming between his thoughts and the stories.

His mind continued its conflict, and thought against itself, spiralling and wrapping inwards and unevenly, all warping and bending trying to fit into a recognisable shape. Some things seemed to fit, matching discussions and thoughts with films or books or theories. Some all pointed together, all were a part.

Sleep never came that night either. He lay with his eyes open. Or were they shut. It didn’t seem to make much difference. String. Money for old rope. Keep your third eye open. He didn’t know if it was night or day anyway. Night and day were the same, contiguous, it was only a layer of abstraction. Hypnotic brainwashing.

His thoughts had streamed overnight. The paper arrived that next day. Bringing its folded pages of faces to the floor. He leaped through the stories. There was definitely a correlation. He matched the stories in his mind. He had thought of some of them the night before as he lay in his room not sleeping. Almost as if he was predicting. It couldn’t be. He had to break the spell. He felt as though he had been brainwashed. Hypnotised.

String theory. Butterfly effect. Chaos theory. If a butterfly flapped its wings somewhere the change in air currents might affect the weather somewhere or something. Everything he created and everything he destroyed. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. What goes up must come down.

He moved his arm. If a butterfly flapping its wings could cause a change in the pattern of the weather, what would the movement of his arm cause. It must be Whensday, What. Where. When. How. He saw a ring of Buddhist monks sat cross legged around a rectangular rug. Were they worrying for him? Nine-minutes past six. The time the monks transverse with their incense. 6:09. He remembered seeing the green glow of the time readout on a watch at a party, reading 6:09.

6:09. Was it the :0 or the 69. The ying and the yan. A circular snake consuming itself. He was up against a brick wall. Maybe he should build a wall. He had built a wall as a task. Maybe he should build a church. Build a school.

He could hear a pinging in his ears. Was that how they knew. They knew as they could read his mind. He heard a pinging in his ears. Was that how they knew. They knew as they could read his mind. He remembered stories of metallic foil hats and anti-meld mesh. The collective consciousness or the pattern match response machine? Simply repeating back what we remembered stories of metallic foil hats and anti-meld mesh. The collective consciousness or the pattern match response machine? Simply repeating back what we’ve heard. Pinging his ip. His ip address. His intellectual property. Stealing his thoughts.

As his life flashed in his eyes, he was shown all his sins, showered with guilt, and he heard the cheers and applause of the group at his confessions. All books were about him, all films and songs. All fairy tales, nursery rhymes, myths and legends. Everything he had ever learnt pointed towards proof of this moment, and yet it still had no meaning.

Thursday. Thurstdate. Thurstday. Thursday. Thirsty. Did the good of the many outweigh the good of the few. The newspaper displayed today’s thoughts. He thumbed through the sheets of the newspaper slowly. He read the pages slowly, in normal reading mode. Looked at the adverts. It was clearer today. The pages read like a log of his previous night’s thoughts, every minute detail he had already imagined, every word, every sentence, had already been read out to him the night before. Chaos theory. Butterfly effect. Every action has an equal an opposite reaction. Left and right.

It gave a entirely new spin on the concept of original thought, everything he had thought had happened.

Everything he did affected something else, and as he sat and watched he could see how it was being effected. String theory. Spiral. Loop the loop. Rope.

He stopped himself moving. He didn’t want his movements to affect anything in the world unduly. Prediction and causation. Everything he did and everything he thought impacted somewhere else. He was causing it. How the fuck was he going to think himself out of that one.

It didn’t seem possible to stop himself thinking. A group of three. The three wise men. The three witches. The three condemned men. The three on the hill. The three kings. The three gifts. The three musketeers.

String theory. String. Rope. Noose. The good of the many and the good of the few. $E=mc^2$. Energy released equals mass deficit multiplied by the speed of light squared. Energy released equals change in mass multiplied by speed of light squared. Were they trying to trick him into sacrificing himself so they could gain more energy?

Thors day. Lightening. Odin. He saw the image of a questing knight from Arthurian Legend dangling from the tree. Odin. The Norse had a particular view of self sacrifice in order to gain self knowledge, either hanging from a tree or spearing themselves.

He had always considered himself selfless, yet he couldn’t justify an act of total self sacrifice. He felt guilt at his own self interest. He didn’t understand. Why should they steal his energy from him. For what reason. Why him? He felt self hatred and despair at his own self interest in not saving the world.

The questing knight hung halfway between the conscious and the unconscious. The quest for the holy grail. What knowledge was the knight seeking, what knowledge was the knight gaining. The quest. Chalice. The holy grail. Receptacle of life. Fountain of eternal life. Drink and be quenched.

Stop doing in order to prevent negative impacts elsewhere. Stop thinking in order to prevent impacts. Decide. String.
Rope. Noose.
He had thought and fought for four nights without sleep. He wished he was well. His mind was exhausted and couldn’t fight any more. There stopped being a start and stop to the firing of his mind, and it broke, the synapses pulsating in a random pattern regardless of their stimuli.
Stamping his mind unceremoniously through a spiralling cheese-grater shaft dancing toward the decadency of oblivion, the daemons raped his thoughts and kicked his sagged body husk around amongst themselves.
Friday. Friariday. Fryday. Freiday. As fast as he could make a defensive swerve move in thought, it could be countered, covered, even erased by them. Freedom of will. Predestination. If things were predetermined could something that he did tomorrow affect something that happened yesterday. Events beyond control.
They knew everything about him. Everything had been laid out according to their great plan for him. What he thought were choices were just a continuation of the same track. He had his reports in the cupboard, telling his thoughts and listing his life. Should he destroy them. They could change his reports. They could destroy the truth.
He could hear the floyd choppers circling outside. Everyone had been in on it. Everyone knew. His lies, his mistakes, his embarrassments and his failings. His enemies, his friends, his family, his mother, his father. They had all known. Events beyond control. Makes no difference. Options always limited by external factors.
He had a final attempt to think at destinal change. It was pointless. Cannot change written destiny, the oblivion was unstoppable. If he tried to change anything they could turn up afterwards and arrange to everything to suit their purposes. Would he be paraded across the front page of the newspaper just like everybody else.
Whatever truth he made they would break into a lie. He got into bed quietly, so as not to make too much noise or disturb any of the bedding too much.

He lays me down to lie. In pastures green he leadeth me, the quiet waters by.

His eyelids reflexed and blinked in spasm when his unfocused stare burdened too much. He lay there motionless in acceptance of his oblivion. His mind quietened. His breathing slowed from panic and became calm.
He waited patiently for the end to come.
Chapter Eight – Return to Earth

He had fucked it but he might be able to help someone else or stop someone else being hurt.

His survival instincts clicked in.

He turned and sat upright, pivoted, and sat with his legs over the edge of the bed touching the floor.

'Restock on reality suppressant,' he thought, getting up.

He didn’t know why his survival instincts had kicked in, but guessed that’s why they were. It was the weekend and he rested on Titan with the knights who knew it wasn’t black and white but shades of grey.

The reality suppressant didn’t work. It just made him feel worse, spinning out his mind into panic and fear rather than relaxation.

Yet another day. As soon as he was awake he wished he was still asleep. The pain of the panic tore through his heart like iced barbed wire, the cold and sharpness of the steel sending shivers of pain and despair across his body. He couldn’t cry and he convulsed in short spurts, contorting his limbs and bending his body in agony, and wretching as if vomiting an unseen poison from his inner depths.

After ten or so minutes the waves of hurt lessened, allowing his abdominal muscles to relax their fierce tightening.

The tears began from his left eye, and his right soon echoed with its own pearls.

At least the hard intensity of his sobbing required enough concentration to still the spiralling of his mind for a while. Another shockwave of tears came, and his abdomen tensed again with it.

“Untitled”

Who am I to question the way of the world,
Who am I to argue the facts that you’ve heard,
The answers that you give me are always absurd.

Sometime later. As he awoke his iced heart shattered, sending the shrapnel chill in shockwaves, the spikes freezing sharply throughout his body. He had been in a nightmare. It hadn’t been very nice. He had been crying heavily in his dream, in a desert of desolation and despair. In the seconds it took to wake, he remembered he had been crying, and as his neurotransmitters changed their focus, his body caught up with the suppressed motor firings and the tears streamed down.

Trying to pray for he so loved his God. Trying to pray but the daemons stealing his thoughts and rapping and nagging with the firings of pain and fear. Holding concentration of thought to say a few words of prayer, only for his will to be broken with such ease as if in squeezed in play. Such was his hellish torture he could no longer pray to his God.

Space aliens from the stomach. Secret files. He spent some days living through a life’s lapping up of sci-fi and odd ball theories, living through and experiencing each one in turn, always himself, but such a change all around that everything was a different world.

Another day. He opened his eyes. There was a delay in the anti-sleep chemical being secreted, and as it trickled through his synapses, for about three seconds it seemed that the random excess firings had stopped. But no, their confusion spiked in, strobing into his shuttering of thoughts, and the obsessive macro phrases began their random firing once more. The shock of desolation returned.

Reading a book. Some other day. He tried to read the sentences of the book. It was difficult. Between every four words the memories shouted, making it hard to maintain concentration. He continued and endeavoured. Finishing the pages, he didn’t know what the book was about, as the lengths of the abstract thoughts firing were longer than what he had read to himself.

It was just getting fucking stupid now. He was watching some programme on the television. The show had been a bit weird for a few days. The character in the programme had been having all weird things happening, and he would switch on and see one of the puzzles that his mind had set itself being unwound in an episode. Today’s episode was just too fucking stupid. The character in the show was watching a show on television about being watched in a show and where everything that happens, happens on the television. He didn’t know whether crying or laughing was the correct audience participatory response. It was all so weird it was becoming boring.

He was sitting in an armchair. A man was reading a newspaper opposite. 'Perhaps I’ve been given a second chance,'
he thought. As he watched the man turn the news pages, he saw the headline, 'Second Chance'.

He stood a while on the footbridge. The people passed by. He was waiting, and while he waited he looked at them all. Some seemed happy, some seemed sad. As they walked by he said to them in his mind, 'God bless you'.

Walking through the town he continued with his thought. Down the stairs. An old man, roughly dressed. 'God bless you,' he thought.

“God bless you too,” said the figure.

Past the shop window. ‘I don’t know what I am doing’, he thought to himself. He turned and looked into the shop window, a large display screen was relaying its show. A man stood in the picture on the screen, and then another joined him.

“You don’t know what you’re doing do you?” said the man on the screen to the other.

“Will I be well,’ he thought to himself. ‘Yes,’ he thought, trying to create the answer in his mind. As he thought his answer, he noticed that the digit of the time readout changed. During the next seventeen hours his mind fought with itself, to try and make it that at precisely the moment the digit changed, he would have an appropriate answering thought in his mind.

He got up and went to the toilet. His bowels emptied into the pan and he stood, pausing to inspect his excretion. There seemed to be a particular shape or pattern to the way in which they had been laid, floating on top the shallow water. Some seemed to be numbers, others symbols, a < perhaps, or a =. Each day for the next week he would analyse the morning view of his shit in an attempt to try and understand the world.

Today was her return from work. She had been away five weeks now. She almost pushed the door down before she had got the key into the lock. Trust things, the key was being awkward, and she couldn’t get it all done quick enough such was her excitement. She turned the key again and it freed the lock. Pushing the handle down, she eased the door open.

The house was nice and warm. Actually a little too warm. She took off her jacket. She could feel he was in the living room, so she quickly slid out of her shoes.

She knew immediately that something was wrong. He was pale and his hair needed cutting. He probably hadn’t even brushed his hair let alone washed it. Though she could not catch his gaze in hers, his eyes looked blackened, as though he had last slept in the womb. It looked as though all joy had left him.

“Are you okay?” she said.

“No,” he said calmly.

She had never heard that response before. The sensation of dropping twenty-thousand feet in a light plane in a storm rammed downwards through her body, sinking her heart through the floor.

She stepped over and placed her hand delicately just under his chin, and slightly to the right, so as to cup his jaw and ultimately his face. He felt cold and his eyes didn’t look as though they were focusing on anything. He had probably used his electric shaver a couple of days ago. As her thumb caressed his cheek the downpour started. It was a slow trickle at first, like which one would see if they heard the splash of water being thrown against a window, and turned round only to see the ends of it slide off the glass.

Like a tap being slowly turned on to full torrent, the flow seemed to increase gradually and in proportion. Her mind flicked back to when she had cut her finger as a child, and the tide of blood that had filled her other hand quickly.

“Why are you crying?” she spoke softly.

“Sorry,” he stuttered out after a long pause. The cascading stopped. “I didn’t know I was.”

He held the tank rails tight as his lowered himself into the water under her watchful eyes. He knew the water was warm, hot even, its steam wisping off its rippling surface. He seated himself in the bath and his legs became goose bumped. He couldn’t feel his skin. He felt cold, a sun of ice burnt inside of him.

She thought his shoulders would touch as he was drawing himself in so tightly. She tried to caress some tension from his neck and collar bone, but she wasn’t sure he could feel her touch.

He could feel her touch, but it didn’t feel as though it was him that she was touching, or that it was her who was touching him. His elbows felt all wrong. And his wrists too.

As she bathed his hair, the soap and water running over his back seemed to make the ratchet of his shoulders slacken
off a notch, albeit a very small one.

Using the fluff of the towel in an attempt to 'puff him up a bit' as she would later call it, she dried him off as he stood there like a puppet with no strings.

She put him into their bed, and lay a while beside him, hoping the warmth of her body would enable him to thaw from his hibernation. He shut his eyes. Although it was night, they danced a bright pattern beneath his lids and it seemed like day to him. The shutter flicking of his mind decreased slowly.

She hummed and sang sweetly to him in a low soft voice as she combed her fingers through his hair, sometimes her love causing her tonation to stutter.

“Let Me”

Let me, oh let me, take away your pain.
Let me, oh let me, make you smile again.
Let me, oh let me, wipe away your tears.
Don’t you worry or don’t you fleece
Because with my love comes your release.
Let me, oh let me, take away your pain.

After a couple of weeks he started to talk, and he told her what he remembered of everything that had ever happened to him. He was talking as though there wasn’t enough time to say what he wanted to say, all terse, sometimes not finishing sentences.

Sometimes she didn’t know what else to do but just make sure he drank plenty of water to balance what he had cried out. Sometimes she found it hard to sleep as he just lay there sobbing. He had spent most of his life helping others, and she was so glad she was able to help and love him.

The searing pain rose from his abdomen and scythed through his heart in vicious sweeps, the ripples of torment sickening him to despair. Then, the wretchedness sent cold spikes down from his shoulders.

Even though it was an afternoon and it was raining, they decided none the less to venture into the outside for a stroll of air, and to go and look at the trees in the park. It was a quiet day, nobody seemed rushed about their busyness. A distinct lack of urgency about everyone, which could easily have been mistaken for lethargy.

It was weird. It was all weird. Everything just had this weirdness about it. He walked through the park and it all looked as though he was wearing sunglasses. Not that it was sunny, or that the light was somehow shaded. It just seemed that everything was distanced from him.

The tense fear ripped down his spine between his shoulder blades, its chill causing them to pull in slightly. Time to return to the safety of his room.

One of the times they tried going out, they stood at the bar, his hands shaking. When he held his drink in his hand, it shook too. He tried holding with both hands. Then both hands began shaking, and glass shaking too.

He scribbled with pens and paper in no particular order. He drew notes and reports, trying to find a way out of his acidic hell. Triangles infinitely mirrored into each other.

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1 1 1 -1 1 -1 1 -1
-1 1 -1 -1 -1 1 -1 -1
1 1 1 -1 -1 -1 -1 1
1 1 1 -1 -1 1 -1 1
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His mother visited him. He confessed to his mother of all the guilt that he felt, such as when he had stolen coins from his mother’s purse, or when he had felt jealous of his siblings belongings. He told his mother of the piece of string.

“Do you still have it?” said his mother.

He fetched it, and gave it to his mother.

“Looks like a piece of dish cloth or something,” said his mother, examining it, and while doing so tested its strength. As his mother pulled on the string it broke, and she continued to break it into little pieces, rubbing the bits between index finger and thumbs.

He looked on in abject horror.

His mother looked at him.

He didn’t know what breaking up the string meant, but the worry of it being broken up lessened with his mother’s look.

Another day his father drove him to a great cliff of granite, where the end of the land met the end of the sea. He stood on the solid rock, which seemed to point like the edge of an anvil towards the sea. He felt the wind on his face,
blowing in from the sea. He opened his mouth and breathed in the air. He turned, and walked back inland. ‘Sometimes things are only true if you believe them.’

It was a while before his brain firing slowed down to a more recognisable pattern. The overload left many residual traces, and sometimes on a moment he would remember them being shouted at him, and he would remember what they sounded like. Eventually the terrors lessened, and their rate of fire had descended from near a three second cycle, crawling through the scale of time until becoming hours, days, then only remembered with a decisional process.

Maybe it was a test of his character, anyone can be of strong character in an easy situation. He hadn’t hurt anyone, and at least he hadn’t done anything stupid. Well, apart from that visit to the clap clinic, but that was more to do with past guilt over an act of unfaithfulness that only existed in his mind. He had felt he had eternally lost the purity of the innocence of first love, and must bear both of their guilts as all was his fault. Although the manner was also probably more due to the hallucinations of the scorpions crawling up his legs. It had been a false worry in his mind.

Chapter Nine – Discussion

Some years later he realised it would be necessary to return to vr for post analysis under controlled conditions in an attempt at determination of the what and the why. This time he ensured he had a little help from his friends, and that she would be there to catch him if he fell.

On analysis, it was clear than he seemed to remain the same, whilst his perception of everything around him had changed. Whether everything around him changed at that time in the past, or whether he had a different focusing to his selective awareness that was consciousness, he was unsure.

Garbage in, garbage out. He couldn’t believe some of the crap his mind had shouted back at him. Maybe it was true what they said, you are born pure and it is life that corrupts. A lot of the phrases seemed to be remembered phrases, what he had read, things from history, myth, media, or from sounds he had heard.

He couldn’t rule out that as the newer evolved mammalian right and left hemispheres communicated with language, and the older reptilian parts communicated with images, it may have been the point at which the older parts had tried to learn language and communicate with the new parts. This might fit with an intelligence/pattern matched response system, repeating inconclusives in feedback, to generate a clarification response.

Maybe it was to do with the delicate balancing act of the ego. Often in any situation it was merely the ego’s response to the situation, influenced by a far greater set of complexities and neuroses than simply just an analysis of the current physical situation. In fact, at times the current situation seemed completely irrelevant, and it was only the current state of the ego that determined the appropriate response that was to be given by the pattern match response system.

At a lower level, maybe it was all to do with cell division. During the process of replication and separation, the components mirror each other in a high level of symmetry. Maybe that’s why humans were symmetrical. Maybe that’s why there was the night and the day, the light and the dark, the opposites balancing. It was when too heavy a weight kept being chucked onto the scales that perhaps it became a problem. With the scales broken, how was a sense of balance and perspective to be maintained.


Inside an incubator. The baby lay there thinking, connecting, dreaming whilst awake. He lay there, legs crossed at the ankles, thumbs nestled between index and middle fingers. The sensory overload caused his nerves to fire at the surface of his skin, causing him to itch. He had to stop now and again to scratch feverishly, often resulting in an opening.

He remembered the time he was a newly born in an incubator. All his senses told him that everything was ok, there was no threat from his environment, but something was missing.

“Where’s my baby?” said the young voice. To the baby it was just a pattern, with no matched response as yet. The sonic vibration was followed by the oscillating sounds of laughter. The baby didn’t know what this meant, and his mind fired, attempting to analyse, understand and fuse connections. His mother lifted him, and he felt what he had been missing. Wrapped in the warmth and with the familiar beat of comfort that he knew, he relaxed. He made the connection. In order to receive the love he simply had to think. He lay there and let his mind fire, cusping and ebbing in streams of thought, building a thinking machine. He still didn’t know what he was supposed to do with it though. And even then, he still had to do it.

His lips were sore and sometimes he didn’t want to feed. Sometimes when he was being fed he knew all was okay, but after feeding he wasn’t sure if he would be fed again. Perhaps that’s why he liked to do everything twice. The repeat event feigning consistency.

Perhaps loving his God, loving himself, loving his future wife, loving his family, loving his friends, and trying to love the whole world would be enough to keep him occupied.
The eye lightening faded out as the reality began to reform. An aching ear abdominal descending bass reverb, the taste of dry saliva, unprogressive wrenching with its mild burn companion. Heart-depth sigh, astonished panic like falling love. Consciousness. He tapped off the rig, his analysis was done for now.

He would go on to do some more work with vr/systems tools for learning systems, interfaces for passing on knowledge, and maybe the odd bit of coding for fun.

“Ah,” said The Captain. “One of the greatest mysteries is why the mind does what it does when it cannot find a solution.”

“And another thing,” continued The Captain. “That sleep disorder you experienced prior to things going a bit iffy. It was caused because your brain wakes up through withdrawal of reality suppressant. More suppressant won’t help you sleep. Lay off the suppressant – you shouldn’t need it anymore now, you’re a natural.”

“Finally, don’t try and solve the whole massive problem, just try and solve the little bit of it that your brain can work with.”

“Yes, you’re right,” he said.
“Sure am,” continued The Captain. “You ain’t that fucking clever.”

It was obvious that his brain could try and find a connection between everything, the brain is exceptionally good at matching, and has a peculiar bias to proving its own theories. The fact that two people can witness the same event and create an entirely different interpretation surely limited proof through experience, as individual experiences could be both false and truthful.

He had seen it from all angles. He was a fool to ever think that he was clever, and could simply make up something to believe in. So many theories proven, yet all conflicting. You just can’t make something up and believe it just because it suits you. Maybe it was a peaceful constant state of ever changing equilibrium, a whole union not a disjointed black and white distinction. Maybe the point of not being able to prove the existence of God is so it cannot be faked in order to gain power and control. Everything had seemed connected, but then it would be, as he was a connection machine.

Then again, it had proved something, God was far cleverer that he was.

Chapter 10 – Into the future

All the tracks were beginning to sound the same but it didn’t matter. He knew he was rising and his excitatory state was matching tracks even when faster and slower, or perhaps containing only a slender few correlations of sonic oscillation.

His spine tightened as the pump of the bass roared home. The beat sent his feet stamping and his head snapping from side to side. His body fired up and connected to his natural vibration. Music mind and body as one, the whole of his essence rocked in the electric fireworks of dance. The tune was for him. The freedom of expression tingled through the layers of his skin, the crackling of his energy reaching escape velocity from his body. The bubble of euphoria ascending through his spine was overwhelming. The rush of emotion unbalanced his seesaw, and his tears Niagared, sinking the wave back downward.

She would still sometimes find him in that state even years later. The tears gushing down his face. Sometimes he would be leant over the table, and it would take two or three decent wipes with a cloth to mop up the pools. It wasn’t real crying. It wasn’t heart-felt loss, the sobbing of depression, or the hysteric of blind panic. The sadness and disappointment at something going wrong, or the pitiful weeping of hopelessness. They were simply sheets of water, running off his face like rain along a street. The miscues and false firings at the rawity of emotion. The after effects of long periods of time spent in vr, and the residues of the reality suppressants still stuck in his neural pathways.

Away from the dancing, she just sat near him, waiting patiently for the shower to pass. She wanted to cradle him in her arms, and place her hand across his forehead as if to heal his mind. Through experience they had developed silent signals. Sometimes he might lay his head across her belly or curl in her lap. Sometimes the roles would be reversed. It wasn’t as bad now, nearer to the event she thought he would wash the colour out of her clothes. But here and now his head was hung down, with the tears of liquid gloss mixing with the lost dreams of spilled alcohol on the floor. “I’m ok, it’ll pass in a bit,” he said, his chin not lifting from the floor, his hands rested on his knees as he sat. While the signal meant that he was fine, and he would indeed shortly be all ok again, and she knew this, as he was always very clear in communicating his ‘defined condition’ as he put it, she was still slightly saddened. She knew her love helped him. The occurrences had certainly lessened in magnitudes. Healed him she liked to think. But she always wondered whether she could ever cure him from the sadness that seemed to haunt him to the depth of his soul.

“Bbrrrr,” he uttered, as though cold. “Sorry about that,” he shook his head gently, blinking the remaining dew from his eyelashes. Like a dog just in from the rain she thought. Poor Laika she thought, as she remembered the story of a less fortunate adventurer.

While she was temporarily distracted by the afterburn of her memories, he had stood up, and was downing the remains of his bottled beverage. She tutted as she always did. He always gave the same reply. A cheeky ‘What?’, for although the drink did replenish some liquid as buoyancy against that he had let slip, her motherliness would have preferred the simple purity of water.
Although his paranoia filters meant that subtlety didn’t always work on him, there was no mistaking what her look meant. The joke that they both knew was old. She stood too, and their hands met as their arms raised and they stepped into stride. Their warm clasp of love met almost without necessitating guidance or effort.

A top track was starting, but one not so penetrating to his innards. It’s gentle whispering rhythm was just starting to form. As they strode forward she tugged his hand down sharply in the way ‘only girls could’, so that he was somehow pulled closer to her. As he took his turn to tut, the expanding warmth of their growing smiles developed into a brief but soul-felt kiss.

“Global warming?” he said. “If you kiss the ice-caps, we’re fucked.”

They laughed together as one. The time of trouble had passed. It was time to get on with life. They were living love and it was time to rock.

It wasn’t a case of two halves becoming one, it was a case of two wholes being one. One plus one equaled one. The two co-existing particles in their quantum entanglement, strolling forward together in the ever expanding universe. It had taken billions of years of evolution for them to be reunited, and the time spent floating in the vacuous expanse of space was immeasurable and unthinkable, but now they were by each other’s sides again, since their separation during the big bang at the dawn of the epoch.

Their wedding day was beautiful and they were all to live very happily for many, many years to come. He turned and smiled.

“Thank you.”
ÉCOUTE ET RÉPÈTE
Polymath Renaissance
2.9 Two pieces of knowledge

∞ < C₀
“Of the abhorrations I have seen composed in this world and in between, it is false enlightenment which is the most vicious and cursed of all things,” warned The Captain, looking through him as he spoke.

“Be wary of false enlightenment,” he continued. “And resolve your mind against it.”

For all our knowledge and understandings, it is egos that make us forget. We read the written and the illuminated, and marvel at their wonders, merely to bastardise and copy only that which fits in with our own spheres of constructs, and satisfies the secret realities that our subconscious has created for our selves.

He wasn’t looking for answers in the internetwork today, merely checking his own. He reeled within the fluid concentric currents, the data flowing into and over him, attracted to his face like the delicate caressing of a lover’s fingers.

The trilock hit home hard into the corners of his spine, and he reeled and winced with the knifing pain. The streams weren’t correlating today. Like watching lightning over moorland from a high viewpoint, he could see the bursts after they had started but couldn’t seem to anticipate from whence they would next begin their formation, or the threaded paths they would follow.

The eye lightening faded out as the reality suppressants began to reform. An aching ear abdominal descending bass reverb, the taste of dry saliva, unprogressive wrenching with its mild burn companion. Heart-depth sigh, astonished panic like falling love. The sound of suction in his ears. The mild pinging pain and the slow realisation of a consensual consciousness again.

“Yeah, this guy comes in, he’s all like, well, in defcon one,” said the unmistakable voice of Gina. “So, he’s geeking it about at the sides, then he comes across.”

“I’m all fluttering,” continued Gina. “Yeah, real tip-toe unison, all in one.”

“Not like you, Gina,” she said calmly.

“I know, new one for me!”

“What happened next?” she prompted.

“Well, for a little bit, not a lot,” sighed Gina.

He flicked off the relay shades, the prismatic outline tracers fading as he focused on the two.

“Oh, back with us dear are you?” she scolded.

Fuck. Not much patience from her today. Although entirely understandable. He hadn’t realised he would be out for so long.

It now occurred to him what was happening. Gina was relaying the tale of how Tommy and Gina met. Which could only mean one thing. Actually, one of two things, but given he could see clearly now, it was only the one that remained.

“Go on, Gina, don’t mind fibre for brains here,” she chided, continuing her reprimands along with those glances of scythes that he’d only let her get away with.

“Rig-burn boy,” laughed Gina. “That’s what they call him!”

She just looked him up and down. Or more up a bit and down a bit, since he was kind of slumped in the armchair. He wouldn’t have minded so much, but he knew that she knew that it would take him a while to reach full functioning, and that she could basically get away with saying anything she wanted, as he was too strobed to gander any sort of response, witty or otherwise.

“Anyways,” continued Gina, although finding time to cast some disparaging looks of her own at him. “So, I’m fluttering and Tommy is defcon oneing. Neither of us making any sort of routers.”

“Yup, those boys,” she said.

“Yup,” said Gina. “Tommy’s all manning it up, and I’m all pouting and perting, two of us looking like two plants at a conf.”

“So yes, then your boy struts over, like some leetboi on a rampage, gives Tommy a shove, and then,” enthused Gina, her excitement mounting in anticipation of the final tell. “He offers these words of golden inspiration: ‘For fucks sake you two, stop tic-tacking and sort it out.’”

She nodded attentively.

“Well, as you can imagine, Tommy just stands there, having no idea what’s going on, and well, I’m not much better!” giggled Gina. “So I do the only thing a girl could do, I grab his hand and get him some netcreds. Tommy sits his sweet baps on one of those stools, and hey, we’re hanging.”

“Why I put up with this shit I don’t know,” he said.

“Ah, the monkey learns speech!” said Gina.

“Save it for Tommy, Gina,” he said. She lightly grabbed Gina’s arm in restraint, as if a reminder to why they were all there.

“You wouldn’t have it any other way, and you know it!” she said, walking over and pinching him ever so slightly, and planting a gentle kiss on his forehead.

“You taste of code, go clean up. I’ll prep Gina.”

“Ok,” he said, and stumbled towards the back of the bungalow to shower and replenish.

The warming water cascaded down from the shower head and slid off his skin on its journey back to the way down. The thoughts of the trilock still shone intermittently in his mind. As he cleansed his body he tried to relay down and
relax the tenseness of his brain, readying for the hack.


Without the sounds of the jet streams in mask, he focused and heard her and Gina yapping. Zooming like a lens, he translocated the rarefactions as he made their time period alter.

Another usual easy one today for Gina, not that he minded, it was only a bogey, and he knew the banter was all good fun really. It’s just that he wasn’t making much progress himself this month.

“Try blinking a little, Gina,” he said.

Gina fluttered. The retinal scanning traced its map points as he tweaked and translocated. Easy to do with Gina present, he hadn’t the budget or the time to do a retina not present transaction crossover. He reckoned Jonny had a fully rigged one, but it was something Jonny had never mentioned, and he was wiser than to bring it up himself.

“Few seconds more, Gina,” he said.

“Sure thing, hun,” bubbled Gina, low and slow, her consciousness tiring now.

The match was nearing, the turn and twist of translace dancing to a climatic satisfaction. The processes flipped and compared, like his mind’s eye had once performed for the girls he had attempted to match before her perfect fit. Almost there, each one progressing the iterative rendering match until all bits were lit in their infinitely complex fractal glory.

The crystal strands turned and locked, relaying a match through the setup. She smiled and admired. She and Gina left him to the true hack, the dual-setup was just to gain entry and authorisation through to the next caponier. It was a classic speed and sweep hack, stealth or instant knockout, the pace preventing a tracing lock.

He shook his head as his soul began to hurt in the centre of his chest. He raised the pace of his hack and clenched his fists in sprint, the drumming of his mind switching reflexes ascending in its race.

He had felt their presence before. From a mere flicker of hair on his neck to a tightening of his spine. Now he was certain. It wasn’t a random sweep scanning that he had been feeling lately. It was definitely an organised tracing. Gina’s birthday wasn’t coming up, so he knew it wasn’t Tommy routing a vengeance crack to surprise her. Someone was hacking his ass. And he didn’t like it.

He tapped and tacked and sprinted through two divert loops. The cascading data streams stretching and drenching him in torrents of binary flow. As the hack reached its point of supernova, he felt the top hats of the ones barbing into his skin, and the zeroes pulsating and encapsulating his bounding frame.

He completed, tapped off, and tapped an extra feed of suppressant to mask the pain of the failed tracing hounds.

Although he was obviously unaware, Tommy had been waiting patiently for him to complete the hack. Tommy knew that twice in one week necessitated a visit. Tommy had pondered upon what he was going to leave as his calling card, but figured the only solution was a trip out.

She and Gina had been chuckling at Tommy’s apparent paranoia today. Tommy stood by the window curtain, alternately fanning and flicking the curtain, and glancing at the hack in progress. Gina had of course led her into the conversation of Tommy’s nervousness, but it didn’t matter; she had some processes of her own running.

Tommy turned and scanned him without looking to any observer. He flickered the hack signal and Tommy acked.

Silently motioning to Gina, Gina led her out toward the garden, and Tommy closed his distance.

“Thanks, Tommy,” he said.

“np. So you’re sure then?” stated Tommy coldly.

“Yeah, and I’m not happy,” he said.

Gina bolted back in through the French doors with an icen look on her face. Tommy sort of shuffled towards the exit a little, but Gina’s stares sent her eye lashes to rivet him in his tracks.

So in came his princess.

“Fuck off,” she barked, almost causing Tommy and Gina to jump a little too.

Suddenly the full cathedral of sound system they had installed at great custom spec erupted into activity, the floor speakers clicking in with a warm hum of bass reverb. It was a pure vocal mix today:

‘Yeah, and I’m not happy.’

She pointed her remote control directly at him, and repeated the clip’s echo around the room, on each loop dramatically overplaying her conducting of his embarrassment.

‘Yeah, and I’m not happy.’

Gina small-stepped to position herself between Tommy and the exit, just to be sure. After all, they were almost, dare she think it, almost a bit, well, responsible, for what was occurring.

“So much for our fucking agreement,” she cursed vehemently. Gina was almost becoming a little shocked, for this wasn’t like the girly she knew at all.

Tommy wasn’t too shocked, he’d landed far worse than that from Gina. Although probably deservedly. It was some out of character for her though.

“Erm, babe,” he dared.

She shook her head, barely looking into his eyes at all. In her rage she heard Gina’s lips purse open in preparation of utterance. Her finger sprang up, and stitched even Gina silent.

Gina shuffled a little bit nearer toward the exit.

“It’s not like you think, babe,” he tried.

“Not like I think!” she screamed, shredding him with her shrills.
“He means not what you think, hun,” aided Gina, pleased with her attempt.

“Yeah, that’s right,” managed Tommy, pre-empting any rib-dig from Gina. Tommy also felt pleased with his effort.

She looked displeased. He looked worried. Tommy and Gina looked at each other, acknowledging that if either was going to bolt, the other wasn’t going to be far behind.

She paused for a moment, and in took breath.

She nodded at Tommy, and gestured three fingers to him. Tommy acknowledged the signal, raised his wrist, and began the timing. Gina chewed and tapped her foot, hoping.

The cycles were already dying as he was realising that three wasn’t nearly enough of a count to manage what he needed to manage. His thought matrices were concurrently comparing possible responses and matching outcomes. The ‘I love you’ line had long since flickered out of the quantum autocompletion.

“I love you,” he said, regardless.

She stared back. “Well that was a fucking waste of cycles, wasn’t it.”

Gina and Tommy couldn’t help agreeing with her, but knew that was always going to be his first response. He thought he felt the slight movement of air of both Gina and Tommy swaying towards the exit.

“It wasn’t my fault,” he continued.

“Never fucking is,” she said, looking at Tommy and smirking, then back at him, teasing him at the continuing passing of cycles.

“I know, I promised, baby,” he continued patiently.

“Yeah, I know, I even told Jonny to stop his scopes,” she said.

Tommy had a quick mild pang of guilt over his two running scopes on him, but hey, that was play, not promise.

“So let it out, why the fuck are you being tracked again if you haven’t been tricking with anything?” she blasted, summing up the case for the prosecution. She let out her sigh of completion, and let her tenseness relax, waiting for his answer.

“It’s like this,” he said. “I did it for you, baby.”

“Stitch in time”

It’s all over before it’s begun,
The future is bleak and I am undone,
But turn it around and let’s look and see,
The future is bright for her and me.

Tommy and Gina were mostly silent for the journey. The shuttle’s electric hum formed the backdrop to his careful description of proceedings to her. Gina eyed the rear mirror now and then, just to check she wasn’t hitting him.

“I’ve known something was up, ever since you went out and bought that clean palm piece,” she explained. “You only do a walk and collect when you’re doing a clean run, and I checked the netstat setup, and it wasn’t publically wired, meaning you were obviously going to do a stealth run.”

Her expertise always caught him. “It really pisses me off that you’re always so much better than me,” he said, trying to get some sort of defence going. He must have been shaving off the barbs slightly, as she didn’t just slap him.

“Not better, just not as damn lazy,” she said.

“At first I thought it was just a few script kiddies playing, or even learning, if anybody still does that. But then things started to up a gear. It wasn’t the same. It wasn’t just the usual mess with the odd nice neat hack, it was a consistent weave of expert crack paths, backed up with a validated stream in flow.”

“Usual bullshit,” she said. He was thinking that she just wasn’t going to be convinced, no matter what the proof. Tommy’s hand was keying his beer bandwidth allocation for today, maybe some vodka suppressant was going to help everyone out. Maybe.

“This is no bunch of meddling kids, you know,” she said. “While you three have been sleeping I’ve been doing some mining of my own.”

He knew he was in serious trouble with this one, either way.

“I did it for you, baby,” he said.

“That may as well be,” she acknowledged. “But you can’t just do that kind of hack these days. We’d all heard about you at the agency long before you showed up on our cross-scannings for the field trips. We knew that one of you was possibly going to be amongst the visitors, but with your team you did a very good mask up job.”

“You always knew I knew though, right?” he said.

“Oh, of course,” she said. “Some of the guys thought that you were the most arrogant bastard hack slut they had ever come across. It was only a few that recognised the pure art and entertainment in your skill. I didn’t know immediately, but after that dinner with Jonny it was obvious. Sheila hasn’t been as long in the game as us lot has she.”

“Sheila’s no weak link though, is she,” said Gina.

“No, but then you didn’t know I knew her before, did you,” she said, beaming.

“I would show you your file one day, my darling,” he said. “But I managed to get it overwritten.”

Thankfully they all laughed. Tommy and Gina exited the shuttle.

She lent over. He turned his cheek up slightly, expectant of her gentle kiss. She breathed forward and whispered.

“Next time you screw with v-industries, we go together.”
He would have let out a chuckle, but didn’t have time, as she bit his ear and made him a wincer, much to Tommy and Gina’s amusement. Although the outside viewers had no conception of what had just been agreed.
They all let their cares disperse as they left the shuttle, and strolled over happily to the beachcomber café.

Chapter Two – Isoteric mappings

He wasn’t even going to bother to try and kid himself that he had any chance of passing the Asotrerial synal mapping today. Normally the odd fail wouldn’t have mattered too much, Brian had certainly let him off a few. Problem was, he knew Brian could only switch it temporarily, and that there was a limit to how much he could back track it.

Normally he would have rescanned and retracked back in when his mind had settled back down a little. A steady readout would have been the only trace, and the peak firings of his genius would have not alerted the overseers to his over indulgence.

Brian didn’t say much, except for the minimal pattern response. Perhaps Brian knew what he knew and thought the same. He didn’t wait to hear her soft voice read out the results, and as he was leaving through the door Brian cut the volume for him in favour, so there was no tell for any listeners. Brian’s personalcom vibrated. ‘Sorry, Brian, it’s the old wound,’ read the display.

His autopilot had already clicked in, and was steering his feet on their course towards Jonny’s. Although there was no way now to fool the system to pass a new sample later, he knew Jonny could at least keep him in the game for a little longer.

Tap, tap. He tapped gently on Jonny’s back window, and glanced around. The dogs treated him like a shadow. He and Jonny had trained them to full stealth. He was always pleased at their safety, but always remembered how much it had cost him, but still, it was done and dusted, and it worked.

“Oh yeah, wondered how long it would take your ass to show up. I figured it was that season again,” muttered Jonny, welcoming his guest in a strange mixture of brotherliness and step-parental scolding.

“So, genius boy, how are you going to think yourself out of this one?” asked Jonny politely, figuring he’d already have at least half a plan.

“Usual story, Jonny. If you can rig me a mirror extension then that’ll buy me another time slot, won’t it,” he said.

“That old trick, huh. So that must mean Brian’s masking isn’t going to work this time. The Captain will have something to say about that one, you know,” bantered Jonny.

“I know. But it’s different this time. She found out,” he said.

“Oh, shit, I see,” laughed Jonny. “She’ll hack your sorry ass some day, you know!”

“Daily, Jonny, daily,” he said, managing a small smile and a temporary eye-glazing.

“Yeah, but you know it’s that creation which makes me,” he said. “The Captain would agree.”

“The Captain tolerates you as he admires your skill, I’m not so sure he’d have approved of the original means to the madness to achieve the method,” said Jonny.

“And another thing, your vet on Sheila wasn’t complete,” he said.

“I know. You’re just making my night tonight ain’t yer,” sighed Jonny. “Me and Sheila have talked. You know, like couples do. Seems like you and her aren’t the only ones with residues from the fall, doesn’t it.”

“Some autocompletions spiral out longer, Jonny, as you know,” he said.

“You knew it would come sooner or later,” tutted Jonny. “If you hadn’t been such a clever bastard at your dawn then maybe it would have been easier for us all.”

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“Some autocompletions spiral out longer, Jonny, as you know,” he said.

“Okay, don’t I know it. And really you’ve letten this one too late, but we all know why, so let’s not sweat it and just have a crack at it shall we.”

“Yes, good plan,” he said.

“The plan is your job, remember,” hesitated Jonny. “Ever since the mexico we agreed at least half a plan, didn’t we.”

Obviously Jonny’s patience was fading this evening, but hey, who could blame him.

“I know,” he said. Everyone knew it was handy to have some waypoints set. Or at least some possible waypoints set.

When the Plan B had been a Mexico home run after a trivial backhack, Jonny had not been amused. That one had cost him, but still, it was done and dusted, and it worked.

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When the Plan B had been a Mexico home run after a trivial backhack, Jonny had not been amused. That one had cost him too.

Jonny was just unequaled for it. He wasn’t quite up to Jonny’s standards of crypto. One of Jonny’s myth tags was that he once published the solution to the vsec algorithm hidden in the finger picking of one of his teenage band songs.

“The isoteric lead watcher is similar to the struct that we saw at the intercon facility last week,” he said. “I know that one was kind of a red1, but I know you can handle that no problem.”

“red1’s aren’t going to stop us, what’s the real trick,” questioned Jonny, the twirl of excitement and science specification setting him running.

“Okay, the main deal is going to be a replicant switch. There’s no way we have the time to copy and install a new translation, so I figure to best way to swing it through is to do a siamese reflection. That way you don’t have to copy it, just mirror it. Then you can mirror the mirror.”

“Brilliant,” smiled Jonny. “Far easier for you to say than me to do though. Want to dual-up for fun, or are you off to do some other mischief for me to tidy up again another day?”

“We’ll have some play at the weekend, Jonny,” he said. “I found a nice bunker for you to have a go at.”

Jonny beamed. “Always up for a bit of gaming. Guess it’s better to draw the line between fun and frak I suppose.”
“Yeah, we’ll do it, although I’m not sure it’s a single sessioner,” he told Jonny, raising the expectation of better things to come, so as not to have bored Jonny’s evening totally with caveman hacks.

“You know I would if I had some spare cycles tonight. I’m never at the right moment lately. I feel as though I’m fighting against time and reality itself sometimes. As if I’m drawn by an unknown will to an eternal vanishing point of variable destinations. It’s all fucked up. Everything is occurring at the wrong time and I’ve no control over it.”

“Go hack yourself, fool,” said Jonny. “No fucking wonder the asotrerial’s were all screwy, voigt-kampff wouldn’t have let you get away with an answer like that.”

“I know. Problem is there’s too many subjectives and not enough definitives. Too much happening at once, and no concurrent solution.”

Consciousness collapsing in on itself, spiralling and folding. Memories of unknown thoughts flicking in a blur of transcendent red squares, their opacity fluctuating in the breeze of data. He left Jonny to the crack.

“Lost where it can be found”

_In a pool so deep that not measured by human hand,  
She placed the pixie armour, whence can be found._

_Covering up from stars and beauty, gone by dark,  
Only left there in, the might light, tiny, pixie, spark._

_Lest you be plagued both night and day,  
With things gone missing as in hay,  
Throughout the winter follow the pixie way,  
What is given out, be guarded, from night, to day._

On the walk back he comforted himself that at least Jonny hadn’t nagged him at all for his dubious use of suppressant. All the members tapped, it was just their hack way, but he was needing to counter something else lately too, and they were beginning to guess it. Tommy knew it was like that old game of pool, the game of confidence. Problem was, he was shot to pieces at the moment, and he needed a greater level of suppressant than normal to compensate for the ever encroaching static from the ego of the world.

Given that his Asotrerial ratings were iffy at best, he had decided to gather some underground access points just in case. The less cycles he spent in the public domain the better at the moment, a spike in usage was always going to add to the number of flags any watcherbots were programmed to scope. It was something the laymen never really grasped. It was rarely necessary to hide totally from view on a mission run through the electroworld, and as ever, the best place to hide was in full view.

“Gaming or porn, Tommy?” he said.

“Huh?” doubted Tommy, knowing Gina was out, but not really getting the thirst for porn thing.

He looked skyward and then tried again. “Porn or gaming? How do you want to mask it? Your quota is as sore as mine, and the only way we can social pass it at this period in the day is porn or gaming. Take your pick.”

“Gaming is probably safer,” said Tommy. “Gina would find out knowing her, and then we’d have to double hack back just to get to the same level we could by playing the gaming card now. Let’s do it.”

He flipped and gamescope tourney 7.2 clipped in.

Tommy never really understood how he managed to steal cycles like that, he just couldn’t see how it was possible to make something out of nothing. Both he and The Captain had given a decent attempt at explaining it to their local node, but sometimes a leap of belief was just easier.

The gaming cycles ran, and the metering ticked.

“It’s very simple,” he said. “Although the implementation is quite complex, the theory is quite simple.”

“You say that every time,” said Tommy. “But it’s how you do the retrieval that I don’t get, and neither does Gina.”

He started laughing loudly and Tommy knew what was coming next.

“That’s the whole point of the theory, Tommy. Maybe you get it after all.”

“I can’t believe you hack that line out of me every time,” chuckled Tommy.

Jonny tapped. Remembering that the after hit was cleaner. After the initial clear rush there was no follow up of blanketness to the firing and melting. But that was the point, meld up with clarity intact. It was confusing from normal, as the hard numbing reward would have fired, giving the different high of satisfaction but coupled with it’s clouding of thought. Thankfully it was still eventually necessary for the mind to fall asleep from a big dose of clarity though, unless the Asotrerials were really off.

Various methods were tried by various Elected, but as with most things, any generalised solution only worked with the consensus of the majority of the controlled population. The overseers could not solve the problem with legalities, so they instead used multimedia models and personalities to implement their education and indoctrination programs. Fact was however, that hundreds of thousands chose to use reality suppressant each week.

In a similar way to how the old television networks were allowed to sell the advertising space which was reserved for Elected propaganda in return for reweaving the messaging within their programming, reality suppressant was often
marked as the cause of problems in society. You can kid most of the people all of the time, but not all the the people all
of the time.

Maybe it was modern life, maybe it was the lure of the speed hack and the buzz, but the negatives associated with it
were more usually symptoms rather than cause, and often the subtlety that it was withdrawal not usage which caused
the problem was missed.

Inside the shuttering of thoughts as the nothing became real. Jonny was chuckling to himself. Although the red1’s
were kind of tame as he had suggested, running in parallel meant he could switch round the whole room of chess hacks
and feed his ego a little for fun. Jonny tapped.

Speeding up and slowing down in a dodge and weave of transactional translacing. Cutting a wave through the
blackstatic and riding the pulses along as they rippled and rebounded into one another.

'Shit me,' thought Jonny, as he narrowed the distance to the true centre. Jonny let his autodogs feed on the isoteric
hounds and leapt through the haze into the outside of the inner. So he had been right. The amount of scopes was
ridiculous, even for him.

Stealthing through, Jonny realised the tangle was so bad a lot of the scopes were scoped too. Jonny ticked and
tapped simultaneously as he danced his dance of glee through the defences.

As Jonny tapped the beat of his dance tracks span into their autocompletion. Remembering the frequency of the
translacing keys harmonically matched to the ebb and flow of the sound. Now speeded up, the kinetics of his thoughts
increased into their rapidity, and he was always thought cycles ahead of the adaptive security patterned defences.

Time for the Siamese. In a green phased of lightening, Jonny entered his zone.

In cartwheeling lines of automatching, Jonny fed his biokeys into the security receptors as parallel sets of isoteric
mappings. The biokeys pulsed through the cell networks of pyramidic matchings, firing in response to the stimuli.

Jonny flipped in the startpoint hackclip. Jonny translaced an exact replicating pattern, and simultaneously streamed
in it’s natural opposite into a concurrent socket. The patterns were matching until the extending led up to a yellowbox.
Both the same and the opposite were giving a result set at the same time. If both were true then there were either more
than two combinations or the sets were in conflict with each other.

Jonny felt that he was so fucking almost there, just needing the final connection to trigger the completion. To be
really fucked up and yet on the cusp of magnificence. The nearer the goal the longer the cycle and the thicker the air
that had to be translaced through. He was so fucking on the ball it was starting to scare him a little, the rush of
excitement overload causing a sparking of doubt and fear.

Jonny barely had time to see why it wasn’t right. The Siamese reflection was identical. The mirror wasn’t mirrored
but translaced to the same result. The output matched the input.

Knowing what was coming next, Jonny smiled at the complexity of the cryptography. Rarely had he seen ones of
such complexity and he knew what that meant. It was self-encoded, a trilock.

Then it became even darker yet clearer. There was a blipscope on it, and round the corner of the tower blocks of
constructed realities of data, the whitebox mercilessly hunted him down in an explosive burst of bioelectric gravity.

Emanating in the mind and echoing through the body, Jonny fell to the floor reeling as the barbs of data pain iced
through his veins, the depth of the sadness sighing his soul. Throwing the rig away from him as he vomited into
unconsciousness, Jonny had a strange sense of scolding from Sheila, and a mild concern for the state of the balance. The
Captain silently felt the tap.

Though away from the conscious world, Jonny dreamed the beauty of the trilock. Three vertices each watching each
other, triangularly spiralling into infinity. The protective mesh was a marvel of engineering, the shield merely reflecting
the attack, thus might would never defeat it.

The scopes automagically cut out, silencing the secret that they kept to themselves. Hacking hurts.

Chapter Three – Trilock

“You wanna drive, babes?” he smiled as best he could.

“Yeah, right, I’d love to, baby,” she smirked.

He couldn’t drive as he had been advised, and experienced, grade three residual visual occurrences. Flashbacks. Not
the tacky sequenced cliptrips from the movies of old, but the subtle spark of star burst vision. Sometimes a stuck
memory of euphoria would be released, and he would see the firework dots spiralling in front of him briefly, like some
hexagonal retinal pattern match.

“Look, the triangular shape here makes it the strongest shape,” said the instructor, demonstrating with the three red
plastic strips bonded at the vertices with the metal fasteners, comparing it to the less rigid square. Pupil one nodded.

The transport pulled up outside their bungalow and they skipped in, hand in hand, smiling plenty. Settling in with
cake and coffee, they got into their game.

“So what’s the current exchange rate to the new world then?” he uttered suddenly, from a nowhere silence.

“What? Hard currency?” she said, altering her glance slightly.

“Yeah. Currency,” he said.

“Oh, now, 1.58 or something I’d say.”
“Figures. These guys are joking me,” he continued, his tapping increasing exponentially. He routed back and changed his geo location. “Yep, there goes,” he said. “How can softs be more expensive from another geo? Rip off.”

When they hacked together they needed no reality suppressant as they made one of their own. He virtualised across the global, clicked back in, re-routed, and did the deal. Currency for softs. “There,” he said. “A third reduction. It’s not who you are, it’s where you are!” he laughed. She chuckled back.

“Just purch yer tools and stop whinging, rig-boy,” she laughed.

The trend had been there from days long gone. There seemed to be a strange in built slide to the ecosystem which meant that as time progressed it seemed necessary to shift the emphasis from the responsibility of the supplier to the responsibility of the consumer. As well as from the Elected to the electee. It was all for the sake of the bargaining tokens of money, the abstracted currencies all trying to shift the balance against each other.

From distanced call centres to netbased response, the corps offered less and the consumers needed more. In the end it became increasingly that corps were getting the users themselves to produce the content of ciptrips and music videos, and then serving it all up as part of their infrastructure service agreement. Thus the big companies built the networks and nothing else, just creaming off the profits from the distribution of the content. The content creators return was never much, but marketed to the individual as a way of generating creds (although likely to be small ones), thus getting the people to create more content by carrot and stick. Plus, you had to buy their tools to do it all. Course, the network was just another hack, so soon it wasn’t the only one.

“The shape of the cylinder makes it the strongest shape,” said the instructor, demonstrating with the white rolled up paper. Pupil two nodded.

The Cybertechnics evolved out of the schooling systems governed by the trusts. The individuals and corporations funding the new pyramid learning centres soon perfected the system into a finely crafted assembly line of establishments for their procreation. In the same way that the ancient Japanese martial arts schools developed their own fighting systems, the Cybertechnics created their own languages and constructs, according to their needs and their desires.

She and him had both been lucky. They had been incubated in strong multidiscipline manners. The problem with the single aspect training by some Cybertechnics was that there is no appreciation of different angles, and thus any interaction was limited to bounds of ego rather than of truth and primary bridges.

Some wanted it that way though. If some were trained only to do one thing, then it was the one thing that they could only do, and by that there was power and control over them.

“Black and white”

One for sorrow, Two for joy,
Three for a girl, Four for a boy,
Five for silver, Six for gold,
Seven for a secret never to be told,
Eight for a wish, Nine for a kiss,
10 for eternal wedded bliss.

She tacked and translaced, her matrices forming waves of accessibility. As his eyes reflected the phosphorus burn of the external display in their group play setup, her thoughts drifted to how she had seen the lightening in his eyes when they first met. Draining down and emotionally tiring, she completed her hack and tapped off the rig.

“Shower time for me,” she said.

“Be right there,” he smirked.

“You wish!” she chuckled back.

He was just over four layers in when he started to see the thought processes that led to the conclusion. Not only seeing the answer, but the processing path to the answer. Dancing round the fires in his mind, forming networks of beacons to guide the path of his thinking.

Then suddenly it was as it had been lately. A different feeling to the environment, like the envelopment of the coming winter’s air when stepping out from a warmer summered house. Triangles infinitely mirrored into each other.

In the unreal he saw the real that he had experienced. Residual visual occurrences, isoteric flashbacks. The shape was more clear to him now. The vertices starred out into an iridescent net shape.

It would have necessitated a diagramatical reasoning explanation. It was all wrong, inside out, reflected back, triangles infinitely mirrored into each other. The net shape shone like nine stars, the vertices twinkling in their irrepressible brilliance. Trilock12, vertices, triangles, four set.

The eye lightening faded out as the reality of the newly born baby began to form. The mild pinging pain and the slow realisation of a consciousness. The smell of her was different. It wasn’t the same smell as his genetic parentage. It was someone different. It was light although it was night. As his eyelids spasmed in growth they opened, and a sudden rush of blood empowered his retinal burn. The scent wasn’t his genetic similarity yet matched like fingers interlocking in warm love. The immune systems would be highly compatible, and the descendant splitting and recombining would enhance the bonds of the chain.
The matrices spiralled and autocompleted in parallel, the triangular base into a pyramid. Mirrored internally to give an octet, each pyramid with four sides, two pyramids making six faces from eight, the bonding occurring at the shared particle surface. The electrons pulsating round the tumbling core in a dance of unison.

Then he saw it and remembered what it was for. It was the trilock. Infinite in its complexity and idyllic in its simplicity. There had seemed no way back from the Epoch Dawn so he had set it inside himself as a failsafe device. An hourglass for deprecation.

Chapter Four – Genius

Although it was the kind of place in which it was difficult to tell whether it was day or night, the time phase was waylaid by the rays that lit the muggy air when the entrance doors swung open in their moments of briefness. Too bright to sit outside all afternoon, so they had retreated inside the curve roofed building seeking shade.

“When vinci and goghy were scribbling out their notes in code it wasn’t because they were being clever. It’s because they were so fucking paranoid, a side effect of their immense genius,” he said. “By encoding their reasonings they were aiming to ensure that any conspirators wouldn’t be able to benefit from the information. Either that or they were appreciative of their genius enough to make sure that it wouldn’t be deciphered until a time of greater popular understanding, or only contemporarily by one of an equal insight of genius.”

He sat his glass of intoxicant back down onto the table after a healthy swing, in such a way as to indicate his rant was over and it was a good time for someone else to take up the round of conversation.

“Yeah, but you know what The Captain would say about that one,” said Tommy, drinking in gulps.

“Yipes,” said Gina. “That would be one of his ‘Be wary of false enlightenment’ rants wouldn’t it,” she pimped up in a ghosting voice, sipping away.

“Yeah, ‘nuff to put the shits up anybody,” said Tommy, almost shaking a little then, and drawing his chair closer into the table by pulling on its wooden arm rests. The floor of the tavern must have been designed to compliment this action, as the chair leg on floorboard transversal was relatively noiseless.

“Yes,” he said. “It’s ok encoding, but be wary of those who think they’ve got it, whereas all they have really gleaned is a false enlightenment constructed out of the needs of their own ego.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean,” nodded Tommy sagely. “Especially if you spent ages explaining it all very clearly and then they still get the wrong end of the stick.”

Gina tutted silently and batted her lids.

“It sure is a funny one,” interrupted The Captain, appearing from the nowhere. “On the one hand there’s those egos which are trying to prove the existence of God, and then there are those egos which are trying to disprove the existence of God.”

“Those proving for get told that their ego is creating something to believe in, and the ego of those arguing against told they are merely creating justification for their own acts of self, their egos making them seem more important than God to themselves. Some feel more intelligent and enlightened if they believe that there isn’t a God, others more blessed as they believe there is.”

“Yes, it’s a strange one, some people are happier if there is a God, whereas other people are happier if there isn’t a God.”

“That’s where I’ve never quite mirrored it, on that one,” he said. “I think maybe some people get confused over the morality thing. Although the moral beliefs are certainly good guidelines and structure social and health benefits as well, they are still two distinct aspects.”

“I guess that’s why a big part of a lot of belief systems are based around a method of forgiveness or acceptance. Again, this is often mistakenly confused with the escaping from the dictates of one’s parents, some rejecting their parent’s moralities in order to come to terms with their experiences of life, and rejecting their belief systems too.”

“A lot of modern psychology is built upon religious beliefs. Starting with Dostoyevsky’s three kinds of truth, that which one shares with other people, with one’s self, and with one’s God. Developing into one’s personal relationship with God, in that the conflict of dualities is resolved by making a decision or acceptance.”

“Further from this, at some point psychologists took out the God bit completely, and replaced it with a self-belief and self-reliance kind of system, the superhuman type philosophy. Only problem with this is that it only teaches how to be selfish, and if a consultant is giving out the worst kind of guidance such as ‘taste of own medicine’, then all that happens is that everyone is going round fucking over everyone else just to satisfy the needs of their own self egos.”

She could feel where this was all going but she didn’t let on, and hid her smile.

“So, the up shot of it all being, is that it’s your round, Tommy,” he said.

They laughed.

“A bit like the science and belief thing though isn’t it,” said Tommy, widening everyone’s eyes with his swift come back. “How does scientific evolution theory distract from belief, if you ask me it’s just more proof that it’s all not by accident.”

“Yes,” he said. They could all sense one of his sword like cuts through the air approaching. “Any time I have doubts about the existence of the almighty I just look at that,” he said, pointing to the glass of water.

“Water, yes, just look at the stuff. Now that is pure true honest genius!”

“Indeed,” she agreed, lifting her glass aloft so that they could all be entranced in the moment for a while longer.
“Just look at the stuff, pure and simple. If you were going to design something that you wanted people to drink, wash with, and was obvious when it had impurities in it, what colour would you make it.”

“That’s clear even to me,” laughed Tommy.

“I guess that kind of intelligent design thing keeps some people happy,” said Gina.

“Well, I just accept that God exists, and is clever enough to design things intelligently. That works for me. Irrespective of evolution, that for me doesn’t deny the almighty, just reinforces it,” he said.

“It’s a shame though,” said The Captain, his sadness showing. “All of these billions of years of evolution, and the only problem we have solved is how to make money.”

“When I’m around different people, sometimes I act differently,” he said. “This is so that we can relate to each other in fellowship.”

“Possibly it’s the same with religion. People find an aspect that they can relate to. But if there’s the afterlife, why the fuck do we fight over possessions. Guess it simply boils down to ego. If there is paradise why do men fight over mere earth?”

“I guess man’s ego continually tries to master man and destroy God. Also man’s ego continually tries to mimic creation thus destroying the power they feel God has over them. Most people end up rejecting God because some man is telling them what to do. Guess we should all try and look beyond the obvious.”

He pondered upon how sometimes if you mentioned to people you were a Christian, they immediately thought there was something wrong with you, and proceeded to try and help ‘cure’ you. Whatever. Perhaps they were so uncomfortable with their own beliefs they had to challenge his so religiously. Surely the genius lay in the similarities between the differences.

The pool cue clacked the balls on their colliding paths across the green felt cosmos.

“It’s a lot like when you look at other people. It’s easier to see other people’s goings on than your own, as you are observing rather than participating. Like when reality suppressant enables you to get a third person perspective on your self.”

“I blame the government,” he laughed. “It’s all a conspiracy. If people don’t believe in God they have to believe in money, so they go out and get it and kid themselves that they are happy behind a layer of tatt.”

“Hmm, you’ve never really lived in the aesthetic world though, honey, have you,” teased Gina, blinking her lashes up and down his appearance, much to everyone’s chuckling.

“Guess all that money can pay for some impressive things though, big buildings, cathedrals and all that.”

Tommy ticked and Gina acked. The old guy who The Captain had been watching them watch, took a swig of finality from his tot glass and slid back his chair. Standing and nodding with an air of satisfaction, he gestured a thank you to the bar staff and made a route for the exit.

Gina rose up as soon as the guy’s shadow had departed, and with an expert pick-up that showed no elbow motion tell, she retrieved the glass object into a pink handkerchief.

“Yup, guess that’s always been the way, the money has often been utilised to express the best of everything from that perspective in time. Thus the rich spent money getting the best artists to paint the best pictures, and the best artists where also the philosophers and scientists, making their own paint and tools by hand. Grand architecture has often been expressions of religion, art and culture, from stonehenge to st paul’s.”

“Hmm, yay, and the hilton building,” laughed Gina.

“Yeah, always been the way. From the egyptian kings with their iron hammers made from meteorites constructing their pointers to the heavens, to the masons with their symbols, try squares, plumb lines and levels. And those victorians with their mother of pearls reflecting the sunlight like the moon.”

They sipped and munched. Peanuts and alcoholic intoxicant.

“Erm, pink, Gina?” she teased, frowning playfully, and took a sip from her tall slender glass, the ice clacking slightly, and the lemon tickling her taste buds.

“Yeah, it’s one of Tommy’s weekenders,” smirked Gina, handing off to Tommy on her return from the little girl’s room.

“Guess it’s all well and good, and is fine, until it starts being used for power and control. All depends whether you look at it as a theme park or as a zoo.”

“Most of us need to be driven by a goal. Some people need something to motivate them. Money can be a token substitute.”

“Money never really got it going for me,” he said.

“Yeah, but you can be driven though, can’t you, when you want to be,” smiled Gina enthusiastically.

“Yeah, of course he can, not like it’s very often though,” she smirked, pinchning him loosely.

“Well, you know that bit in close encounters,” he said.

“Which bit?” said Tommy.

“The bit where he’s making mountains out of his potato rice,” he replied.

“Oh yes,” nodded Tommy almost thoughtfully.

“Constantly driven to create structures of beauty from soggy nanoparticles, for some unknown reason. Well, my whole life has been like that.”

“You used to work for corps though, didn’t you, hun,” said Gina.

“Well, yeah, kind of. It was much the same with them all in the end though.”

“Yup,” she said. “They seem to have a different view on it all than us. It’s a strange one. They can never seem to get
over the power and control thing.”

“Yeah, I put a lot into them, you know what I’m like, I work for the kinship, not for the money. Well, seemed ok for a while, and was interesting and fun. But then, they just seemed to go all weird on me. I think maybe because I didn’t go around blaming someone else for things that went wrong they saw that as the problem. Funny how some people react when you cover other people’s backs. What was that lark all about.”

“It sort of spiralled down from there. Some I even provided nourishment for and invited them into my home. Shame they just got greedy. Started off where I’d do clips and wait for feedback, and three months later I’d get an ack back complaining it wasn’t done so I wouldn’t get credited. Carried on like that for a few projects, and that coupled with the continued bombardment of stuff which was just nothing to do with me kind of spoil it all.”

“Did he go or was he pushed,” said Tommy.

“Yes, a common one so I’m told,” he said. “Saves them on licensing fees and contract overheads I hear. Guess that’s why they call it freelancing, everyone is trying to knock you off your steed. Although you don’t kinda expect it when you’re just out for a canter in the park with ‘friends’.”

“They can’t all be like that though, did you try any others?” smiled Gina optimistically.

“Of course. Tried a few others, but none really ever got the foster parent thing. Some just appeared from nowhere, trying to sniff round and find out what it was that I had. Others tried to copy what they thought were the solutions, but were merely five year old techs from long gone.”

“Bloody shame,” chuckled Tommy, half in sympathy, half in extreme piss-take.

“Worse thing was, I kept giving them all free advice and explaining it all time after time after time, but they didn’t listen, and even more so, when it all went wrong as I had just given them, they just scapegoated me for it too. Double thwack. Kinda makes you wonder.”

“Yeah, what’s that all about,” said Gina.

“So in the end I just didn’t bother trying to give any of my babies to any of them. After all, what’s the real point in makingcreds that you don’t want, and an offshoot of it being that you are funding corps who’s morality you don’t necessary follow, and are only interested in just making a fast buck rather than providing a quality solution. Just taking your carefully nurtured offspring and exploiting them in cages of code. Letting them propagate in ways you don’t believe in.”

“You should have kunted them!” sniggered Tommy.

“Not really my style. I could have floored their corps, but hey, that would have just created hassle for some other poor sucker, who would then have been in a bad mood and hassled some other poor sucker, and so on,” he said.

“You could have niggled them with minor hacks, real small ones, multi-streamed annoyance ones,” said Tommy, in a playful way.

“Nah, where’s the skill in that.”

“What about litigation?” said Gina.

“Again, not really my style, it’d probably have cost loads in law fees. Well, not unless I was having a really bad day, or needed a bit of entertainment.”

Tommy nodded.

“Also, they sort of did it subtly over a while, so there were plenty of comms which could have wrong sided me if it came down to splitting hairs.”

“Yeah, like the one that said, ‘Lose the ego and don’t treat your next programmer like a kunt and you’ll be fine’, ” she said laughing, and they all joined in.

“So what did you do?” asked Gina.

“Just walked away, just walked away,” he smiled.

“You still code though, babes, don’t you,” she said reassuringly, rubbing the top half of his arm with her hand.

“Of course, honey,” he winked. “I haven’t forgotten how.”

“Yeah, we sometimes thank you for a little tweakage here and there,” smiled Tommy.

“Indeed,” he nodded, arms out wider slightly in a hug like motion. “That’s how we always stay one step ahead of the isoteric hounds. I save my best codage for those who I love.”

“Yay! Yay! Ack-ack codage away!” cheered Gina.

“Frustrating though. I think ultimately it’s incredibly disappointing that no-one simply wanted to work together. A massive missed opportunity for them really. Oh well, I’ll just keep those best systems to myself.”

“Maybe just as well if they can’t get over their power and control, exploitation thing. No point draining yourself to over your limits if the relationship is parasitic and not symbiotic,” she said, trying to garner some sympathy.

“Yeah, save the codage for another day,” he said.

“There, there, hun,” said Gina, noticing her comforting of him.

“Hm, it did feel a bit like having to dump a girlfriend who I cared about a lot because she had cheated,” he acknowledged. “Although what probably hurt more was having to delay the rave for a while, as some others who were probably linked withdrew too.”

“Shame though, but that’s yer basic economics,” said Tommy. “There’s a limited amount of money which is mostly redistributed. Every economy drives for growth, in wealth, resources, and thus population. Some elected go for the fad of selling out the young with debt from their Cybertechnics and their housing costs. All creating something out of nothing, and forcing them to work later in life to pay for it all.”

“Doesn’t have to be like that though, imagine a world where we all lived as one.”
“All business is mostly a pyramid scheme.”

“That’s the problem when the elected start going down the same morality route as the corps. They make it so there’s no direct point of access, all of it hidden behind levels of abstraction with no-one to have any individual responsibility over anything.”

“Yeah, reminds me of a clip I did once. The corp it was for was one of those consultancy project management firms,” he said.

“A cutter and shutter?” laughed Tommy.

“Mostly. The irony didn’t escape me when they tried to get tech support from the firm they had just sold off. Seems they sold off too much and it took months to get any sort of ack back from them.”

“Well, money’s never been a problem in your business has it, sweetie,” teased Gina.

“I’ve never been told I was the cheapest. I’m often told I’m the best,” he said.

“You ain’t no ten dollar hooker are you, darlin’,” she laughed.

“I just misunderstood,” he smirked.

“There comes a time, in the life of every genius,” said The Captain. “Where they reach the understanding that their work may not be understood in their own lifetime.”

“Now,” continued The Captain. “The main problem here is of abandonment in the face of pointlessness. But, on consideration, we all owe as much to the future as we do the past. Knowledge learnt, Keplared, and the output fed to the next input.”

“Yeah, bit like goghy I guess,” he said. “If only these bastards would look at my paintings, I don’t think anyone gets it, fickle kunts.”

“Makes you wonder though doesn’t it, he was most prolific in the final days. Kinda makes you think if he knew but thought he’d hold on and get as much out as possible.”

“Yeah, but apparently it was his periods of lucidity in which he created.”

“Hmm, maybe. But perhaps he was only painting what he had seen.”

“Does the genius cause the madness, or does the madness come from being a genius, the frustration at not being able to do anything with it.”

“Yes,” said The Captain sternly. “Be wary of false enlightenment.”

Even though they all thought, ‘here we go again’, they still kind of shivered and shuddered, and even he moved about a bit uncomfortably in his seating.

“One such false enlightenment is when it is used as justification,” said The Captain.

“It’s a bit like psychology, really it’s only someone’s opinion. Two different experts most likely have two different opinions, different views and different constructs influencing their response.”

“Just because an anomaly doesn’t fit the pattern doesn’t mean it’s an anomaly. It’s often simply that the model is wrong, limited by an artificial band of personal assumptions and false base calculations.”

“A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, be careful it’s not just your own opinion. Just because it isn’t your way doesn’t mean it isn’t right, and remember whatever it is you think you may know, chances are, someone else knows it too. Make sure it isn’t just dictated by the limits of your experiences.”

“Yes, I saw a clip once where some guy was going on about his latest theory. Well, he may well have been right, but really he just used the evidence that he showed to prove his theory, with no other real counter argument.”

“It was based around paintings from some ancient civilisation or something. The guy’s theory was that they believed that the heavenly world was opposite in nature to the earthly world. Thus he had decided that the paintings of non-fertile sex were done in order to promote fertility in the earthly world by depicting the opposite in the heavenly world.”

“Well, he may well have been right.”

“Yes, who knows.”

“Exactly. They might evenly as well just been a bunch of pervs.”

“Youp, or maybe just showing really early forms of contraception.”

“Maybe they were just really into blowjobs.”

“Yes, ‘gaming or porn’,” laughed Tommy.

“The problem these days is that everyone thinks they’re so clever, and that we have invented everything.”

“Whereas really it’s just the same stuff each civilisation has discovered for itself as others have. Take greek poetry with it’s hexameters and stuff. The story, the song, the intonation, the rules, all intricate and beautiful.”

“Yes, but a lot of those rules were added on in later stories though, some of the original tellers didn’t stick to the form so rigidly.”

“Guess if you’re going to have a genre it needs to be defined by it’s rules, and then people wanting to replicate the success or create in that style have something to go by.”

“Cept for rig-boy here, he just whistles ‘I did it my way’,” laughed Gina.

“Most of it evolves naturally though doesn’t it. Like elected systems. If a bunch move away, soon they will need direction, and a leader and rules will emerge. A natural route to the solution. Natural selection or selection of the natural.”

“Not like the perceived democracy of public message boards then, they only moderate and display those they want to.”

“Like the two questions of nature or nurture, God or science, opinion and ego. Bit of both if you ask me,” he said.

“Well, I can’t sit around all day philosing with you youngsters,” said The Captain suddenly, and got up to leave.
They all gave him hugs and cheery goodbyes.

“I know I’ve been mostly silent this afternoon in the pub,” said The Captain, slowly. “But I do listen to what you all have to say in your own little viewpoints. The fact that you discuss does encourage me so, you know.”

“We know, pops,” said Tommy.

“Yay,” said Gina, kissing The Captain’s leathery cheek.

“Bye-bye for now,” waved The Captain.

“Byes!” they all chorused.

“It is sometimes sad for The Captain,” he said. “Even with my long time with him, there’s loads of stuff from our late night chats that I just don’t get. Then all I can do is look at him and know that he knows that no-one else may understand what he is talking about for another few hundred years. The frustration of that alone must be one keplar head-fuck.”

They all nodded. Not that they could do anything about it though.

“The problem with being a genius is that amongst others you either look insane or an idiot, and amongst other geniuses merely average,” he said.

“Yeah, and as we all have that instinctive drive to communicate with each other in order to pass on knowledge and experience, with The Captain, the difficulty arises as there’s no-one to pass on knowledge to,” said Tommy.

“What is the master without an apprentice,” she said.

“Merely a slave to his genius,” he asked. “Maybe one day one of us will be good enough.”

“They all took another drink from their drinks in their own manner, hoping that would bring some enlightenment. “Easy this stuff,” said Gina. “Even a monkey could use it.”

Tommy just glared and held out his hand towards Gina, while she helpfully blew the liquid dry.

Gina pincered the adapted mascara brush into between Tommy’s thumb and index finger, and Tommy rolled it across the surface with care and skill. Once the fingerprint copy had been collected to its full extent, Gina held out the container for Tommy to pop into. Job done, sample collected. Flicking it up a little like a fielder triumphant in her catch, Gina nipped it in into her cotton blouse pocket, giving the outside of the garment a tap, tap, on its deposit, just for safety’s sake, securing and reassuring its presence.


He and Tommy collected up their empty drinking vessels, murmured over to the dark wooden bar, and set them down gently. Thanking the staff gleefully, they all departed The Royal Hussar, and made their way back homeward to end another day.

Chapter Five – Day trip

“So, yay, how many clicks have I just driven all yous then?” asked Gina, parking up in a rock and a sway.

“Bout two hundred I’d say, hun,” she said.

“So, you all love me then, yay?” smiled Gina.

“Yes, Gina, we all love you,” he said.

“No, I mean, you all love me, don’t you,” blinked Gina.

“What now, Gina,” guessed Tommy.

Tommy didn’t so much care as have immediate concern for which was going to cost him more, creds from Jonny or teared out mascara.

“Tickets.”

By the time Jonny and Sheila pulled up in the lovebug wagon, the rf feeds were already initiating. As long as they all stayed within ten metres of Jonny’s central frequency ticket, they could belly hop in on his waves and trick in through the system. Once the fingerprint copy had been collected to its full extent, Gina held out the container for Tommy to pop it into. Job done, sample collected. Flicking it up a little like a fielder triumphant in her catch, Gina nipped it in into her cotton blouse pocket, giving the outside of the garment a tap, tap, on its deposit, just for safety’s sake, securing and reassuring its presence.


He and Tommy collected up their empty drinking vessels, murmured over to the dark wooden bar, and set them down gently. Thanking the staff gleefully, they all departed The Royal Hussar, and made their way back homeward to end another day.
replenishment to their tired hearts.

They all looked at each other smiling. They didn’t need to tell each other which gameclip they were going to go on first, they all knew. It was always the same one. He shuffled along at the back while she danced forward up front.

“C’est ne pas un livre v8.3,” said the sign. Good. There wasn’t a queue. A few seats left in the multisystem multirig.

They settled down and firmed in, the rig fielding their thoughts in a whirlwind of carnival firings.

“Version 8.3 rocks,” said Gina.

“Yeah, definitely the best. v2 was the hardest to develop, took a lot to be in a good enough mood to code out what was already written in imagination,” he said.

From the blacked out distance came the shape, spiralling over itself in a blur, unidentifiable at its range. As the white dot flew nearer it became clearer, and the strands of luminescence coalesced into view.

A white rectangle, glowing in beauty yet modest in its display. Perfectly formed, perfectly proportioned. The width, height and depth set at the natural equation of 111, 175 and 8.

The obelisk shone into construction and opened like a story book. Taking on their illumination, the words glowed their strange green and blue glow, cascading out and into the participants of the game, becoming bright white, almost ultraviolet and transparent. The page numbers blowing the sails of years like the wind, the speed and strength in translation translacing meaning into world view.

The route through the clip was in truth navigated by the observer. Whilst concise in their meanings, the individual interpretation was always going to be biased by its own needs.

Tacking and pivoting in their own waves through the oceanic size of the abstracted systems, they flowed through the script in their courses, each racing or jumping as was their want. Playing back and watching from the different geos and egos, some used the lightpencils to correct the mistakes that we all inevitably make for ourselves in our lifetimes, others merely weighed themselves against the words.

After the clips had looped back so they had another chance to read what they had missed, the rig retracted and they came out from the inner once more.

“A beautiful piece of contemporary existentialism, capturing the innate conflict in the co-existence of the triasm between the aesthetic, ethical and spiritual dimensions,” said Jonny. It was one of Jonny’s more familiar matched responses, but they still enjoyed the listening, and Jonny definitely still enjoyed the telling.

“Don’t take it all too seriously, it’s just for fun, for entertainment,” he said. “Some might even say it had humour in it.”

He was checking a couple of readouts from a palmpiece that seemed to have appeared from nowhere. He tutted.

“I can’t believe so few people fill out the user contributed notes,” he sighed. “Oh well, guess they’re all too busy hacking.”

“Hack it up, babes,” she said, and kissed him, and then gave his hand such a drag as to indicate they were going.

Maybe she didn’t like the fact that he had opened up the maintenance panel and wired in, just to check how the readouts were listing. Well, he could check it from base easy enough, but where was the fun in that.

He cleaned up quickly, as was the joy with Jonny’s custom insertion pegs, and let her drag him away from one source of fun to another.

Skipping from gameclip to gameclip, they let the joy of the moment take hold, and played free of care whilst time allowed them.

Strolling over to the familiar stall, he dropped the tokens and scooped up the projectiles in a single, swift motion. With a skim of his wrist he tossed the ball to her after her eyes had flash acked his challenge.

She hesitated for an instant with the trepidation of the coming test of skill. Her delicate animation reminded him of one of the first times that they had met up. She had let slip her veil of hiding from him for a gentle moment, and he had seen a scared little girl, who briefly managed a nervous smile and a cheeky giggle.

Pulling her arm back in a pivot like a trebuchet, Gina’s encouragement signaled the release of the rasp and the projectile was launched. Acceleration and accuracy that would have made a ninja jealous.

“Guess who’s daddy couldn’t wait for a boy,” she smiled.

“Ah, never mind, honey. Guess it has its uses,” sympathised Gina, and gave Tommy a ‘just you remember that for future reference’ kind of look.

He took up his turn and launched his missile without much fuss, but with a fair amount of skill.

“No daddy with daughters,” he said. “But three older brothers. Plus the mates of the three older brothers. Which meant the ratio of batting to fielding for me was such that a a long accurate throw was quickly developed. Through survival rather than skill or expert coaching. Although ‘chuck it this end’ might amount to trade secrets in some quarters.”

The sets of coconuts knocked from their perches. Counting up the tickets they had collected over several visits, they were pleased they had enough for their prize. A styled ice-bucket, brown leather casing and horse-shaped miniature trophies as decoration. Functional and aesthetic, just the job for the task planned.

That hunger feeling had been there a little while, and had it not been for such excitement they might have had to interrupt their playing sooner. Their thoughts of hunger matched to the environment they were in. That special taste only

with real cheese.

The sliding doors kicked open. Although they weren’t the most elvish of constructions, they performed the task. Their main aim was accomplished, by automatic opening nobody needed to press their hands against the door. Thus, when everybody came to eat they weren’t merely just eating what each other had just smeared onto the door push panels.

They strolled across the shining alternatively tiled floor to the counter, and gazed at the fast-food menu in all its glory, its pictures and its confusion mimicking an instinctive choice response to spur addiction and selection.

“You’re such a slut,” she said to him. “You really are, you know.”

He had positioned himself to the side of the service counter, as per usual. While they were all amusing themselves with choice and subsequent wait for harvest, he had other lures of expediency to satisfy his itinerary. Sooner or later one of the staff would go through the service door.

“There you go, enjoy your meals,” smiled the service assistant from behind the counter, in what would seem full templated script response mode, but in fact was genuine and with natural conversational feeling.

“Thanks honeybun,” smiled back Gina. Carrying the parcels back outside, they unwrapped them whilst seated on the wooden easel benches.

“59779” he said.

“You are such a hack slut,” she scolded. “You really are. You just can’t help yourself can you. It’s like everywhere we go, every deck, every pad, every scanner. All just another bit of hack skirt for you to flirt with.”

He knew she was right, but somehow it didn’t seem to matter. So he was a hack slut. Nothing wrong with that, really. Tapping away into his palmpiece he added the code to the database that the members kept for themselves. There weren’t many places that they didn’t know how to gain access through.

The oars slid slowly and smoothly in tune with the ripple of the water.

“There’s no use in giving it one of your ‘success is achieved by proficiency in the medium rather than the proficiency of the participant’ rants, just put some effort into it!” laughed Gina.

“Just a little bit more, you pair. Then you can have some of this chococloud dreamwhip cream cake!” she shrilled, joining in with the comedy and tapping on her container.

“Row? This isn’t a stream it’s a lake!” said Tommy.

“Then make your own current, dear boy, dear boy,” spoke and sang Gina.

Drawing up to the tiny island, they smiled as the weeping trees came into fuller view, their delicate beauty floating gently in the breeze. Occasionally a piece of its blossom would be released from its mooring into the air streams, and glide a path outwards, drifting downwards. They noticed how the steady variations in the undulating wind and the fairy crafted shapes of the blossom interplayed in such a way that the random factors created a pattern of coverage, carpeting the whole island in a soft dotted painting of petals.

He never quite understood why everything had to be in those strange containers these days. They were sort of plastic shrink wrappers, only they were more like some sort of organic paper polycomposite. He ought to look it up one cycle, but hey, who had the time until the data was needed to be known.

Both he and Tommy would have just picked up their slices and been half way through by now in one bite, had she not produced those sweet spoon-fork things of hers from her gadget bag. Just as well as it turned out, for although the cake looked like spongy stuff, it was more like pure cream and ice cream fluff. So it had a lovely light airy sponge texture, but was even more melty in the mouth, a vanilla and chococloud swirl main centre, with a more solid biscuit chocolate base, some sort of thick caramel spread roofing, topped off with curly flakes of both milk and white chocolate.

“Maybe all that advertising from old wasn’t all lies,” said Tommy, not feeling slightly sick until after the last mouthful, although it quickly disappeared again, so maybe it had been due to his rate of consumption. Come to look at it, Tommy was the only one who had completed. Still, it didn’t matter, he had enjoyed it fair enough. Maybe those girls from the ads had the right idea, much better shoveling that lovely stuff into your mouth that having it rammed with, actually, thought change instigated.

They rested and lazed in the warm sun, amongst the green grass and the white and rose petals. In their stillness the world moved on and around them, and in their relaxed concentration they watched every minute beautiful glory.

It had been a good day and good fun, the best place to practice skills they might need one day, amongst friends in a relaxed environment. Well, with a bit of edginess and subversion, giving that they were riding on floating tickets.

**Chapter Six - Imbalance**

He ticked off the rig, and sighed as the view returned. Twisting back in and realigning. Hiccups. She was going to kick his ass for this one. It’s not so much that everything wasn’t clean, as much as it hadn’t been cleaned. Not a creation of mess, just a fading through time and a gathering of desolance.

Hardly his fault though really. It was just that pursuing his work to the depth that he wanted meant taking long periods of concentration. He had never been one for being a nine-to-fiver. It wasn’t just the routine that he couldn’t do, but that the timing seemed all wrong and too short a sync. It took a lot longer than a typical nine till five to rev up, let alone get into the zone required for autocompletions.
He guessed the difficulties arose when the doubling up carried on over too long a period. If the suppressant was both being used for codal zoning and for relaxation, then it was easy to see how the ratings could become transparent.

She sure would bitch at him, he was way out. He had been spending far too long in the rig. Not that it really mattered, but obviously real interfacing was tricky.

Sometimes he didn’t even bother to readjust back in properly, like you do when you wake up in the night needing a pee, but try and not open your eyes so as to pretend you’re still asleep. So it was with him, he figured he wasn’t going to be in the real long enough to warrant the slow down and speed up again to get back into the rig.

He stood there watching. The events unfolding before his eyes. Slowly, seemingly scripted, elongated over a stretching putty of time. That was the problem with the real, sometimes it was just too fucking slow, and it became painful waiting for the delay in reality.

“There you go, cheers,” said the assistant.

“Thanks,” he let out at last. Although only seconds in the real, it seemed an age in his mind flickering, it’s speed reading every detail, seeing every particle flow in the air, and every rarefaction of vibrating sound that would become listened speech. He sometimes thought it a pity he couldn’t see round corners though.

He left the transport commercial outlet and swooped round the corner. Then he noticed how quiet it was. How silent. His thoughts in his head were louder than the noise from the surrounding environment. Not that they were loud, but just fast, the buzz they created making a greater sound than the emptiness around him.

“He’s not going to end up visiting the store, even if some tried to differentiate themselves in dress or stature, they were pretty much of a muchness. Then it might go to the local outlets. At least you’d recognise the staff, so there couldn’t be any type of plants laid down in wait to catch you out if you were having a tricky moment.

Beyond that, the familiarity might not be so welcome. The need to indicate a basic pattern matched response, all too difficult when the Asotrerials are really off, and there’s no fooling those who know you.

To then what is left, the 24-hour open access store. Those places always seemed to draw the type of stereotype that rose from slumber at twilight, irrespective of what time period the day was actually in. Still, done now, packets retrieved.

The Captain sat whilst he stood, pacing.

“If I have to go in to do this season’s asotrerials then all they are going to do is destroy what I believe in and replace it with something else,” he said. “I’ve been in that room with the mirror window before, as you know.”

“Yes, I know,” murmured The Captain. “The number of dawns you’ve been pushed through some would say is slightly excessive.”

“It isn’t paranoia, cross paranoia or anticipatory paranoia. It’s not like that. And it isn’t the reality suppressant, as you know,” he explained.

“Yes, I know,” nodded The Captain. “Always used to irk me as a youngster that one. When I’d be trying to explain a new theory to some of the overseers, they would just say that they would have to refer to the wacky charts.”

“It’s similar to an infinite game of hack whispers,” he continued. “I am able to link just about anything together, as constructed realities are.”

He looked at The Captain, hoping to see some sort of look of understanding.

“Continue,” nodded The Captain.

“Yes,” he said, hoping the ack was genuine and not just leading. Not that it mattered, the databurst had started and it was flowing out. “After a while I can see what books they’ve read, what clips they’ve seen, what episodics they like,
and the main media routes they feed from. Almost a narrow banded input hack whispers or hack media source, a repeated input response of someone else's opinion.

“I see,” said The Captain, instantly wishing to have uttered a better phrase in the current circumstances.

“Hm,” he pressed the air from his mouth. “So, anticipatory relays and routed opinion. Like when you look at pages of code or text and read them as an image, the words and syntax forming presupposed pictogramatic sequences.”

“Ah, the pictographic construction methods,” tutted in The Captain, rubbing his chin earnestly. “Yes, we’ve discussed those before I believe. I think you were right by the way, the bit of both is best in patterned learning there.”

“Indeed,” he agreed, distracted from the active thread for a moment to complete another reasoning.

“The way your Cybertechnic taught early language comprehension has biased your interleaved interpretation methodologies,” said The Captain. “As your base was the block reading method, you were able to add onto it the phonetic method in order to achieve your particular accelerated interpretation.”

“I like to call it ‘phonetic blocks’,” he said. “Or perhaps maybe ‘segmented phonetic pictotary’, if you’ve cycles to spare.”

“So you’ve been continuing your work with thought recording and retrieval then,” said The Captain, placing his hands on his knees and sitting up slightly.

“Thought capture is a bit of a holy grail of mine, as you know,” he replied. “The ability to be able to capture what I’m thinking when in the rig, forge instantaneous memory during the top keplar cycles, before the solution disappears again from view with the end of the reaction. But that isn’t it either. It’s not like it’s one thing, it’s a whole bunch, all cascading in on themselves and conflicting.”

“Remember it’s your brain that produces the solution, not the reality suppressant,” said The Captain. “The suppressant just helps you relax. Don’t fall into the trap of just tapping the suppressant and expecting it to come up with the answer, you still have to think. That’s the key, maintaining the thought process through the suppressant.”

“It’s like if you read something,” he said. “And at a later date it’s in a conversation which covers similar subjects, it’s highly likely that you will merely repeat what you’ve read without interpretation and expressing it as your own opinion, indeed, the listeners could interpret it as your own opinion. It’s also highly probable that if you encounter a different source repeating the same read subject, the information will be designated as trivial and obvious, and in addition the relayer a poor source of information.”

Continuing his pacing, he continued his tale.

“I’ve been working later in the evening, nights, and doing weekenders again as well,” he said. “It’s almost like it’s much better and easier to function when the rest of society is relaxed and not giving out it’s hectic buzz and static.”

“So when is the last time you felt relaxed?” enquired The Captain.

“Relaxed?” he said.

“Yeah, relaxed.”

“In what way?” he said.

The Captain sighed. “In a relaxed way! You know. Not tense.”

“You know I don’t really relax when I’m working,” he said. “So that’s not a system status I really recall.”

“No wonder you’re shy of Asoterials at the moment then,” muttered The Captain.

“Yes, I’ve been in that room with the mirror window,” he retorted. “In my early years I used to go there thinking that they were actually going to say something useful.”

The Captain let himself let out a little laugh. He chuckled too, the irony wasn’t lost on him either.

“But, as you know, they’re not really interested in solving the problem, but merely creating an aesthetic solution. Paint over the cracks.”

“Yes,” said The Captain. “That’s really the facility that they are aimed at.”

“They just try and break what you believe in and try and replace it with an alternate falseness of consensual reality,” he continued, the pacing gathering to a race as his explanation grew.

The Captain nodded with a knowingness.

“Once I went there and they gave it the old time patterning one, which may suit their purposes, but it doesn’t mine,” he continued. “Saying that I should give up cola, caffeine, nicotine, and go to bed at 9 and get up at 6. Well, that’s just utterly fucking ridiculous.”

The Captain allowed himself a fuller, belly driven laugh. “I can see that it was the ‘go to bed at 9 and get up at 6’ that really turned you right off it.”

“Oh, I can see that’s funny,” he said. “But really, it’s only advice aimed at making the anomaly fit the curve, when really it’s the fact that the curve is only a best fit that’s the problem.”

The Captain was still laughing a little, but acking out that he was listening and Keplaring what was being discussed.

“Nine-to-five might suit the factory owners,” he said. “But it’s shitte all use to me. Society merely becomes a structured system of false enlightenments, varying from bulk whispers, opinion, advertising, to manipulation and control. I know all the little conspiracy theories and ego-rationalisations keep everyone busy, but what good is it to me. Everyone just having their own conversations dropping in phrases which they think are important. A twenty-four hour sleep segment is so wrong. Two four or five hour segments is much better.”

The Captain belted out a roar. “The afternoon nap!”

“Look, it doesn’t have to be afternoon nap, the timing isn’t the key, it’s the displacement. And it takes much longer than twenty-four hours to rev up into a decent keplar cycle, sometimes sleep is the last thing you want.”

“I see that,” said The Captain. “Allow me my fun.”
“Yeah, ok, I wouldn’t deprive you of that,” he said. “But straight away they’re coming in with the constructs. Making you wait in the room off the corridor, as who knows who strolls by, staring. Enough to make anyone feel uncomfortable. And later, in the second room they have a pentagram dotted out using drawing pins behind the questioner.”

“Shape conspiracy matching straight away,” agreed The Captain.

“It’s all right,” he continued. “But I’ve had my brain washed too many times to be bothered with it all again.”

“And I know what you’re going to come out with next,” said The Captain.

“Yup,” he said.

“Yes,” said The Captain. “And at some point they will discuss your reality suppressant consumption.”

“Indeed,” he said. “Doesn’t that just irk you so damn much!”

“Always and whenever I hear it, true is true,” sighed The Captain.

“Social use is no different than anything else,” he ranted.

“Moderation in all things,” wised The Captain.

“Yeah. It’s the tone of it all though isn’t it,” he said. “Blaming reality suppressant when it’s just a symptom, a counter play for the real problem.”

“Hmmm,” deeply sounded The Captain.

“And as for ceasing,” he said, gaining into full flow. “Well, that’s just silly.”

“I know that,” said The Captain.

“To remove the cure for the symptom doesn’t remove the cause of the symptom, does it,” he said.

“I know what you mean with that one,” said The Captain.

“Whoever did that clip on the non-physical dependence was just silly,” he said. “We all know that there’s the brain ache, the hyperness as things are too slow without the processing realm of the suppressant. And as for the sweating palms, well, sweating everything, it’s just general temperature regulation fuck-city.”

“We know this now,” said The Captain.

“All that before we get into the real depth of it all too. The base that makes it all work and tic,” he said. “The fact that we are wired differently. The reality suppressant helps us to think, makes our synapses fire in our natural vibration. Raising the excitatory state of the synapses so that connections are more readily formed.”

“Ok. As Jonny would say, what’s the download?” said The Captain, whilst not disliking the conversation keen to make more rapid progress.

“Where do I start,” he laughed. “The frustration of telling advice, and then being scapegoated when it isn’t taken and things go wrong. Nobody contributes anything back to what I am talking to them about. They just repeat back to me what somebody else has told them. The externals processing or extrapolation has been made. It just doesn’t seem to matter what I do, it all reacts and changes and doesn’t alter a thing, like a groundhog day completely dependent on the actions of other people, with my own actions never influencing an instant.”

“Non-progressive Keplaring,” said The Captain.

“And when I try and multiphase it, everyone just keeps repeating what I am saying,” he said.

“Repeating what your are saying?” said The Captain.

“Yes. Écoute et répète.”

He shoved his hands deep into his pockets, and The Captain pondered on his keyphrase for a brief moment.

“Or worse than that,” he continued. “Repeating back to me what somebody else has told them. The externals reflecting a non-relevant pattern matched response.”

“I am aware of your problem,” said The Captain. “I’ve rigged up some new wave reflexes that I’d like you to try.”

“Oh,” he said.

“This should help us better understand the isoteric structure, and thus ultimately help you when you come to the big hack,” explained The Captain.

“The big hack?”
“Yes, the big hack. We’ve known it was coming. So let’s formulate it and see what we can do,” said The Captain, setting up the reverse-feed abstract visualisation unit.

He fell into the rig and let the programming run through his mind. A shared face. Three vertices each watching each other. Triangularly spiralling into infinity. A gate. A guard from the inner and a guard from the outer. Eight faces, three shared bonds.

“Hmmm,” said The Captain. “Your’s seems a little different. Most lock the door on the outside.”

Chapter Seven – pop

“You’re just a fucking barcode!” she shouted, at and through him. Ouch, that must have hurt. Through the door and across the rug she glided like a leaf, straight in for the slap. Not a hesitation or a halt, justitia ex tempore.

Oops. As soon as she had completed the impact of her performance she had regretted it. He didn’t even attempt any delicate maneuver to block or lessen the impact of the blow by siding his cheek. He just sat there motionless, and the full force of her twatting hit him sharply.

She sank down to his seated level, bending her legs to the floor gracefully until she was kneeling. Massaging the sting from his face slowly, first with fingers and then with the back of her hand, hoping to warm the coldness of her impact.

Shit. She hadn’t gone for him like that since he borrowed her rig that time, and accidentally got that crumb of chocolate wedged in it somehow.

“Sorry, baby,” she said, her eyes burning a path towards his.

“It’s ok,” he said, and motioned what would have been a smile. He took her other hand in his, and stroked it with his thumb.

“It wasn’t so clear what the sitch was this time,” she said. “I thought you’d just been pissing around as usual. I didn’t know it was so big an isoteric structure.”

She turned and looked at The Captain, who stood there briefly, nodding. The Captain had orange2 flagged her, which usually meant he had just been too playful. This time however, she now realised it had all been a warm up for the big hack.

As she kissed his forehead softly, she could almost feel the buzz of his mind beneath his skin, the crackle of processing writhing inside. His eyes were moving and changing their focus in rapidity, echoing the switching and analysing of his synapses.

Helping him up from the chair of the rig, she noticed he was weakened slightly by the hack.

“If The Captain ever plugs you into one of those,” he said, pointing to the now resting unit. “Start to worry.”

Noticing his weakening, and ignoring his glances of annoyance, The Captain handed her one of his special recovery sachets. They were a bit like the packs marathon runners would get handed after crossing the line, only these were salts for the brain rather than the body.

Leaving through the door, the sight of the transport was enough to pad him a little strength, and he tensed his legs, and shrugged off her walking frame mannerisms with his shoulders. It was some fucking wagon, the monster truck.

Standing there like both a 1 and a 0, the Land Rover Defender aroused that certain instinctive edge of admiration in both her and him. The power and the reliability. The craftsmanship of the timeless classic. The barded mount for les chevaliers d’honneur.

“Yes,” she said. “I brought the monster truck.”

“I am pleased,” he said.

She winked and smiled. “Like my lover. Always guaranteed to keep the power going right until the end, always gets the job done.”

“Winch or rack today for you, madam,” he cracked.

A moment of laughing, and then the standing there before the monument of engineering. Dressed in the glory of Nato matt black, the roof rack equipped, the sidestep bars adding their promise of stability, and the checker plated outline highlighting the E3 quality we all seek. Enough lighting to find one of Gina’s earrings in the worst of fields, and the spare wheel on the bonnet for that final female touch. Yes, that female touch. Wheel on the middle of the bonnet so the rear door wasn’t so weighted when it was swung open on a slope. Handy when hauled up on a steep incline, water up to the knees, in the rain. Not like the parking aid on those sweet small toy jeeps.

Starting smoothly as soon as it was called upon, the engine exponentialled into motion. Tommy was in the hot seat, with the blinged out Gina at his side.

They both sat in the rear seat, more hackgear behind them. A blanket and her hugs warming him from the acid chills of the previous hack. Normally he’d have a rest up after that big an isoteric analysis, but the game had already started and there was no key to press for pause.

Day turned to night, and more blankets were unbagged as Gina and Tommy took turns to pilot the transport. The jagged blur of the out of town road lighting hazed in colours in his eyes if they opened on a less deep cycle. She made him as comfortable as she could, and he took his turn too. As she tickled her fingers across his forehead, she sang her improvised song in a whisper.

“Set my love”
I set my love awaiting, waiting for you,
Throughout the seasons darkness, forever I knew.

A teared dewdrop shining, for the morning sun,
My timeless pixie armour; waiting for you.

He slept a quiet sleep in the lullaby rocking of the transport, dreaming softly of her love.

He cast back the blanket and sprang into life like a daisy opening for the sun in a speeded up clip. He was in an excited rush. Before the transport had settled to a halt, he had tricked the door latch and was ready to disembark. He danced over to the grass in a kind of side-stepping sprint motion, a lower stance and a firm press down of acceleration.

Once nestled on the springy greenness of the wild growth, he opened the satellite uplink panels and kicked the palmpiece into action from its battery saving slumber.

The primary assault hack was a beautiful Coldiltz double he had prepared earlier. On a previous hack into the system he had faked an escape, the detectors not realising he was still there for roll call, so when the real escape occurred the numbers they counted weren’t true.

Stealthing in under his false log count hack, he drifted into the rigged centres. Lying in wait for a while until the timing cycles coalesced, then an under curve swoop up, and the lock un beeped.

Tommy was playing this one for show. Jonny had rigged him up with some touch sensors, so that when Tommy clicked his fingers the shuriken grunt of code took out what remained of the surveillance system in unison with the debeep.

The gate creaked open. It had been a while since it had been opened, and although the toughened black paint had weathered the elements, the bearings of the hinges had degraded in performance through lack of use and movement.

“Never go in through the door,” she smiled, and cut the three wires of the fence as she intoned her well loved phrase.

“Yeah, very good, babes. But luckily we didn’t forget to ground the couple of thousand volts parsing through it,” he said.

“Don’t get jealous, honey,” she ticked. “These are Jonny maxcuts. Insulated to the bone and proximity sensored for current.”

“Clever bitch,” he said, kissing her oh-so-soft cheek, but shying from the bum pinch on this occasion. That cheek was certainly soft. “Love you, sweet cheeks.”

“You boys aren’t the only ones with your geek gadgets, you know,” she kissed back. “Least we have some sexy stylin’ too. Better than your black, or silver, or black and silver.”

Gina was laughing. Looks like a bit of humour was bringing them all a bit closer.

“Ok, mistress of many masterings,” interjected Tommy, hamming it up even more so. “Can you hit that thing from here.”

Gina stamped her foot and huffed. “Go do it with goats. You know I’m crap at throwing. Hympt. You can’t casket hack can you.”

He stood there silently. Rotating his wrists in warm up. Flexing his fingers so they pumped liked a heart. Jonny had taken out the main observers from afar. The wired fence and the ir motion sensors were always really meant to keep out the bigger animals, to stop them chewing the masts or urinating near the cable entry points. Bastards, they’d piss and corrode anything given enough time, and for some reason they’d eat their way through that sheathing as though it tasted like candy.

Eyeing up the sensor networks, he slowed his breathing. Each atop a concrete pillion, the steel masts held the arrays aloft in their vigilance. Some hacks required elegance, some required skill. These little fuckers required just one thing, the brute force approach.

As they smashed they emitted that joyous crackle and hiss. Hence the rock approach, the encasements were wired and laced, enough to fry any pigeon mistaken for a tamperer, and severely melt the skill of any pianist. They were military spec, although cheap, hence the fry effect was never touted as a failing. They were added on much to the disgust of everyone after the facility had closed down. That gave that extra satisfaction when they fissled.

“All the fun of the fair,” he laughed.

Hacks and slacks done, they strolled across the bracken and dark grassed field. Approximately in the centre, a few rough trees partially obscured the plain concrete pillbox. They were based on the design of the World War Two gun emplacements, which in turn were based on the boxes Victorian ladies had for their tablets and habits. Octagonal in design, for gun duty they covered every fire arc, for pill guard the eight segments gave one per day, plus that special space for the panic pill or a keepsake. In the present case however, the eight sides echoed the incoming routes of the interworked optical cables.

This afternoon’s guardian of the gate was a single sinister black casing.

“Star fixings,” said Gina.

“On it,” said Tommy, flipping his Swiss army hacktool into activity, and fixing the correct sized drivehead like a bayonet. Unscrewing gently after Gina had checked for blipscopes and boobies, the two bottom holders were removed,
thus allowing the casing front cover to be opened up on its top hinging.

They all laughed.

It was a multiple-digit pin input system, horizontally mounted. This was opposed to vertical mounting, which made it harder to read over someone’s shoulder, that’s how hard their marketing department ended up trying.

“Concrete casing, jelly baby guards,” laughed Tommy.

Flashing her camera at the panel, she read out the serial number that appeared on her display in cross referencing from her base of data.

He danced this pattern into his palmpiece, and began the secondary cross matching. The member made database of manufacturer types began its scan. Although the security algorithm was uncrackable, there was a pattern range per chip batch number which rendered the complexity down by several big magnitudes, and thus breakable. Of course, it had taken considerable man hours to facilitate, with a distributed members network of activity drilling down to all those poor geeks sitting in a basement for two months each ticking away at the data, just to solve one piece. Still, add up all the little pixels and what a picture.

“Oh, if we lower the temperature down a bit, the probability range of inputs would allow us to use a Jonny number 79 on it,” he smiled.

“Tacky, tacky-tacky, tacky-tack,” sang Tommy.

He lowered his backage and removed the horse trophy ice bucket in all its fantastic leather bound extravagant.

“Wish these bastards would put the hinges on the bottom,” moaned Tommy, shoveling and squeezing the beads of ice into the casing, whilst trying to hold it shut.

The rest of them just stood giggling.

“You always grab all the glamour, Tommy, always,” she said.

Ramming the casing firmly shut to the crack of plastic and ice, Tommy smiled and let himself relax a little.

“What do you reckon, hun,” said Gina, turning to look at her.

“About two or three, I’d say,” she said.

So two or three cycles of waiting it was, the ice doing its job, and the potential processing capability of the panel encryption lowering with every degree.

“That should do it,” she said, nodding in Tommy’s direction.

Tommy opened the casing, let those beads that would roll out, and then scooped out the remainder with some sort of local twig.

“Ok, over to you then, hackboi,” said Tommy.

He stepped up. The Jonny number 97 tapped in and connected, spiralled and translaced, clicked and opened, its panel even showing the time the hacktool took with a cheesy rating animation, for a bit of fun atop the functional. The displayed cartoon of dancing Pop Weasel indicated an elderly system which only necessitated a few steps from a brief Irish jig of calculations to crack.

“Ladies first,” he said.

“They are no ladies here,” joked Tommy.

She used a corner of her sleeve to dust the handle, and squeezed the trigger latch to slide it open. They all ducked inside to the stillness of undisturbed air.

The next bit was again pretty simple, the gadgets did all the work, although the gadgets weren’t simple. Using the automated cable splicer, they routed through their own wirings and patched in the desired weave. First step done here, the required net pipes and cross entry points connected, along with a bit of jumping to disguise the trails. A pure over air line would have been neater, but for the maxed out instantaneous bandwidth they needed, this was the only way.

“Woof,” barked the dog in the distance, muffed by the pillbox casing they had led themselves in to.

“Fuck,” whispered Tommy. “We’re in the shit now.”

Tommy had ducked into a low combat stance in anticipation of the canine, but he sensed that it was a handled dog and so rose to a more midrange, so any accompanying biped was in sharp attack range too.

Gina swung round her tits in preparation of a human hack.

Tommy almost launched into an attack as there was an unexpected delay. However, the eventual processed understanding of the sound of a pant and a lap of tongue against ice betrayed that it wasn’t a merc security outfit hired to patrol.

“What the fuck are you kids doing here?” said the stern voice.

“Dave!” excitedly greeted Gina.

“Youngies you think you’ve got it all with your tech toys and your leetboi threads,” bantered Dave. “But you haven’t got the science of nature that Mickey has here in his nose.”

“And how are you, young Mickey,” said Gina, rubbing the long ears and patting head and neck.

“I know yous guys are professionals,” said Dave. “But you know you’re gonna need a print to get anywhere don’t you?”

“Yup, got one,” rebuked Gina smugly in a playful way.

“Who did you have to sleep with to get that?” laughed Dave.

Luckily Dave was back and out the door before Tommy and Gina’s blows would have struck. They were annoyed that Dave had just maneuvered out without blocking, but pleased that his age hadn’t Wearied his skill.

Dave barely felt Gina’s mascara case hit him, but the chuckle he let out on seeing and understanding was real enough.
“Those schoolgirl tricks never fade, Gina,” said Dave, tossing the mascara back.

“Sure thing not, babe,” said Gina, catching the mascara and switching it round with the package containing the fingerprint they had collected in The Royal Hussar. Dave only saw the switch as Gina huffed up the point of exchange in play, and Dave knew it well.

“Look, I don’t mind what version of node drafts you’re playing, but don’t leave a mess and shut the gate after you leave,” said Dave. “You could have told me, and I’d have lowered everything for you.”

“Where’s the fun in that,” they said in unison.

“Erm, Dave,” she said. “We may have to wire a donation to one of your causes. For the, erm, wire.”

“Jonny blades huh,” said Dave. “How is the old hackfool.”

“Jonny is as Jonny does,” smiled Gina.

“Same as,” smiled Dave. “So you kids, what’s the big hack today?”

“v-industries,” he said.

Dave rolled about a bit laughing.

“Yeah right,” said Dave. “Good luck with that.”

After a few more hacks to secure the route, they had spent the night at The Halfway House Inn. Rested and recuperated a little, the new day brought new hope.

Tommy and Gina settled up the hills in cash, and joined them outside. They were sat on a light wooden bench, back to back, spine to spine, his left elbow resting on the low back, her right. Having had time to choose their clothes as opposed to the previous days hurried hacks, they were dressed for hack fun rather than wandering around in mud. That had definitely pleased Gina, whilst Gina didn’t mind and was always game, a bigger fashion could be worn today.

The two of them were engrossed in one of their thumb battle hack games on their handsets. Today she was wearing mostly black, a sexy skirt coupled with some stylish boots, and a rather fetching tight lapelled jacket. Her white blouse completed the effect, the frilly white lace of its edging elegantly flowing down and covering its front buttons, and the thick white cuffs tucked over the black sleeve ends, giving that hint of continental styling.

He was suited up in his white outfit. He was wearing a white shirt under his jacket; trousers of white as well, thick white cuffs tucked over the black sleeve ends, giving that hint of continental styling.

“Sensible footwear though, yes?” said Gina.

“Yes, hun,” they replied in tandem. Judging by the fact that his thumb was much more highly active than hers, she was winning, and winning by far. Still, he was laughing, she always won, but he did enjoy the playing with her.

The night before they had changed their appearance in other ways. Whilst clothing was one thing, really clothing was all the same anyway, it was all just dressing, no matter what it was. What really mattered was what lay underneath, under the skin. That’s what they had hacked, instead of changing one’s appearance to change type, it was more a matter of changing one’s data to change who one was. Change your profile data and you become a different society stereotype, the clothes are just clothes to hide the bits that you end up spending more and more to cover.

They had borrowed the lightweight aluminum boat from Jonny. The worn greenish camouflage would still have been effective if it were not broad daylight. Still, no living sensors were going to be here, the place was long disused.

Crossing what was somewhere between a moat and a fjord, the flat bottomed boat glided a steady path under his and Tommy’s oarsmanship, her steering, and Gina doing a figurehead type pose at the front. Over the still water, and past that funny type of seaweed that they had only ever seen here.

Moorings up on the cranky jetty, they stepped slowly toward their goal and the wood became earth. Past a few rocky outcrops which reminded him of the tors near home, and up a gentle slope. The thin wire fence here was just that, no need for cutters or grounding, just a grab together and leg over would do. No need for security here, it was only useful to them now they had completed the intermediate hacks to create the route.

As he strolled across the sheep mowed grass, his many memories of here shone through him. Years ago he had been here to Troonhilly Downs, on a Cybertechnic placement, learning the systems and getting some time on the massive satellite transmission dishes.

Another year he had been here on one of the member’s organised rave party tours, the memory of the outdoor party stomp fest that weekend brought a smile to his face and a slight shiver to his spine.

The dish align was a little easier than the trisat one. That time he had to hack the weather service web page that the intern used to align the dish with the wind factoring. Whole lot of people left their umbrellas at home, sorry guys.

Each time he had left another hackpoint for the members to tap, and this is where he knew he’d come for the big hack. It was the only place he had access to that would give them enough instantaneous bandwidth when they needed it, right at the point of climax to the hack.

The entry deck here was more difficult. There were no geek tools on this one, no flash or pan, just his fingers versus the encrypted structure. A fast hack and tap and he accessed in. They were here, at the point of presence.

They unpacked the hackgear out from the sealed pelican cases, and sent Tommy back for more.

Chapter Eight – hack xf trilock
To a casual observer the scene would have looked quite sedate in its serenity. The two of them, laid out on the horizontal dual rig. Their external peaceful innocence did not betray the horrors that lay inside. His and her heads gently resting on the pillows, as if dreaming of sheep in the electric pulsating of thoughts in their synapses.

Only in time lapse would the true sight have been revealed. A snapshot instant would not have shown how Tommy and Gina had watched the progression of the hack. In the early founding hours, Gina and Tommy observed the hack through the group projection rig, their dancing and translacing bringing laughter and smiles.

As the biogravity had increased, Tommy and Gina switched off the scope displaying the thoughts of their mind. Not only would the coming sights be sickening in their horrendous complexity, but the mere experience of another’s darkness would have required a whole isoteric mapping hack of its own.

An earlier frame would have shown Gina’s tears of helplessness. Gina had watched their firmly clamped handholding wilt into a limp resting of two damp leaves lying atop one another as the pain of the hack drained the essence from them.

Tommy had comforted Gina, although he didn’t quite understand.

“If it’s biogravity how come they are still in the rig?” asked Tommy.

“I know, sweetie, I hope we gain that much progress one day,” hugged Gina.

“Yeah, we’re getting there,” said Tommy, managing a smile. “But how come they just haven’t vomited, or their bodies just rejected the rig?”

“Yes, I know. She and The Captain chatted to me about it once. It was a little while you and me had met, hun. I think they sort of tell you stuff as you go along, don’t they.”

“Hmm, yup, I remember some similar visits, although I guess you and Mandy had plenty of prechats too,” affirmed Tommy.

“Yes, you boys have them too! Pity you all waste so much time on the bullshit though and have to catch up later,” smiled Gina, and battered her eyelids and shoulders, her hips and head tottering on the spot. “Good time to tell you some more of it then I guess,” continued Gina. “Since we gonna have the time and the opportunity while we wait their one out.”

“Erm, ok,” murmured Tommy, wanting answers but hesitant of them.

The poison of the biogravity sweated out through their skin. Her delicate hair dampening onto the pillow as the hours drifted by. His face growing its black lawn of stubble.

“You know your dawn, babes,” said Gina, holding Tommy tightly and interfacing with his eyes.

“Yeah, like any of us any forget it,” said Tommy, acking Gina

“Yes, that’s right. Perfect fit that they are and all that, 'siamese reflector crossfeed' or something Jonny would probably call it.”

Tommy began to recite his memory of understanding. “Human psychology is obvious to all but the one experiencing it.”

“One method at which time may be viewed is on a linear scale,” he said. “Time travel to the past is not disproven, as travel to the past would not effect future events as they haven’t happened yet. All time exists instantaneously until it occurs, and all time occurs at the same time, i.e. instantaneously.”

“Time exists in this manner in a quantum entanglement state,” she said. “We (humans) experience time linearly as we exist inside of the time that is occurring, and thus our rate of quantum entanglement completion is occurring at a slower rate than the time we are inside. See figure 8 (shows concentric circles), for further explanation of the
Tommy and Gina silently sighed.

“All any of can do is find an outlet to our madness,” he said, causing a rupture of laughter amongst them. The hack was in its early stages, and was more like dreaming than paining at the moment. He and her enjoyed its lightness with each other in a bright spring picnic of data.

“I’m just lucky in that mine was coding,” he laughed.

Both of them dancing a translating abstraction into symbolic representation. Thought into language. Thought into code. Thought into words. Code and language similar. Coding merely a method of increasing the abstraction to symbolic representation comprehension.

His consciousness was tired and he let his subconscious take the strain of the combinational autocompletion for a while. She watched over him, guiding him with her love. The campfire of her emotions keeping the hounds stretched back to a distant perimeter.

“It’s time to get up,” she had said.

“Just a little while longer, baby,” he had muffled from beneath the warm covers.

“Look, baby,” she retorted, in her firm but fair way. “Don’t even bother with that line that you love. It isn’t going to wash.”

She sat on the bed and kissed him gently.

“A few more cycles, you know it’s not my body that needs it, but my mind,” he breathed, almost as if snoring out the words in his sleep.

“I see, usual bullshit,” she smiled. She let him dwell a while in his lucid dreaming whilst awake. She was gradually letting him let her believe him. Although he could have risen from their bed, without an extra few cycles to still, it would have been merely sleepwalking.

The memory of her memory faded out as she continued to fend off the occasional insurgence of the biogravity hounds with her wrist locking blows.

“So what do we do, baby,” said Tommy, as they mopped the brows of their sleeping friends.

“Watch it out really,” she said, screwing up her nose a little, which Tommy found cute, even given the appalling situation. Guess it was a bit of a lift to help cope with the starkness of the viewing desolation.

“Jonny said he would pop in later,” said Gina. “He told me he was going to have a chat with The Captain about something. Maybe they’ll peak it.”

“Yeah, maybe,” said Tommy, mimicking the response of hope as was his skill. Covering his ascension of sorrow, Tommy’s instincts didn’t let the weight of the shadow be cast over Gina. Tommy remembered what he had said to him a few days earlier.

‘At some point,’ he had said. ‘The girls always tire. It’s like why the weekend was invented. A bit like a weekly new year. The renewal thing. Like the seasons.’

Tommy had nodded, like Tommy did.

‘We all take up about as much as we can handle,’ he had continued. ‘Often more than we can. At which point the hope of the weekend kicks in, and the weekend itself is reward enough to replenish enough to face another week again.’

‘Yeah, I get it,’ had said Tommy.

‘Thing is,’ he had said. ‘When I go in with her, at the point you and Gina are tiring, Gina is going have the hope for the weekend kick in.’

‘I can see that,’ had said Tommy.

‘thing is, if Jonny and The Captain do turn up, the only thing they’re going to be able to bring to the party is pizza.’

Tommy mixed the pleasure of the understanding with the depth of the data.

Her marvel at his beauty formed electric tears as she admired his hack. He progressively rendered his skill in response to every stimuli that was shone at it. Faster in defence than that could be formed in attack. With her covering his hope and his skill matching everything that spiralled at it, progress was programmed into the wiring of data. The shards of barbed biogravity thought back in a martial dance step of palmistry, their physical manifestations countered with synaptic skill.

That was one of the things about him she loved the most. He was the best at what he was best at. In the streaming unconsciousness of reality he bettered at all he was forced to try at. That was one of the things that turned her on to him. He was her renaissance man. But there was one thing he was better at than all other things. He was best at being her friend.

She sensed the biodiversity of the defence was gaining the evolutionary upper hand and switched her and him round. Her fractally opposite combinational response meant the defence mechanisms of the viral attacking defenders had to adapt to survive, and were forced back a few generations. He took his turn to wonder at the wonder of her skill, guarding her soul from despair against the shadowing attacks of the skulking blackstatic mists with the depth of his love for her, while her electrostatic angelic luminescence thought back the physical negatively of the scything painers with her delicate performance of timed punches and gliding kicks.
Gina’s grip tightened on Tommy’s as they watched their hand clasp fading as the winter of the hack approached in the passing of the length of time. His and her hands seemed to age from their ripeness with the drawn out drama of the battle.

Tommy and Gina could feel each other’s warmth for each other through the pulse of the beat of their hearts in their hands. The sadness of watching the heat and the beat fade away from the resting lovers hurt Gina’s soul.

Gina and Tommy felt for them as they watched and waited. Few went that far in, and although they all had studied the theory and the history way back in class, it wasn’t many who went on to tackle the type of systems they seemed born to dance with. As was such, the watching and the waiting was worsened by the knowledge, if not the experience, of what was coming next.

The ultima defence mechanisms were not programmed to show any form of global protective response. They were merciless and ruthless, the pairing dna coding removed from the remembering of their biological programmed constructs. After the weaning down of the physical layer of programming hacks, the isoteric mappings would go in for the kill. After kicking their bodies to the sagged husks of wretchedness, the daemonic raping of their thoughts would follow as they attempted to destroy the very hope of their souls.

Though in the collective consciousness of the real world their physical representations had long since born relevance such was their drained state, in the inside of the outside that was the programmed world of the v-industries granite distributed defence constructs, him and her held their interlocking finger hand clasp in fun as they danced their dance of joy in rejection of the shredding gloom.

Her and him were seeing the complexity of the attacking defences. Were it not for the pain they might marvel at the complexity of the coding, but it was all wrong, it wasn’t beautiful, it was grotesque in its architecture, the dark horrors of dark souls biting and clawing.

Him and her walked into the shadows through the meniscus of consciousness, twisting the barriers of today and tomorrow, flowing through the past and instinctively knowing the answer. They hoped their hope would see them through, for although the first rounds would be hard, they knew that they knew that their foundations were stronger.

“He laid it on me like this,” said Tommy, rubbing Gina’s shoulder. “He said it was a bit like the poorly conceived operating systems of the nineties. Product bullshit driven rather than quality driven had meant that it was a continuing slackhack built atop another. In a tottering stack of fixes to fix weaknesses in the fixes and new useless features, the whole bloated and feasted upon itself in a confusion of greed and necessity.”

“Yes, she said it to me in a similar way, same but different, you know, girly not geeky,” said Gina.

“Really,” said Tommy. “You mean geekgirly rather than geekboyly surely.”

“Oh yes, rest it off for a day,” said Gina, pushing against Tommy’s chest. “Base of it being, yay.”

The four knights without sleep. The isoteric hounders were tightening their hold. It was their Epoch Dawns which gave the members their emotional resilience to withstand the onslaught of the defence systems, but it was also where the flailers would wreak their fiercest attacks. They reminded him of his misery. His Epoch Dawn. His failed hopes and his darkened soul.

The field trip that never was. The piece of paper pinned to the private message board stating the love/hate swing. The perceived choices against the predetermined outcome. The feeling of unfaithfulness even though the knot had been undone. Seeing the beauty again and not being able to face as eternity had already been lost. The irony of destroying what was by seeking comfort from the pain of losing it.

He looked at his fingers. He had been using the sandpaper to smooth the walls for decorating. Maybe he had overdone it today. As he sweated, the moisture seeped into the minuscule holes that the grains had worn into his fingers. As the sweat sank through the holes, they itched, and as they itched they rubbed more, and the holes were widened and made more.

They stamped his body downwards through the spiralling shaft. The metal sides were barbed like a cheese grater, the sharpened pipe endings shredded his skin as they stomped their dance of stomp which had no ceremony, no thought to it, no care or preparation. The would have been smooth sides of the grating apparatus had been blast sprayed with a crystalline white solid. A potent salt to burn his openings in his tangled fall.

He lay there in the incubator. His skin itched. He looked at himself, where he had itched he had scratched more. Where it didn’t hurt it didn’t itch, and where it didn’t hurt it looked better, smoother, more beautiful.

He sanded the walls and made them smoother, more beautiful, so they wouldn’t hurt anymore.

Another layer of the isoteric mapping defence clicked open. Hacking hurts.

“Well,” continued Gina, saddening in her description. “To them, it’s a bit like dying.”

“Dying?” questioned Tommy.

“Yes, hun, dying,” nodded Gina. “With a bioelectric hack that big, no one person can stand the backshot of the amount of biogravity spored out by the defences. Effectively what is happening is that they are taking turns to emotionally die inside of the rig.”

“I’m starting to get it now,” murmured Tommy. “And they don’t flatline as it’s the hope of each other that brings them back.”

“Yes, that’s right,” squeezed Gina. “Their dawns were what she called ‘equivalence’ or something.”
“I remember,” said Tommy. “A couple of times when he was wasted and performing away he would fascinate about it, tracking treasures down at the same time or something. He called it ‘logical equivalence’.”

“Good for you, hun,” loved Gina. “A while back you’d have had to look that one up.”

“Look, don’t spoil it,” defended Tommy.

“It’s ok, don’t jig an environmental withdrawal from the stimuli, pulse back and get closer,” said Gina.

“So in essence then,” said Tommy, preparing himself for the revelation. “They are taking turns to dawn and resuscitate each other’s consciousnesses.”

“Yes. Experiencing fractal epoch dawns at a rapid rate,” said Gina.

“I ain’t ever getting into that shit,” said Tommy.

“Thank fuck for that,” agreed Gina.

“If they were metering for this one, it’d be a fortune,” said Tommy, shaking his head.

“More pimp than your ass,” smiled Gina.

All those years of rubbing the bars with his thumbs to weaken them when the guards weren’t watching were all in vain. They knew and watched without looking. The guard unlocked the door of bars and swung it open, leaving thus. It was no different. He still had no way of getting through the door, and he lay there motionless and broken. And then, the guards laughed at him in his wretchedness, both despising and pitying him, as far as their weakened depravity could.

“So how was it for you, darling,” Gina said, the stereotypical line so far out of context. “So, how, was it. Your dawn.”

“Oh, you know,” Tommy said with that sense of urgency and hesitation. “It wasn’t very nice.”

“Ever feel you’ve got a master plan but are unable to do anything with it?” he said. “I do, since the day I was born. In fact, before that, when I was in the womb. That’s why I popped out earlier, I realised I was keen to get started, kepler the solution. A larger short-term memory, lower immediate memory, corrected during sleep.”

“It’s a bit like playing chess in your imagination,” said Gina. “Only the number of possible moves is infinite. The players think ahead in thousands of combinations of moves, each reacting to each other dynamically.”

“Only when the final connection is made does the route autocomplete and the reality of the outcome occur,” said Tommy.

The self analysis leading to the self therapy of the commlink in his teens to the girl he hadn’t asked those years before. Correcting the missed events even though the time had passed for any reality to be affected. The rapidity of thought, the spiralling of complexities, instant analysis, instant self analysis, the greater shorter immediate memory. The eight digit on the deck, the eight digit on the comm dial pad. The positioning, the inversion, the movement of the star.

The leaving test from the first Cybertechnic when two base ten bits were lit. The two questions that weren’t obvious. One was ok with a couple seconds of thought. The other a relatives aunts and uncles type thing, he drew a little diagram and made a guess. There, that should do it.

Another day he handed his sheet of paper to the primary planner. Their task that morning had been to design something to place in one of the three squares in the concrete slab, left behind from the removal of the building. In its situation in between two of the playgrounds of his primary Cybertechnic, a ‘patio’ sized paving slab protected each plot prior to the planner’s permission being granted.

“It’s a perpetual motion machine,” he said, pointing to his diagram, showing his invention in a side-slice cutaway type view. The exterior display side of things was to be a waterfall, a calming sight to any observer surely. The mechanics inside the hill of the fall revealed how the wheel maintained its motion. The buckets attached to the wheel scooped the water back upwards inside the hill, their power being drawn by water already scooped falling.

“It’s good, but it’s not suitable,” said the doubting Thomas. He didn’t understand why, nor was given a reason why.

Gina and Tommy watched.

It was topic tasks that afternoon. He walked over to the side shelf and looked at the book on mediaeval history. He had always liked castles, and was fascinated by a page showing a castle design and which described its functioning. He replaced the book on the shelf and returned to his table.

He sat on his red plastic backed chair, and he wrote some words on the castle, and drew a picture. Hoping it was enough to show to the primary approver, he joined the small queue.

“You’ve copied all of this straight out of the book,” shrilled the music tutor, her voice shivering his spine.

Puzzled, he returned to his seat, and spoke to the girl at his table. “Why do I bother. All she asks me to do is read and learn, and when I do it’s not right. It’s not as if I can go back and see the castle, so it’s going to be like the book, isn’t it.”

He didn’t remember he had remembered it like an image.

Waited.
Seated on a higher plastic chair, legs swinging as they dangled. Reading the word flip-charts on the side worktop, with their red spiral bindings on top. The panels of black words on white rectangles, words and blocks. The view through the wide window to out over the primary Cybertechnic playing fields, and on towards the woods.

Hoped.

The first day at the first Cybertechnic. The coat hanging peg with his name on it, all pre-arranged, ready and waiting for him. The wooden fort with the wooden soldiers, the memories of others.


Inside an incubator. The baby lay there thinking, connecting, dreaming whilst awake. He lay there, legs crossed at the ankles, thumbs nestled between index and middle fingers. The sensory overload caused his nerves to fire at the surface of his skin, causing him to itch. He had to stop now and again to scratch feverishly, often resulting in an opening.

His mind grew as it responded to the stimuli. The brain folds increasing in their regions of proximity. The firation of nerve impulses, three signals enough to form a connection in the delicate array structure of consciousness.

As the fired thoughts pulsed further away from their origination, they formed new cross matches of their own. When the whole shone in thoughts, the growing weaves melded tapestries of uniqueness.

Watching his fingerprints provide traction for his fingers to grasp things. Inside the incubator the baby was picked up and never left to settle. He had been battling against a false pattern since birth. It didn’t fit, it was all wrong for him. When to sleep or feed or think, it was all random and confused. It wasn’t a routine he needed but an appropriate action at an appropriate time. Needing a result there was no synaptic equation that his thoughts could follow to create the desired response.

Sometimes thinking one way would provide the appropriate response to the pattern he was trying to create, other times the same pattern would not produce the same result. Maybe it was combinations of thought. His mind would spiral out in autocompletions in efforts to gain the response.

In a short time as the processing structures had grown rapidly he had calculated his own internal solutions, but still the influence over the external seemed distant. He would think this 1, think that 0, this, that, 101 combinations. There was no control over external events.

The biometrics hack. He couldn’t answer as he could only remember her face, her eyes and her hair. Especially her eyes, eyelashes. The hack couldn’t autocomplete and he knew the only way round was to expend a little of the trilock on it. The hack had completed but the blip had been piped.

The starting with a cell. The growing of a stem. The formation of the control centres, the piping of the transmission mediums and the bonding of the the motor actuators. The construction of the pattern matched processor and the nanomachine. The reptilian brain growing from the stem. The cells expanding and creating the animal brain around the older cell designs of the reptile. The mammalian brain slowly forming in its place around and in the animal brain. The what we are and what we were, evolution through the layers of modular processing, cell, stem, reptile, animal to mammal. The final steps to the conscious awareness.

“Two or three undulating strings of energy and light,” he said. “Wherein they touch matter formed and universes created. This implies that matter formation has a trigger threshold, one energy line is not enough for transmogrification to occur, but the summation of two or more raises the potential enough to reach the required escape electrical threshold point for the reaction of energy to mass formation to occur.”

“Was it two or three strings,” she said. “Or one same supercoiled string of $\infty$.”

As the hack progressed the isoteric structure thought against him with unerring accuracy, trying to defeat the intrusion attempt. Battling within his deepest emotions to try and conquer all that his soul held dear. His hope, his faith and his love.

His fantasies of explaining how he felt to somebody were fading. He had slowly given up hope on being able to see his friends again. One day he had planned to visit them, or create another rave to reunite them all again. But he had travelled too far. There was no journey back to where everything was that he had left behind. No return trip, and no possibility of circumnavigation.

The full page newspaper advertisement designed to dispel the conspiracy theories that still had hold over him. The humour lost and the message misread for egotistical bounds. The shape may have looked as a pyramid shooting to the stars, but by moving further away would be revealed more as a trophy, or as a holy grail. An individual standing amongst the faceless corps, not for power and control, exploitation or monetary gain, but to inspire those cast down not to live in fear.

Slowly he had discounted them all in turn as being able to understand was he was saying. Some he didn’t want to burden with his darkness, others could not hear but for the reaction of their own egos, still others simply had no conception or connection to anything he was trying to communicate. The frustration.

As his mind had categorised and created objects of reality inside of his consciousness, so now he developed bounds of being, invisible borders and cages to his actions. In the same way that the late night hacker may have tiered down to
himself too. The process repeating in endless cycles of new discovery and frustration.

back out of the rig. Great parallel discoveries from history, no-one to witness or believe he had experienced them for

Drawn out and controlled. The financial managers, the bandwidth overseers, the medical professionals, the tally of the

white winged dove at the centre. The connected initials somehow appearing at the three and the nine on the beacons of

his entire life, all connected within to some unknown grand master plan, already known and impossible to change. The

Knowing and watching but not being able to change a thing.

Feeling as though everyone else

complexity. The point of not being able to prove the existence of God was so that it could not be faked in order to gain

of strangers near the bank and in the posting office.

branch trimmed to a post, and then being replaced by the pole and the chain with its spiked crowns. The conversations

from the Son of God. To the shredding pits of cascading hell.

deciphering on translation or phonetic similarity, the most trivial form being a rather poor derivation of the sun of god

trivial changes in language and inflection to achieve a point, to the more sinister. The laughability of trying to prove

unreasoned logic.

Manipulations of the random spreading autocompletions to make the last steps occur by filling in the gaps with

Relying on the mind's inbuilt referencing facilities to extrapolate a third point from the two inputs supplied. Manipulations of the random spreading autocompletions to make the last steps occur by filling in the gaps with

exploitation of the pattern matched response and the ego to prove untruths from linking partial fragments of facts. Relying on the mind’s inbuilt referencing facilities to extrapolate a third point from the two inputs supplied. Manipulations of the random spreading autocompletions to make the last steps occur by filling in the gaps with

problem was it was him holding the torch, wandering hopelessly in the dark.

sadness rippled through the surface of his skin with their icy shivers. He knew there was light at the end of the tunnel,

and draining, somewhere deep in the recesses of his mind he screamed a thousand cold screams of dying. The waves of

saw rippled through the surface of his skin with their icy shivers. He knew there was light at the end of the tunnel,

problem was it was him holding the torch, wandering hopelessly in the dark.

The pulsating of a hundred false enlightenments tearing at his soul. The suggestion, hypnotism and indoctrination,

exploitation of the pattern matched response and the ego to prove untruths from linking partial fragments of facts. Relying on the mind’s inbuilt referencing facilities to extrapolate a third point from the two inputs supplied. Manipulations of the random spreading autocompletions to make the last steps occur by filling in the gaps with

all forms being a rather poor derivation of the sun of god from the Son of God. To the shredding pits of cascading hell.

conspiracy when mistaken for a feeling of sexuality.

a feeling  of vulnerability,  falsely used  in  proof  of the posterity seeking laid trails of the Magdalene descendant

burn and the stake. The hands tied behind the back, and the feet pressed together. The placement of the body promoting

from the Son of God. To the shredding pits of cascading hell.

dropping elastic bands along his routes of traversal, trying to spin him off his true track. The entrance tree first

His primary Cybertechnic play where the three of them stood on stools in their handmade costumes in the tier seated

hall. The two girls were the sun and the moon, and he played the role of the stars. The different aspects of the heavens,

the different symbols of uniqueness, sometimes used to unite together against in false bandings. The truth lay more in

the whole of a part.

Dropping elastic bands along his routes of traversal, trying to spin him off his true track. The entrance tree first

branch trimmed to a post, and then being replaced by the pole and the chain with its spiked crowns. The conversations

of strangers near the bank and in the posting office.

But how could something that had no proof be disproved by proof. Idyllic in its simplicity and yet infinite in its

complexity. The point of not being able to prove the existence of God was so that it could not be faked in order to gain

power and control.

He felt cold, tired, and lonely, and as though it had always been that way. Reap what you sow, or sowe what you reap.

Feeling as though everyone else’s egos were cursing his fate. Their answers of misunderstandings dictating events.

Knowing and watching but not being able to change a thing.

The memory of a hack. The route in through triple splicing and the triangular watch. The meaning and messaging of

his entire life, all connected within to some unknown grand master plan, already known and impossible to change. The

links of the chain, eight in number on the base, seven on the face sides, the triangular keylink connecting at the top. The

white winged dove at the centre. The connected initials somehow appearing at the three and the nine on the beacons of

the level playing fields. How could objects created before his existence be so telling of the events he had made in his

past. The connections between corps, the hack whispers being very telling, the links revealed, the motives unknown.

Drawn out and controlled. The financial managers, the bandwidth overseers, the medical professionals, the tally of the

accountant.

Spending weeks so alone in isolation working on his latest reasonings. Cross referencing and analysing once he was

back out of the rig. Great parallel discoveries from history, no-one to witness or believe he had experienced them for

himself too. The process repeating in endless cycles of new discovery and frustration.

The pleasure synapses firing in compensation for the dark feelings of pain. The more the onslaught from the
isotterics, the more their bodies released their organic bubbles. The waves of despair in the lags between the emissions and the resetting of the centres. As the opposing forces wrestled against each other, the pleasure slowly lost its ability to fire over and mask the pain. The emotional victories becoming more and more empiric. The meniscus of the reservoirs of reserves slowly expended away. Beyond the forgetting of the knowing of joy. The rapid firings of despair conditioning a constant experience of pain. Pleasure itself becoming hurtful. Standing on the event horizon, staring into the black pit of hell. All lightness being sucked in never to return again, forever lost in the depths of the unknowable. The sadness that haunted. The silence and the stillness. The cool chill of the wind on the bridge of his nose and his forehead.

From the depths of the ashes her phoenix rose, rekindling the fire of his dragon breath, life once more. Turning around to let look and see the beam of the incoming light, being lightened by its glow. There was one experience that never seemed to tire, never needed refilling, never scolded with the scarcity of its supply. The reality of love. With that gift he had managed to turn and sit upright, pivot, and sit with his legs over the edge of the bed touching the floor.

The defence systems reacted quickly to regrow the breach. Another test of tolerance with the statements of love being a defence of a broken ego. But they knew altruism bonded them all, in the same way the cells of their bodies had co-operated to achieve the full functioning of the system with consciousness. There was no hiding from truth by the arguing of opinion.

How to find her. At least he knew what he was looking for. As he knew her and knew of her, he knew that she was. He knew that when they met even if it was for the first time they would be no strangers. Instantly distinctive, locked in each other’s gaze, the retina pattern match displaying in the fractal pigments of their eyes, indicating the pattern of her dna, highlighting her love and her genetic compatibility with him.

As he knew she was, he knew that at some point he would meet her. Squinting to alter the light shape gently to glean a match. Wearing polarised sunglasses to see if recognition was easier on one plane. Waiting in patience for her. Preparing and expecting. Again or first didn’t matter, he just had knowledge. It hadn’t happened on his layer of abstraction yet, and therefore would occur naturally at some point along his pre-arranged linear path of life. Like when he was lost in the department store, the harder he moved to look the further the distance and the less of a probability of a coincidence. He stood still, timeless as a hedge of stone, awaiting the sun, the moon, and the stars to lock in whatever pattern then would lock in, to mark the moment of fascination when all bits would be simultaneously lit. He wasn’t out of time, just outside of time.

In his calculations in the incubator, it seemed apparent that if it hurt him to be without her, then it must hurt her to be without him too. So he took that hurt and added it to his own, so that she would not have to suffer it. He knew he couldn’t take up all of it, but hoped it would be enough to allow her to have the strength to find him, lasting long enough for them to meet and recharge off one another, dancing in their perpetual energetic quantum spin. Covering her tracks, deleting the files that were logged about her. They had no way of contacting each other but they knew each other was there.

Living in the past, yet in the future, yet with no present. Having no moment or experience, just a knowledge of the past and a pre-calculated extrapolation of the future. A timeless existence of tomorrow and yesterday, the narrowed meniscus breathing in its alterings. Their opposing angular momentums creating the 0 and the 1, the circle and the shaft, the co-existence of time to create their present.

A focused alignment of both the particle and wave of light, the shimmering and depth turning of the structures. Each without, yet eternally bonded by a force so strong it never weakened over distance. The model of the rock dropping being honed to calculate how an unknown stone would interact.

\[
e = mc^2 < {\text{O}} < e/m = c^2 \quad \infty < C_o < c o < C O \quad \sqrt{e/m} = c \quad \infty < C o
\]

\[
e^2 / c^2 = m
\]

“This infers that we are not made of matter but of energy,” he said. “We only exist as matter at any one time as the probability of that matter occurring is 1 (meaning it always occurs), but the point at which it actually appears is indeterminate.”

“However,” she said. “Given that c is a large value, the speed at which the energy is travelling is such that in any given time frame the probability of the particle appearing is 1.”

“Note this may only be true at the level of abstraction at which the particle is conceptually aware of,” they said together as one. “I.e., it can exist constantly within itself and appear contiguous, even if outside its layer of abstraction it appears only intermittently, and inside its layer of abstraction it appears more complex by orders of magnitude (there are a lower number of sample points than there are instances, thus ‘bits are missing’).”

Their Epoch Dawns had occurred at the same time. A sense of belonging when near her. Not only belonging to her, but belonging with her, some how she made point to his existence. His mind still when in her presence. The whole that connected everything was him. It all seemed connected as it was, by him.

That which the isotterics thought was his weakness was his strength. They had no knowledge and no understanding of what it meant, how could they, their dna was sliced of emotion. As their final judgment axe fell, he let his energised orbits lower, emitting his photon radiance. With its long wave particle accelerated into light, new solutions were visible. From a different angle their Sierpinski pyramid tetrahedrons could be seen shimmering in infinite beauty. Things were
always that way, and like the petals falling on the island, though the pattern seemed random, it always autocompleted into the inevitable. It made no difference from where the plot started, or the order of the points, in the simplicity of its complexity every outcome achieved full coverage.

They sat contently and played like children. There was no beginning and no end to the game. There was no winner or loser, the game itself was just for the playing. It was the joyfully playing together that they loved. There was no ego between them, no separation. They were as two aspects of one, dancing in their quantum entanglement of love.

The defending attackers waned. There was no enemy for them to divide and conquer. After the physical fighting, and after the torrent of emotional drains, there were no weaknesses to pierce with their weapons of adaptive evolution.

The Captain had been right. He had just needed a challenge. By performing a hack of infinite complexity and resolving his mind against it, he had broken the trilock.

'Do the hard thing first and everything else is easy'.

“How d’you feel?” whispered Jonny, not risking any great volume so as to allow their ears to readjust back in. Their eyes blinked into the dim lighting.

“Bit tired,” he said. “Maybe need a nap later.”

“Would be. Can we get something to eat,” she said.

“Sure thing, hun,” smiled Gina.

“A meat feast jalapeño would probably kick start us again,” he smiled.

“Real food please, darling, not coder corn,” she said.

“Ok. That one reminded me a bit of flying over the carolina’s in a small seater,” he said. “Started off all cool, lady ready newspaper, executive looking smart, air hostess doing the mostess. Later in the storm the pilot keeps going on about no need to worry, just a small bit of turbulence. Well, they are small to start with. Then he’s saying things like, ‘no problem, just a little drop of five thousand feet in the turbulence’. Only feels little, small little bump, so yeah, it’s ok.”

She nodded.

“Then it’s, ‘no problem, just a drop of ten thousand feet’,” he said. “And you start thinking, now, did we climb a bit after the last drop?”

Tommy laughed.

“Well,” he continued. “By now the executive is white knuckling his seat, and the lady is expending more energy trying to hold the paper in place as the whole craft rocks, and is only pretending to actually read the news. A little bit after, and we’re dropping some more. No-one knows how big a drop it was, and we’re all waiting for the sound of the voice to come over the tannoy and tell us.”

Gina stared.

“So we’re waiting, and then the air hostess is even starting to look worried, and the newspaper has been crumple folded up, the cool composed play of a seasoned traveler has been shattered.”

She smiled.

“Then suddenly there’s this big banging noise, and a jolt which rocks us forward,” he said. “A shaky voice squeaks out the speaker. That is it folks. We’ve landed.”

They laughed together.

“I’ll drive,” said Tommy.

“Slowly,” he said.

“Hm, and no gear changes,” she said.

He turned and smiled. “And another thing. Can you all stop playing hack whispers with me now.”
EQUATIONAL EQUVALENCE

3.8 Three pieces of infinity

\( \otimes \)

\( \Delta \equiv \Delta \)
Chapter One – Of tetrahedra

It was morning again. The facial chill contrasting with the warmth of the duvet zone. Head withdrawn tortoise-like from the sharpness of reality, retreating back into the womb. Rubbing the cold hand that had reached to tap, tap, on the alarm snooze button. The gathering together of sleep-swept thoughts, the opaqueness of the flickering reminders of past and current draws. After the daily play with the three snooze periods, and the smirk of the irony of setting the alarm three periods early, the final fist thud on the sensor pad came.

Pushing the covers back slowly as though they were steel sheaving, stretching out of the bed and stepping along into the shower room. Sliding the door latch across, doubling up on gates even though the flat was otherwise empty, the entrance locked, and the building secure. A skillful flick on the sink plug lever, and the exacting turns on the taps to achieve the preferred temperature. As the liquid love of the water streamed its fall into the basin, the ritual continued as it did each morning. She looked into the mirror and faced her self, alone.

As she sobbed in hard heart-felt wrenches, the back of her mind comforted her with the fact that shedding underwater would mean there would be no red-eye tell, and that after a shower and a little padded warpaint, she would be ready to step out into an unknowable world once more. Today was no different. It was the same as it always was. Another day, another hack.

Stepping into the shower, she sang her slow hush lullaby.

“Never Me”

I’m standing in a sunshine sea,  
Of miracles and destiny.  
Dancing through the golden glow,  
Facing sorrows all must know.

Teared out armour drifts so slow,  
Gainst the tides of downward flow.  
I see the light that shines so free,  
On where it shines, but never me.

I love you, darling.

As she skipped out of the shower, she allowed herself one of the few smiles from her daily quota.

Fuck. She ought to stop being so sketchy, singing to a guy she hadn’t even met, and think about what she was supposed to be doing at work. Well, at least think about what she was supposed to be acting to be doing at work. A job was just a job, not like she wanted the money or the bullshit, but cover was cover, and the best place to hide was in full view.

She turned her red transport right onto the main faststream thoroughfare, and promptly grounded to a halt amidst the bustle of outers heading into midtown. As she tapped her fingers in a crescendo impatiently, a stylish fashion caught her eye. It didn’t look to be local, so as she hovered in the traffic, she studied with her glances. Ebbing along with the lady’s footsteps, noting the turn of lace and the contrast of tailored colours.

As things carried along, the purveyor of style passed some young man suited up, standing with inactivity in some shop doorway, complete with designer stubble and dodgy pointed collar shirt. In the tracking of the current street’s interest, he gave that man look of up and down, rubbing his chin’s fur and nodding with a smirk. She figured his interest lay in other qualities of fashion.

Further down, an older gentleman clothed more in the garb of the street let tell similar glances, although with no accompanying smirkness. She could almost hear the social mutterings of the stereotyped judgments of the ‘old perv’. Showed what a difference the disguise made, the same actions, but the reactions worlds apart. Not all were fooled so easily. Shoes for feet, caps for heads. Some used the suits to hide behind as rationalisations for the sin in business, others the warpaint of makeup to thicken their skin against it.

It really did remind her that she must have a word with that new lad in the office she was temping in. Tell him to cut his hair and stop dressing like a tramp. That way there would be a chance for him with the comms girl everyone knew he fancied. Urrgh. She hoped that dodgy sleaze guy from the office down the hall would just ask her out so she could turn him down, and let him move on with his conquering.

She parked up her red transport neatly as the venetian metal door secured the entrance. Trudging up the staircase into that place of 'work', whatever that was. Some needed to leave one box and enter another for part of the day, just to fool their minds into believing when they were working and when they were playing. Trigger some sort of learned response to let them know when they were supposed to be stressed, and when they were supposed to be happy.

To her it was much of a muchness. It was all a means to an end. She was content enough to play at working to get the periods of working at her play. Hackers were hackers, they didn’t have jobs as hackers, they hacked a job so they
could hack. All the members did the same.

“Oh, hi, Caroline,” she said.

“Yeah, oh, yeah, hi,” giggled Caroline.

“Didn’t know you were in today then,” she asked.

“Yeah, in today, cramming a couple of extras, you know how it is,” said Caroline.

Actually she didn’t know, but hey. “Yeah, I know how that is, huni,” she masked. “So not much happening at your Cybertechnic then?”

“Nah, not much happening,” replied Caroline. “But then mine’s a small route one, I wasn’t a fast track like you, not that it bothers me.”

“I know that. Guess we all have different paths flung at us, that’s why I’m in this place now.”

“Yeah, sorry, I know how it is, we all just do,” said Caroline. “Do what we’re told, feed our brains on the food they give us.”

“That we do,” she said, her smile widening. “I still have to study too though, who knows how they work it.”

“Mystery,” nodded Caroline. “Guess it never ends.”

“That seems so true,” she nodded gently. “Anyway, best get to my desk of chains then, see you later.”

“So, did you find true love at the weekend then?” teased Caroline.


“Hopeful?” danced Caroline, in a cheerleader like way.

“Yes, I guess there’s always that,” she said, and drifted away to her designated workspace.

“Hey, Caroline,” said the new girl.

“Yeah, hey, Mandy,” smiled Caroline. “Got any goss?”

* * *

Tommy and Jonny were in the common room of their Cybertechnic. Jonny was fiddling with some bits of something, and Tommy was periodically lifting himself up on the chin-ups bar. The both of them occasionally glancing at and around the display screens flickering their programs and programmes. He pretty much fell through the double doors, and rushed over excitedly.

“I’ve got it this time,” he blurted out.

“Hmm,” nodded Tommy.

“Yeah, worked it out, keplared it!” he shouted. “By doing some tansengental reasonings, and cross-matching with previous correlations, I’ve figured it. Using the notions of fractal simplicity and quantum mechanics I’ve discovered that we must be logically equivalent.”

Tommy puffed out, raising his chin above the bar.

“It’s right,” he continued in full hacker flow. “The secrets themselves are encoded in me, I think it’s only a matter of deciphering the particular triangulations, and then I should be able to remember what it is that I already know.”

Tommy and Jonny looked up and zoned in briefly on one of the display screens as a change in brightness and volume sparked their reflexes, then turned back to their twitching fascinations.

“As far as I can work out, she is long blond, five-five, green eyes, left-handed, slim, probably a 32b or 34c, and is called Anna. Dyed or natural blond I’m not sure. What do you think?” he prompted.

Tommy and Jonny continued silently in their ticks. “Tommy, what do you think?” he said.

“Huh,” said Tommy, lifting up into another pull. “I wasn’t listening much, I thought you were talking to Jonny.”

“Jonny,” he said. “What do you think?”

“Hmm,” said Jonny. “I thought you were talking to Tommy.”

They laughed. He laughed the shortest. He recapped.

“So why Anna then?” said Jonny.

“Obvious. Palindromic of course,” he said.

“Erm, yeah, that makes sense,” lied Jonny.

“Plus, the A does look a bit like a triangle, doesn’t it. Especially if you go into dimensional, with ΔΔΔ. You know what I’m like for triangles,” he said.

“Yeah, we know that,” said Jonny.

“If she’s as paranoid as you though, she’s probably changed her appearance though, hasn’t she,” said Tommy.

“Um,” he sighed. There was a short pause. “You guys are just fucking with me aren’t you.”

“Yes,” they nodded.

He sighed and left. Trudging down the stairs back to the rig lab, he sighed again and wondered how it was all beginning to seem a little bit like work. Actually, work, there probably was something he was supposed to be doing for his current tertiary Cybertechnic unit. An easy one if he could manage to force himself to actually do it. He had completed the assignment in week one, two weeks early. But he knew that somehow he’d still only manage to transmit it for assessment after the designated window had just expired.

As the lift in the corridor made its way down, he watched the metal supports flash by in their patterns. He
remembered how in his primary Cybertechnic he had been shown the pictures of the seaside piers. Told to see what shapes the girders were made of, he relayed every answer except that which was being prompted for.

The problem had been that he could see it from all angles, and focused through to dimensional matches rather than seeing the obvious flat shapes. Nestled between the parallel outlines, the criss-crossing straps formed their constructs. Seeing squares, crosses, parallelograms, x’s, but not the triangles. To him they were but the component sides of the outlined net of a three-dimensional shape. His mind reiterating in attempts of autocompletion to tie the missing side.

“All my love (I am saving)"

*My heart is oh so heavy, my songs they are all sad,*
*Without you my darling, I’ve nothing to spark me glad.*

*All my-i love__  I am saving__*
*All my-i love__  I am wasting__*

*Each day that I wake up, and feel your deepened pain,*
*Glowing for your precious light, we eternally meet again.*

*All my-i love__  I am saving__*
*All my-i love__  I am wasting__*

*When will I ever reach, the truth that lies so deep,*
*My mind forever aching with the secrets it does keep.*

*All my-i love__  I am saving__*
*All my-i love__  I am wasting__*

Flipping to the ic structures work module, wiring in a response mechanism for the data transferal path. The circuits first firing the undulations of energy to mark the Transmit Acknowledgment signal (TACK), then listening in wait for the ACK burst of electricity to rebound back.

As the hard pasta shells crashed onto the white ceramic plate, he remembered the clacker of dried biscuit food hitting a blue bowl. Nourishment for mind and body of young Billy the cat. Flickering back to the kitten’s arrival, the tiny size of the truly black and white cat. A black body of baby fur, with a fluffy white underbelly. The pattern repeated on the growing face, a black head, with white chin and whisker regions. After feeding and playing and dancing, it was very much time for the young kitten to sleep. Fascinated by stairs not previously allowed to climb, the preferred sleeping space was about three-quarters of the way up the twelve, or was it thirteen, straight steps, the rose carpeting and the white banistered hand rail.

Straining to stay awake, Billy the kitten’s eyes drooped along with his head. Each time a nervous mind jolt kept the system functioning in consciousness, not letting enough relaxation to fall into dreams. He sat and lay there, draped amongst the stairs, patiently being with Billy, until the repeated experiences of comfort burned enough of a synapse path to enable a condition of stillness from sensations in the unfamiliar environment to be reached.

So as it was with him now. Not much of a sleep pattern for a while, flashes of sleep caught in the here and there. Feeding and playing flipped the firings into slowing and stopping beneath their threshold of response, but the pulse of the primary objective beat as loud as it always did. Something was missing. He couldn’t fool his self. Sleep was always sparse when the autocompletions of destiny were still left undone.

And so the day ended as it began.

**Chapter Two - Oddness**

Lazy Sunday. He figured it was going to be one of those odd afternoons as soon as he entered The Royal Hussar. ’I did it my way’ was already playing through the jukebox. Readjusting his eye brightness filters as he stepped across to the bar, he noticed the old figure to his left, along with some bags whose contents where obviously not from the stores that they advertised.

“Usual, Sir, is it,” said the barman.

“Yes,” he nodded, a little discomforted by being referred to as Sir.

“Hello there!” gleaned the old man from his seat across the bar. “Let me buy you a drink!”

“Oh, no, it’s ok, I’ve got it,” he said.

“No, let me buy you that drink.”

“It’s ok,” whispered the barman. “He always buys people drinks. He’s loaded. Let The Captain get it for you. Probably gets lonely, figure he’s outlived everyone he knew.”

“Oh, then, thank you,” he conceded.

“Pint of Scrumpy Jack it is then,” smiled the barman.
With the golden rays poured into the glass, he lifted the beacon and carried it over to an empty table. The Captain tottered across.

“So you one of those at the Cybertechnic from across the wander way then, yes?” asked The Captain.

“Yes, that’s correct,” he said, taking those few first refreshing gulps from his glass.

“All that new age stuff then I suppose, wasn’t quite like that in my day,” reeled off The Captain.

“Yes,” he agreed. “Some of the overseers there banter about punched cards and ticking tapes, I’m guessing your ways before even that.”

“Ways before that!” laughed The Captain. “Before Kepler organics, waveform navigation, solid-state even. True binary mechanics, cogs and all.”

The Captain recited his tale of how he had been a fighter pilot for the Polish air service, and then for the RAF and the Allies after the decimations. He must have been through some shit.

“Funny things those dronings,” continued The Captain. “There was always a guaranteed time of incursion for them. Could set your pocket piece by them. Sunday teatime.”

“Yes,” he smiled. “The dark teatime of the soul.”

“We reckoned it was a morale thing. They must have decided that by attacking at that perceived safe haven of time and place, it would affect us the most.”

“Verifiable tactics that, I guess,” he tried to confirm and agree.

“True as,” laughed The Captain excitedly with the understanding of the telling. “The harshest of enemies will wreak their fiercest attack at the moment they perceive is your weakest.”

Their glasses emptied more.

“Strange thing was, it sort of geeried us up,” said The Captain. “The true Englishmen looked upon it as cricket high tea. They all relaxed in the afternoon, had their Sunday tea, cake and nonsense, maybe even the odd snooze. After this period of gentle stillness, they laughed, ‘Second Innings’, when the waves came in.”

He couldn’t help but admire the truth in that, bit like Drake and his bowls. Chill out and finish what he was doing, then ride out to the fast pitchers. Although some would banter that Drake was pissed the night before, had a terrible hangover, and so didn’t surface until late.

“So you see,” leaned in The Captain. “Sometimes the enemy attack at the moment they anticipate you will be at your most vulnerable, where in fact, it is the moment at which you tap your greatest strength.”

The sound of the pool table clinked from the near distance. The drinks flowed their flow.

“You seem nervous,” prodded The Captain.

“Well, not really,” he said. “Although I guess things are always a bit sketchy when missions are incomplete.”

“Hmm, yes, I know that feeling,” said The Captain in an eye-glazing.

“But I’ve been said that I’m a little paranoid though,” he laughed. “But don’t tell anyone I told you.”

The Captain barely managed a smile at that. “Guess you can never be too paranoid. Especially someone with your skillset, you being at the Cybertechnic and all that I mean.”

“Too paranoid,” he said. “That isn’t something that would occur. But yes, I have been subject to a few recruitment drives in my time.”

“I’m sure you have,” said The Captain. “There’s certainly a good few tricks about.”

“Yeah. Makes it hard to meet the right woman though,” he smiled.

“Oh? The right woman?” quizzed The Captain.

“Hmm, yes,” he replied hesitantly. “I think I’m one of those people with a long burn-in. Once I was walking up a hill, and three girls all dressed to thrill were speeding down towards me. In the typical way of girls, none of them maneuvered to make way, so I ended up squeezing past by a wall, at least I didn’t have to do a hop into the transport way.”

Gulps of liquid fluidity to lubricate his tale.

“Yes,” he continued. “As they floated past, after their preanings and eye-casting glances, one of them piped up, ‘Don’t worry girls, he’s looking for the one, not some one.’”

“That walk of yours must give out some weird TACKS,” said The Captain.

“Very probably,” he said. “What I really mean though, without my ramblings, is that it can get difficult when I meet a girl to as whether she’s trying to seduce me or merely recruit me.”

“I can see you’ve been through a few of those,” laughed The Captain.

“Yeah. It’s sometimes like a pyramid stream of them,” he said. “From the simple single girl bait and trap, to the holidaying alpha girls, to the worst of the worst. The double whammy of the linked encouragement.”

“Oh, yes?” hacked The Captain.

“Yes,” he said. “The worst of the worst is the brother and sister lure. Works better than the female friend bait as there’s an established excuse for the moments of coincidental meetings.”

“Ah,” slowly nodded The Captain, swigging a few swigs.

“The amiable stranger befriends you in a difficult situation, which is probably engineered too, and then pops up by and by. After the trust has been triggered, the sibling card is brought into play. With the secondary befriendment, and then the inevitable played for reversed seduction, the end result is that two separate yet complimentary sources of information make their tapways.”

“Interesting stuff,” said The Captain. “Don’t worry. I won’t bore you with one of those. Although as my dear friend Henry would have said to you, that’s better than electrodes on your bollocks!”
They laughed heartily and drank a toast to Henry. He noticed he was laughing, and then remembered it wasn’t his laugh. Someone had most likely stolen his. He hoped he hadn’t accidentally stolen the one he was using, but it was probably just a generic indication of laughter, that reflex of human response.

“Everybody’s trying to sell you something, I suppose,” he said. “Even if it’s just their opinion.”

“That’s often the way,” said The Captain. “I presume you’ve had a few agencies have a go at trying.”

“I suppose I have,” he said. “Maybe all those positive manipulations by all those varied religious groups, and all those sketchy girls just wanting a wallet and a willy, have stood me in good stead.”

“Maybe,” said The Captain. “I heard some of those cults can be a bit iffy.”

“Yeah,” he said. “Even with the real legit ones you’re always left wondering whether it’s just all for the ego of the high preacher. Either having reached a dawn where the mission is to make up for their own failings by rekindling others, or just a competition thing with rival sects, the numbers of members forming a high score table of fame for them.”

“Hmm,” said The Captain thoughtfully.

“Maybe I’m just ranting though, those aren’t so bad,” he said. “Suppose they only mean well, and just want to make you part of their community, but it can get all a bit encouraging and assimilation like.”

“There’s worse sharks that attack,” confirmed The Captain.

“Definitely,” he nodded furiously. “Some I’ve encountered have bordered on satanic offerings, trying to get inductees to sacrifice themselves without knowing, in some power and control, energy gain scheme.”

“Sounds highly odd,” said The Captain.

“Yeah,” he said. “During one particularly long period of brain washing, I had live voice comms saying stuff like, 'If they knew you knew they’d want to kill you'.”

“A nasty one,” said The Captain.

“Very,” he said. “Enough to put even someone with level asoterials off their game for good, let alone someone who’s fractalling internally. And this is all coming in from someone who had built up a position of trust over a long period. A definite long wire-in.”

“A good turn of phrase that, fractalling internally,” said The Captain.

“Thanks,” he said. “What with all the false flag umbrellas, triple identify forges and ether history database manipulations, you’re left never really sure who’s behind it all. There’s so many layers of abstraction these days. That’s why I pretty much try and have to do nothing with any of them. It’s ok getting a 'pension' cheque every now and again, but you know the goggles will be knocking on your doors with transports any time there’s a bad sitch.”

“Hmm, yes,” said The Captain. “Sometimes it may simply be more prudent to hack for your self.”

“So what time did he say he was coming round then?” said Jonny, barely looking up amongst his tweaking.

“Oh, you know,” said Tommy. “You know what he’s like. Doesn’t have a time thing does he. He was telling me he’s in a 'variable vinci double' at the moment. Some sketched-out stuff about two four-hour sleep slots at differing times of the day.”

“Really,” said Jonny.

“Yeah, so he says,” replied Tommy. “He says he does like evenings though, so he’s probably awake then.”

“Awake,” smirked Jonny, clicking two pieces together. “Some would argue that he never enters a conscious state. Just stays on the surface of interaction between the borders of the dream like and waking reality.”

“That sounds like something he would say,” laughed Tommy.

Jonny huffed. “You’re probably right. I’m probably only repeating what he told me. Or repeating what he repeatedly tells me more like.”

“Yeah,” nodded Tommy. “Guess we all have our missions that drive us, just wish he’d work out what the fuck his is and give us a bit of quiet.”

“So very, very, true,” said Jonny.

“The beef of it all being,” said Tommy. “Is that he’ll probably be around some time this evening.”

“I thought this was an assist,” frowned Jonny. “He ain’t half working up the hackcreds on this one.” The hackcreds system was a good system when you needed it. As is often the way, sometimes you need to perform your biggest hacks when you’re at your lowest point, and sometimes you can’t be in two places at once to pull off a simultaneous trigger.

“Hackcreds then, Jonny,” said Tommy.

“Yes, hackcreds, Tommy,” said Jonny, giving that look of 'you should know this', to the younger Tommy.

“Yeah, I know what they’re all about, but where’d they come from, originally I mean.”

“Ah. Well, if you listen, then I’ll burst off what I know,” said Jonny.

“Ok, ok, I’ll sit comfortable and listen for a bit,” said Tommy. “I won’t drag it into a multiplayer discussion group where the source of the data disappears into the interplay of a pub group conversation.”

“You know you can pay attention when the need arises,” laughed Jonny. “Even if I haven’t got dyed hair and a big cleavage.”

Tommy scratched his chin and peered innocently out from the top corners of his eyes.

“Oh,” said Jonny. “The associated myth tag of the hackcreds origination is the usual blend of fact and fiction. A
Tommy almost thought of adding in a buzzing noise to make things multimedia, but on this occasion thought the better of it.

"Now," said Jonny, going into full professor Yaffle mode. "On safely returning home, the pollen that the bees had collected could be analysed and the location of the honeypot tagged like the location of a speeding device. If necessary, other bees could then be sent out in other sorties to keep the honey producers busy, and distracted."

"Sounds all well and good," risked Tommy, to Jonny’s stares.

"Yes, and in practice the system worked well," continued Jonny. "As it turned out, it all worked rather too well. The initial targets where intended to be small, and thus have a finite amount of drawable resources. Maybe the coders of both the intrusion and the detection system were just too good for the job. They both designed excellent systems, although some could argue in hindsight that it was all just too much gold-plating through boredom."

"Bling, bling," whispered Tommy in a low voice that Jonny didn’t bother to process.

"When the pioneer bee arrived, its sensory components detected that it was in fact the biggest fucking jar of honey that it had ever seen. The original design was that the individual bees would just top up on their fill, and then fly back to base, reporting findings to the other bees. What the Belgians, often mistakenly and rather piss-takingly referred to as the Wasps or the Busy Bees, forgot to do, was cap the performance of their neatly coded insects."

"Myth tag legend has it, that on what must have been a particularly rainy or sunny day depending on the nature of the particular coders, they decided to make some optimisations. Running through what must have been a simple benchmarking and load simulation tool, one of the coders noticed that there was an inefficient bottleneck in the architecture. When a source was particularly rich in honey, the system was designed to send out extra bees to feed. Thus with a big jar, the cycles the bees took to travel to the pot where larger than the cycles spent at the destination. As the group only had limited processing power and resources, supply outstripped demand and the hive ran out of bees."

"Myth tag legend has it,iami.”

"Now," said Jonny, sternly. "This is where the effect of that little optimisation comes in. The queen bee has developed the ability to know when it’s too big a honeypot to send out her limited number of bees."

"Wise momma," laughed Tommy.

"With this data, she runs the routine that the hacker had put in. The solution to the bottleneck was simple – fly out another queen to the pot, and establish a local hive."

"Conquer and populate," said Tommy.

"All fair well in itself. So, the queen bee arrives and sets off her bees. And now comes the sting in the tail," smiled Jonny.

"Busy bees!" said Tommy.

"Yes. Here comes the secondary impact of the optimisation. The bees report to the queen the size of the pot, and guess what, the queen divides and now there’s two queens."

"Sounding like something out of attack of the killer bees," said Tommy.

"Yes. And so both of the optimisation routines fire up in their efficiency. The host starts flagging resource pulls, and the bees keep telling the queens to make more queens."

"A classic deadlock run chase scenario," said Tommy.

"Neatly put. There we have it, two processes locked in performance competition, each able to draw on more
resources to be chased by the other.”

“Sounds like a very sticky situation,” laughed Tommy.

“Very sticky,” agreed Jonny. “Needless to say, some entity noticed. A very big entity. Not the kind of systems to be poking into without a very good mexico.”

“Yeah, and by the sounds of it, all the Belgians had was some soggy pizza,” laughed Tommy.

“Hopefully decent pizza,” said Jonny. “Probably something meaty or severely hot, judging by what they did next.”

“Those darn jalapeños,” laughed Tommy.

“High probability,” nodded Jonny, smiling. “They knew the trace would be coming, and they figured a beacon bonfire would be the only way to avoid the track.”

“Very resource intensive,” said Tommy, thankful he hadn’t been there.

“That’s right,” said Jonny. “Now, they needed a way to tap the coder power to achieve the hack. Given that they were real trueschool hackers, they sought information in the subject area of the target they were avoiding.”

“Erm, what eats bees?” spat out Tommy.

“No quite. Naval history was more their ticket. They came across that point in history where the brits were defeated by dutch. Severely embarrassed, the hornet like investigations of the reasons why showed that money was the key. The dutch were able to generate more funds from their native country, and thus build a superior fleet.”

“Clever,” said Tommy.

“Yes. The dutch banking system enabled the government to effectively borrow money from dutch corps, by holding it in their banks, and then selling shares in the holdings of the banks.”

“Good stuff,” said Tommy.

“Yes,” agreed Jonny. “The beauty of the plan was that it effectively enabled the system to use the same money twice, creating something out of nothing.”

“Doubling your stack is always good,” smiled Tommy, then switching to the mimic of a stern poker face.

“And so the hackcreds system was born, said Jonny triumphantly. “By establishing a bank of hackers, they were able to construct the network of blinding flares which they had originally conceived.”

“The system we all know and love,” said Tommy, “Well, mostly.”

“Yes. The way of it does serve as a good method of drawing fresh talent into the pool,” said Jonny. “Often the one’s who need to do a larger hack quick are those starting out.”

“Good job the cybertechnic covered some of the brown envelope stuff,” said Tommy. “Or I’d probably owe a lot more creds.”

“The design does have a way of attracting the right sort of wrong types,” smiled Jonny.

“A seemingly endless supply of those,” laughed Tommy.

“And as for the Belgians, rumour has it they’re still paying off the hackdebt to this day,” punchlined Jonny. Tommy lapped it up. “Joking aside, he’s running up a bit of a tab with this, isn’t he.”

“Well, erm, sort of,” stuttered Tommy.

“I see,” said Jonny with much eyebrow raising.

“Actually, I kind of sort of, well, owe, him,” managed Tommy.

“You do have a way of doing just the wrong thing at the right time,” chuckled Jonny. “But he’s still ticking away at my meter, even if not yours.”

“I know,” said Tommy. “But he is meteor driven on this one, keeps going on about tracking treasures down and the ‘big hack’, whatever that is.”

“Don’t we not know it,” said Jonny.

“And you know what happened last time,” smiled Tommy. “He created that credbot system to do lots of tiny hacks for him whilst he was sleeping.”

“That was very inventive,” said Jonny. “But the weight of some of the coins on all these latest ones will need balancing out with a little more than trivs.”

“I’m not even going to ask what silos he’s got you scoping,” said Tommy.

“He wants to listen to some of his own bollocks sometime,” said Jonny. “Maybe he’ll be able to work it all out for him self.”

The entrance buzzer roared out. Jonny and Tommy stood excitedly in expectance. Looking into the vidpanel display.

“Oh,” said Tommy, disappointment draining and deepening his voice. “It’s you.”

“Well there’s a fucking welcome for you,” he said.

“Come on up,” said Jonny, fingers dancing on the keypad to the solenoids.

“So how’s it going?” he said.


“Usual way,” he said. “Tie-up for a while with the fodder, and then out will come the end of level boss.”

“Yes, the usual isoteric way of this type of system,” said Jonny.

“I’ll let you have first crack at the gargant when it rears in then,” he said.

“You’re so caring,” said Jonny, partly thanking, and partly in sarcasm.

The buzzer roared again.

“You two dual-up and I’ll sort the fuel,” said Tommy.

“Good plan,” said Jonny. “So tell me then, how do you always arrive at the right time for pizza?”

“Oh, you know how it is, Jonny,” he said with his hacker smile. “One of the delivery guys owes me hackcreds.”
Jonny just smiled back.

“Well praise the Lord!” said Tommy, armed with the righteousness of that heavenly repast, pizza, and the miracle of being given extra jalapeños on the side.

Chapter Three – For a girl

He awoke screaming in pain. His felt as though the hurt in his skin was afire, the surface taut and sore, bleeding. Where it hurt it itched, where it itched he scratched, and where he scratched it hurt. His instinctive solution did not solve the problem, and the circular torment continued in its cycles until his mind realised no progress was being made, and it gave up in screams which jolted his body in spasm. He could sense that his progenitors weren’t there. It was light although he knew it was dark. The night watchers looked on, the layer of the incubator glass between them and him. They couldn’t lift and hold him as the pressure against his skin would only have created pain. He lay there, legs crossed at the ankles, thumbs nestled between index and middle fingers.

Morning came with its cool chill and eerie stillness. A slow passing of cycles, coupled with the expectancy of something destined to occur. The baby lay there thinking, connecting, dreaming whilst awake. An exhausting wait of emptiness. He felt cold, tired, and lonely.

With the sun through the window came the maternal glow. His mother had returned with the beginning of the workday. He tried to feed through his sore lips, a little nourishment was gleaned, but feeding didn’t seem to quell the chemical triggering in his mind.

Settling him back down, his mother gazed upon him. Looking at him lovingly, glancing over the breaks in his skin. Blowing gently over them with a breath of perfect temperature, giving a mild relief to the burning sensations of pain, and a tactile touch of warm comfort. He fell into sleep.

Another night the intermittent observer from an agency who had watched them watch, hacked in. Seeing the baby unconscious amidst the restless writhing of the soreness of his skin surface, she copied the blowing technique she had smiled upon a few days before.

The eye lightening faded out as the reality of the newly born baby began to form. The mild pinging pain and the slow realisation of a consciousness. The smell of her was different. It wasn’t the same smell as his genetic parentage. It was someone different. It was light although it was night. As his eyelids spasmed in growth they opened, and a sudden rush of blood empowered his retinal burn. The scent wasn’t his genetic similarity yet matched like fingers interlocking in warm love. The immune systems would be highly compatible, and the descendant splitting and recombining would enhance the bonds of the genetic chain.

She blinked slowly. The baby wriggled in the dance of wanting to be picked up, arms half stretching out in a hug like motion. She motioned her protruding bent index finger towards and into the fish tank incubator. Starting at the left side of the baby’s mouth, her finger’s knuckle traced the slow circular shape round his lips, and a slight quarter circuit more to position back to the central.

His eyes focused on the pattern in her eyes. A prismatic net shape burning in starred vertices. As she sang to him in a soft lullaby, his nanomachines recorded every visual detail, long blackened eyelashes, the cheekbone and nose edgeline ridges, a slight puffiness beneath her eyes, slowly iterating and continuing down to her chin. As she blinked he sucked on the flavouring of her finger knuckle. His first taste of reality suppressant. The memory was fused.


“I know you think it unfair now, but it’s vital for the survival of your future daughter,” said The Captain.

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Things were certainly so not right. They hadn’t been for a while. Stuff could go sketchy of course, but this seemed a little different. She knew that tiredness and a building up of a lot of trivialities could weigh her down sometimes, but this felt a little more that those odd week or so’s of flu-like darkness.

Maybe it was because she was everybody’s last call. The person they ventured to when there wasn’t anyone else to turn to for help. She was ok with that, for some reason she did manage to have an endless patience when it came to that kind of Keplarisation. She was a keeper of many people’s secrets.

Problem was, her own hacking had led her to a level of abstraction from which she couldn’t define her viewpoint to anybody else. She seemed to have the answers to the hidden equations, but she didn’t seem to have any use for them, or anyone to communicate them to or understand them, or indeed any interface to even feed them into.

She had learnt her skills and used them to experience and practice as she had been taught. But now what. It was no longer enough in itself. Training for what, no purpose or sake to it. She was lost. Not really lost, for she had a fully annotated map, but just no place to go, no reason to visit.

She had worked out her detailed plan for her escape to Mexico, as all the members did. She wondered whether the time had come to just accept and give up, but really she needed to tidy the flat first. Never good to leave unsolved items, or a mess. Leave things more beautiful than you find them.

Actually, that paperwork was needed somewhere too. She visited Caroline.
“Hey, Caroline,” she said plainly and simply.  
“You, babes, hi,” gave back Caroline.  
“Brought that paperwork and that, you know, tidy as does,” she said.  
“Thanks, appreciated,” said Caroline. “So how’s it in your world?”  
“In all done,” she said. “This has been the worst year of my life.”  
“You’re lucky you’ve gone so long in life not to have had it before,” said Caroline.

She left soon after.

Bumping into her friend’s uncle in the street.  
“Hi,” she said.  
“Oh, hello you, I’ve heard you’ve been having a rough one of late,” said uncle.  
“Well, it’s all just life stuff isn’t it. You’ve solved the money problem which is most people’s difficult one, so really, you have an advantage.”  
“Yes,” she said.

The comm line to her parents in one of the regular three day check-ins.  
“We’ve heard that things aren’t so great,” said her mother. “Well, I’m worse, as you should know. You can’t be thinking about some running away plan. My problems should put yours into perspective.”  
“What have you been up to then, little one,” said her father. “If things aren’t going great you should lay off that wacky reality suppressant. You know that it isn’t good for you.”  
Why did they always bring that up.

That cunt from the office had told everyone that he had shagged her when the wanker hadn’t. Probably only told that fucking Mandy, the local transmitter station. Actually, a little unfair on Mandy, she just liked to talk. The grapevine definitely looked as though it had been in full-bodied flow.

Everyone in the office was looking at her differently. Had they heard the false gossip or had they not. Some looked down their noses at her, some eyed her up as though she had now become some global piece of free for all porn. Others pronounced her name in different intonations and inflections when they said hi.  
The toilet cubicles seemed to empty when she entered. When she wired comms they seemed to take longer and longer to respond, and the replies were offhand and unmeaningful. Hushed voices and giggles when she was near.

There wasn’t anybody to listen to the explanation of her side of the story. What words to use or in which language, she did not know. Forever lost in an abyss of confusion and misunderstanding. There wasn’t anybody who knew who she was.

She didn’t feel well. Leaving the office and in the street. It was the same. Everyone seeing the false lies that were branded on her head. Glancing, eyeing, staring, judging. Turning her transport away, the hums of the traffic chattering about her. The smart dressed and the tramp like on street corners. One meeting another, then moving on and passing the gossip to the next along the chain. Harsh looks and backs of heads. She felt cold, tired, and lonely.

Returning into and securing all entrances to the flat. Over garments and shoes dragged and kicked off into snow drifts in the corridor. Stumbling into the bedroom and ensuite.

She poked her tongue out into the mirror, examining for some unknown symptom. Her temperature regulation just didn’t seem right. Too hot or too cold. She had a fever. Maybe she hadn’t eaten. Draining over too much to do that now, little other action possible but going to bed.

Her Asoterials must be really off. Thoughts flickering in a blur of sleep hazed enlightenment. Connections drifting in and out through consciousness, waves of lightening crashing into jagged rocks. The swimming of swans and the high-pitched hooting of migrating geese. A cycled curse of continued heart-felt explanations falling on empty ears. No truth gleaned from knowledge or experience, time stolen in false understandings and judgmental rationalisations of fickle onlookers.

The long hours of the long days drew out into the endless length of night. Shining silver tears wept out to fall amongst the oceans, rising and subsiding with the swing of the tides. As her sweat of nightmares and the rivers of her eyes dampened the bed, she took turns to roll herself to the other less moistened side.

The acid chills of sleep deprivation unchaining the black knighted wraiths of draining terrors, shredding her face into unrecognisable forms. Shaded blood seeping from the walls of the room, pouring in and filling up, until the mattress lay floating atop a thickened spew of putrid hatred.

On the fourth day since everything first began, the bubbling and gurgling of a torrid spiralling flow around her. The foul-mouthed spits of boiling raging forth the tongues which lapped around her covers. The pressure mounting against the shields until the wretchedness broke the very sanctuary of her bed. In and around her. Invading, intruding, violating the sacredness of her soul. Enveloping and squashing inward.

Finding half a peanut in her bed. The pea and the nut. A shell and its fruit. Found a peanut last night I. The shape and the suggestion. Synapses melting and reforming, trying to glean a pattern match to explain the symbol. Everything being linked through and outside of time to this moment. An eternity of not understanding the questions to the obvious answers which were found in proof.
Falling into a conscious unconsciousness, the sound of a silent wind and a numbness of feeling. Standing up.

On a liquid plane of patterned light she stood motionless and relaxed, her legs bent ever so slightly, a delicate curve in her elbows. The cool chill of the wind behind her, blowing her hair forward. Not the most flattering direction to be viewed in.

Such was the breeze, any sounds her lips motioned drifted away in packets of light, inaudible to her as though the monitor speakers were turned off on her stage of infinite proportions.

No matter which direction she stepped in, the undulating concentric circles of light seemed to pulse toward an unknown centre faster than she could traverse. She silently prayed her thoughts to her God, to bring her comfort on her hiking travels. Left or right, forward or back, it made no difference. No matter how she danced and twisted and turned in flow, the wind was always behind her, shining towards an inner destination. She was lost to all hope.

She stopped her rushing, and stood patiently. Silently expectant in wait. In the stillness of her acceptance of the cascading of non-existent time, she saw a shape that the rays of light danced over in their passing. Taking time to focus and concentrate, changing the beams and rarefactions, she saw it was someone lying down.

As the meniscus of her eyes changed their wavelengths, the shape became clearer. Not so much zooming in, but being drawn toward a viewpoint of understanding.

Although still distant, the shape was much clearer now. It was a man laying on his side. One leg bent at the knee so it pointed upward, his head resting on an arm which was bent at the elbow, the whole creating a circuit of curves.

He lay on the very edge of a black abyss, an event horizon where all the streams of accelerated light suddenly sped to a point where even they held no form such was the distance between their component waves of particles.

Rays shone out from his eyes like a lighthouse of vision, projecting a shimmering glow of radiance in their paths of searching. She watched as his sight fell on an abstracted world of beings, who collided and interacted in a non-obvious correlation. As he gazed upon them, they seemed to reveal their light in a gradual raising of ultraviolet auras from their feet, like the appearing of a heat haze shimmering over a sun baked transport lane. The odd one reflected back a dim glow, although the numbers and brightness of them was hardly noticeable.

There were other beings which lit their own light without any intervention. Now and again glowing, in quite a regular short-spanned pattern. His light seemed to be guiding them away from a ragged shore. Once they had their bearings, mostly the bright lights shone for each other, drawing themselves to each other in.

She could see all the illuminations dancing their light show. It was like that she had seen at parties and gatherings, were eye contact and a smile could spark the crossings of the light sabres of love. She saw the light, but it never shone on her.

Her viewpoint moving closer, translacing like a lens. Unlike the source of lightening behind her, his beacon only seemed to shine intermittently. Each sweep seeming to drain an unseen power source, needing a short moment of recharge, and then radiating in all its glory again.

Then his lighthouse stopped. The wait for the recharge ebbed away into the acceptance that the transport had either been or wasn’t coming. Either way the timetable was irrelevant, and gave no indicators or further data.

She watched as he moved his legs ninety degrees, and stood up. The centre of the spiralling circles became darker, the rays of light travelling faster still, their acceleration rising exponentially. Standing on the event horizon, staring into the black pit of hell. All lightness being sucked in never to return again, forever lost in the depths of the unknowable.

Seeing and experiencing all his hope lost in an endless curse of repeated failures, she felt the warmth of her tears of pixie armour drip down her icen face. The panic of the heaves of his chest breathing seemed to slow gently, until they looked to resonate in matched cycles to the peaks and troughs of the incoming ripples of light.

She watched effortlessly and timelessly as he walked to the centre of the circle. Not so much floating above the lightfall, as just existing in stasis on top of it, as though he had no mass that could be pulled to form a weight to be drawn down and inward.

Then the very will seemed to disappear from his abstraction of being, as though he doubted his existence itself. He seemed to be looking for something, searching in the cascading parabolas of timelight.

She tried to maneuver herself so as to be in his field of vision, tilting her face slightly in the expectation of being looked upon. How ever she danced and cartwheeled around, she was always behind him. He couldn’t see her, his gaze distracted in the meanderings of fluid flows. Like the early memory of when she had strolled over the black and white striped pedestrian crossing, spotting a potential target to spark her iterations of possible matchings, only to be missed in passing as he admired the big red sports car revving impatiently in wait.

Intermingled with the visions of her own library of stored thoughts, she saw him disintegrate like the pixellation of a tacky cliptrip effect. He had seemed to set some device just as the balance tipped. He fell.

Her arms almost broke from her shoulders with the force of her reflex action, stretching out in a snap that would have been rivalled only by the best transcended of martial practitioners, were it not for its over exertedness.

Reaching out in desperate motions, like the want of a baby needing to be picked up, her finger knuckles shattered as they tried to expand beyond her realm of reach.

Sensing depths of screams never heard before. Not the broken whimpering shrills of terror, nor the high-pitched alarm calls of cycling fright and fear, or even the shouts of pain cried out in reluctance when the threshold had been triggered. They were the deep instinctive reflex shutterings of a body wrenching in inexplicable agony.

She felt no action could be taken in help, lost inside of herself in a torturous observation. The claws of daemons tearing at his skin and shredding his soul, contorted legs with over-proportioned muscles stomping and kicking his
sagged body around amongst themselves. Nagging whisperings of hypnotic false lies being incanted to his ears.

Her own soul imploded as she echoed the experience of her witnessing. Her body vomited out tears until her skin seemed to dry out and become cracked like untended grassland turned to mud in too strong a sun.

An instant before her sight became blinded by the brightness of the darkness, she saw her shimmering tears in their whirlpool, flowing around and into the cylindrical shaft. Spiralling and rushing, draining down deep, cleansing and protecting. Washing and purifying.

There was no longer time and her formless being being breathed outside of it. In the nothingness of everything, all hope of even mere existence fading with the slowing of synapse firing. Starry spots of memories burning out, with not even a candle wax left in tell to trace.

Nothing left to be, nothing left to do.

“So she sang to him”

At the end of all time,
When all light had shone,
There was nothing left,
Save my love for you.

Tears of pure pixie armour,
Wept down to shield your soul,
Reaching out into eternity,
Where I know my love resides.

In the timeless of infinity he waited. Never doubting for an instant in his belief that she existed. Though the screams quelled not, and the wretchedness was unceasing.

She ever felt the presence of his love.

Chapter Four - Of the boy

Stamping his mind unceremoniously through a spiralling cheese-grater shaft dancing toward the decadency of oblivion, the daemons raped his thoughts and kicked his sagged body husk around amongst themselves.

It had been a tough week.

Things had been getting tricky for a while. The indoctrinal banterings of various groups had been circling in his mind for a considerable time. At the start of the week he had met with his peers on the day of the moon. Parts of the discussions were the usual banter, other parts seemed strangely inappropriate, phrases he had heard before, but were somehow now being displaced into an attempt at the explanation of an unknown meaning.

“What is it? A tapeworm?”
“Break the spell.”
“The good of the many and the good of the few.”
“It’s not black and white, it’s black and white.”
“Like losing control of your brain.”

He had that strange awareness feeling that day, so he hadn’t risked the cakes in case they were laced with an altered strain of reality suppressant. Although there was no way any right minded coder could have refused the offer of a can of fizzy pop.

Leaving and returning home, later in the day he realised he had run out of reality suppressant. There would be no powering up the rig into vr until he had restocked. Settling instead for a warm up from everybody’s favourite uncle whiskey, sipping gently and reanalysing and reprocessing the day’s inputs.

He felt sick. He figured he had eaten sufficiently that day, so the gurgling in his stomach was indeed somewhat curious. Without time to cross the living room and hallway, he vomited into the kitchen sink.

Focusing down into the abyss, he saw what looked like a piece of string, and there his deadlock run chase scenario began. Processing through explanations for the result of his organic equation, his message as it would be later phrased. Was it a tapeworm? Perhaps it had been hidden in a flecked ecstasy pill, to lie in wait in his stomach lining until years of water had swelled it in size like an exponentialled grain of rice.

What had he done. What must he do. Perhaps he must do good deeds to make up for his past. Piece of string. Was it a piece of a dishcloth. Would his good doings just be as dirty rags, soiled by the ego in external shows of charity. Or would he be like a cleaning cloth, which wiped away the dirt to bring forth reborn shininess, only to leave itself marked by the process until washed carefully under streams of river flow.

Whereas before his mind only might spend the odd cycle in analysis of the random unknowns, the rapidity of his Keplarisation reached a greater peak with the stimulation of the awakeness of days and nights without sleep. Thinking and attempting neuronisation in infinite pathways. In its attempt at understanding, his mind fractalled internally, searching for the truth that lay deep beneath.
The memories of his entire life hung in fluidosity in his mind. Thoughts were never forgotten, single switches of synapses floating softly in a timeless breeze. They waited there patiently and effortlessly, until the time that a processing formed a new connection to them, and instead of being isolated outside of the network they joined the wholeness of understanding. Whilst a single spark might not address much in itself, when two, then three, were ignited in communication, the waves of energy were noticed by those surrounding, thus inflaming other routeways to comprehension.

Rapidly analysing and reindexing, cross-matching in overflowing paths of firation. The whole mass of his brain bursting in its explosions, becoming a single fusion of connectivity. Windows of thought being translated into focus, examined, subdivided in two for closer inspection. These divisions themselves being dissected into half parts. The iterations mapping inwardly, his mind fractalling into itself, until the single cells themselves fractured like a popping bubble.

Speeding through the lightening flashes of his life in his eyes. Observing, experiencing, reliving every smile and every tear as his body reverberated from a cascading of emotions in total recall. That which he had always held dear. That which he had spent his life questing and prospecting for. An unknowable force highlighting his key moments, his triumphs and mistakes. A lifetime of miscognition and not being understood. Searching for his points of weakness. Where his vulnerabilities lay waiting. The moments for which he blamed himself.

Spanning through the memories of girls he had loved and been loved by. Recalling how he had phoned a girl from the red telephone box, to make up for the time he hadn’t in the past. Even though it wouldn’t change the future, he had known that it would at least dispel that particular hold the past had over him. Spinning into failed relationships, missed opportunities, and false readings.

Spiralling backwards in linearity, then flipping and cross-comparing in a meld through the inside and outside of intermingling time. The building of a parallel processor capable of linking everything. In the darkness of his clarity he remembered that divisive moment.

Walking through the nightclub to the left of the dancefloor. Past the tables and chairs on his left. Suddenly stopping in a larger area, seeing the girl unexpectedly. He raised his left hand like a Red Indian, as if a silent hi in truce. He couldn’t remember hearing any reply. Gazing on the beauty of the girl’s face and eyes, all reality and time fell forever lost in an eternal darkness. They had separated months before. In the sorrow of missing the girl he had broken the purity of their bond, sharing one night of loneliness with another. He remembered the words of a friend saying how maybe a second chance could come in the summer. He had forever broken that hope and had lost that which he had eternally loved. He had never properly explained himself to the girl, nor had she ever properly understood him. His summer never came.

Sprinting through lifecycles of mistakes and blame. Futile attempts at self analysis and subsequent self correction. An eternal epitaph of mockery in an endless passing of equinocial circles.

Maybe the match was never there, a remembering how sometimes the girl sneezed in his presence, joking of being allergic to him. Maybe the immune systems of their genetic bodies reacted in a way outside of their level of consciousness. But that did not lessen the blame of his self, or his sense of loss. He was always so very tired.

In the days of nights that followed his mind thought inside against itself. The meniscuses of waking and consciousness, past and present, melded into one. The incidence of coincidence exponential in paths of attempts at understanding and explanation.

When he saw the vidclip on the screen which he had seen some years before, his perceived unfaithfulness to the girl triggered memories of the hallucinations of scorpions. Especially as the original source was interspersed with repetitive jabs of various indoctrinal brain washing codices, to be unleashed at a later date, and reinforced with a tainted batch of reality suppressant. The comm link to the clap clinic certainly manifested itself as a defcon zero, life or death situation, forming a new connection to them, and instead of being isolated outside of the network they joined the wholeness of.

In a succession of nights of dreaming whilst awake in his room, his thoughts became predictive in their firings. In the sweating of sleeplessness, his imagination became predictive, each night’s thoughts echoed throughout the headings of the next day’s newspaper. To try and lessen the butterfly effect of his being, his mind fought against itself, trying to think clearly and maintain a stream of goodness. Not wanting to be awake, not wanting to be asleep.

The harder that the strength of his thought swung, the harder the swing back of the echoes of oblivion. Like losing control of his thinking, losing control of the conscious thought of the brain. Everyday the paperboy brang more. The good of the many and the good of the few. Was the purpose to destroy himself so that the many may have good. E=mc². Was it the aim of the conspirators to fool him into destroying himself so that their energy would be greater by the release of his. As he walked along the muddy track, the grass either side of him seemed as green. Freedom of choice. He stepped along the path like an equilibrist.

It wasn’t now so much that the reality suppressant was necessary to provide the third input to the Keplar organic transistor, but that he didn’t have a reality without it. Society was a self-perpetuating illusion of society, and his reality was unsustainable. Standing at the centre of the nothingness of everything, the only way to maintain existence was to fall. So after setting the trilock, he let go, and fell into the darkness of oblivion.

It’s not black and white, it’s black and white. The stripes of a pedestrian crossing. A head checked by a jumbo jet. The great game of control, like some grand chess board of a masonic master. A lifetime of controlled predestination. There was no thought or action he could make to change anything. Whatever he did made no difference. The rearrangement of everything after to suit their lies. Like a rock star left dangling in a hotel room, the fabrication of false secrets of a life story paraded across the front pages of a newspaper.
As the helicopters circled in their hums, the memory to the piece of string returned. The lying deception of the centre point conspiracy. The feigning of a middle life crisis like event, to whip a generation into cramming more in, increasing their productivity. Cranking up the handle of the money machine.

The breaking free of mother’s apron strings and the cutting of the umbilical cord. A progenitor conspiracy. All throughout his life he had been played as a script. The performance of the sun, moon, and stars, in the guildhall with its tiered steps when in his primary Cybertechnic. An image of a triangular pocket watch pushed into view suspended by parabolic curves. The meaning of the symbols instead of numerals as the hands of the hours ticked by. The white winged dove at the centre. The parallel flickering of an image of a white messenger pigeon cooing. The initials of the failed lovers when the pointers became level, on the towers upholding the spheres of Tesla coils. The date on the inscription of the watch. 1881. Forever lost in a fin de siècle. He was outside of time.

The conspiracy lay both in and without him, set throughout history. He never had a chance. There was nothing he could ever do, in the past, the present, or the future. All had already transpired against him. It was as it had always been, the autocompletion of reality separated from him by a transparent meniscus. Like when the primary Cybertechnic tutors separated him from the others for yapping too much after he had finished his tasks, as he was distracting them from theirs, being moved to a table in isolation, from where he couldn’t communicate. The girl from kiss-chase, his eagerness to catch and kiss, their feet accidentally clipping in running, being blamed for tripping her. A continued cycle of misunderstandings. Like the girl he had loved when he was six, who moved to another country with her family when their tasks lay elsewhere. Like the girl he had been attracted to in the bank, the irony of being separated from her by a layer of bullet proof glass. As it always was. As in the incubator, no influence over external events, only a series of watching non-relevant reactions being reflected through the fish tank walls of glass. He lay there, legs crossed at the ankles, thumbs nestled between index and middle fingers. Thinking, connecting, dreaming whilst awake. The sensory overload caused his nerves to fire. Screaming and wrenching in pain.

At the Epoch Dawn where the night met the day. The sounds of Psalm like songs being sung. Something that had no proof could not be disproved by proof. Idyllic in its simplicity and yet infinite in its complexity. The point of not being able to prove the existence of God was so that it could not be faked in order to gain power and control. The true genius of God.

A church. Black and white. The models on top of a wedding cake. The ying and the yang. Part of her inside of him, and part of him inside of her. The two of them as one, the parts separated, but still maintaining the memory of each other within their selves. In the timeless infinity of the combinations of reality, the autocompletions occurred simultaneously.

Standing amidst the burning black flames of hell. Sickenened, broken, breathless, in the emptiness of oblivion.

Tap, tap. The warm rain of her tears fell onto the bounds of his being. Cascading and twisting down throughout him, coating him in the love of her pixie armour. The oxygen of her phoenix blue reignited the red flames of his dragon breath with its chemiluminescence.

They stood facing each other’s faces, locked in realms of matching. Their arms outstretched, palms pointing upwards. The fingers of her hands beckoning him towards her, drawing him in with the attraction of a timeless force. His arms reached out in an echoing of reply.

With the nearing of their existences, they crossed their arms at the wrist, their hands laying out centred in front of them, levelled with their hearts. Turning palms so their left palms were downward, and their right palms pointing upward.

Their open palms of no secrets met, and they delicately caressed each other’s hands in a reading of understanding. Gripping in a hand-holding, and then their fingers interlacing and locking in the bonds of warm love. They kissed nine times. The connection was made.

Like the two similar halves of a peanut, separate yet keyed to another, complimentary in their twinning. An endless string tying them together through the bounds of infinity.

A few weeks later she bought a red transport. A little after that a red coat, just to be sure.

Now this is where he perhaps may have regretted watching a lifetime’s worth of sci-fi and conspiracy theory films. Impaling aftershocks crunched the sketchy factor even more than the original dawn. Live comms continuing in, like the ‘if they knew you knew they’d want to kill you’, didn’t exactly help the matter. Especially as he knew not what the they or the what were. With mind and body broken to a childlike acceptance, he lived through and experienced all of them in the months to come, evaluating and processing them, setting them on the balance and Keplaring their worth.

In their depraved taunting of him, the terrors had whispered false bargaining lies of being able to lessen the length and extent of his torture by trading some of it to her. He would never let them anywhere near her. Their promises to make it worse for him were the only truisms in their covenants of hate.

Her pixie armour shielded him from the inside out.

How to find her. The thoughts of his last ex girlfriend floated through his mind. The irony of that comms line being near one of his suppressant stockists didn’t escape him. The memory of both sparked the remembering of that feeling of being loved, but he knew neither were the truth of love that he sought.

Later he wrote the analogy in code. The Lighthouse game, light bulbs collected to energise the beacon, whilst
avoiding the drains of the fanged bats.

How to find her. The obvious answer lay in his mind’s life experience of training. He must hack for her.

Chapter Five – Darn shiny hackcreds

Transport parked up, neighbours avoided, perimeter secure. At last, a bit of peace and quiet. Time for her to have a bit of time for her, and she knew that this evening she would be spending that time in the rig. After slipping from her day’s disguise of society clothing into her hacker slacks, she fired up the rig and got into her game.

Flying round the three-dimensional constructs as she altered her viewpoint, she toyed with the gameclip’s match and reveal pipelined completion. Tapping and aligning, she used the puzzles to hone her focus back into the real of the unreal. Smiling and flitter dancing with glee as she span through the levels, her task sensations sated themselves and it was time for the true busyness of the rig’s play.

Much like the gameclip, she had prepared her hack by sequencing a series of interlocking parts. She smiled mischievously to herself at the graceful styling of her configuration. The hack was a strange one really, the download was just some time-saving code. She was planning an extraction from one of the member agency freezers. She tutted at her self for the use of the freezer analogy in her thoughts, that all those jumper boys just so loved to use. That ’s what it was, code storage. They so loved saying that phrase of playground humour, and could endlessly repeat it along with that way of speaking while holding their noses.

Shit. She really couldn’t believe she had just held her nose and repeated the phrase. What a bitch, guess it was just so damn catchy.

Anyway, a bit of refocus. The download was just time-saving code, nothing so complex that she couldn’t have weaved it out herself, it was just that for some of those translation matrices which were used again and again, there wasn’t much point reinventing the wheel. Or as in most code cases, reinventing the wheel, assembling the infrastructure to harvest all the resources required, put the thing together, test it on a cart, in fact work out how to fix it to the cart, and then scale the solution so that hundreds could be spawned in an instant.

The difference with this hack then was not the download itself, or indeed the method of gaining entry to the vault, as it was already open to members like her. The game was to mask her routes, so that there were no tells to trace her identity, or indeed anything left disturbed to show that someone had ever visited at all.

Tap, tap. She let her creations slip into the meld as though delicately pouring champagne into a crystal glass. Slowly, surely, letting the bubbles seep in and then pop away into nothingness when they had performed their retrieval. The preparation had been long in its fermentation, and the drinking auto completed with a gulp.

Sealing her io barriers once more, she glanced through the pattern of the downloaded clip. It was usual for members to leave a deliberate mistake in any code they distributed. The error would be a trivial one, but an understanding of the code would be needed to spot it. That way only those who had invested the time and effort in true learning could use the code, but if they did there were a wealth of time-saving libraries to borrow from.

Correcting and sliding the clip in, scarcely noticeable in its part of the enormity of her system consciousness. It was almost nearing the end of its development, and would soon be ready to leave the nest and take those first tentative steps towards flight. Instantly switching her thoughts to the next rung in her ladder, ever towards that breathtaking height from which she could have the adrenaline rush of the slide ride. Now to gain a host system to parse it all on.

She had made her fortunes this way and that. But there were some things that money just couldn’t buy. They couldn’t be begged, borrowed, or stolen, not even by her skill, such were their importance they were bunkered off any outside systems. For those kinds of purchases there was only one currency. Hackcreds.

Tommy awoke to the sharp stillness of the day. Black shadows flashed across his field of vision, and his body ached with a cold dark chill. Breathing slowing into consciousness, he deepened his intakes until his mind became relaxed. Shifting himself upright in a single motion, he stretched and flexed his body in warm up, then leapt up to the chin-up bar and began his daily hack.

After the workout, Tommy showered and fired up his rig. Although Tommy was on a martial specialism scholarship, everyone at the Cybertechnic had to learn the skills necessary for electronic survival. Ticking through the learning cliptsrips, Tommy’s mind echoed the databursts with a triaspect burning of knowledge into his synapses. As the quickening of neuronisation slowed, thoughts turned to more recreational pursuits.

Flipping to the gameclip, Tommy tap, tapped, as he set about his fun in galactic domination. Starting up a fresh clip, he set about the tasks of population growth and taxation to build his empire. Building to a base economy from which his planet could reach out into the unknown, contact with other planets and other players in the meld.

Jabbing through excitedly, Tommy chuckled as the charting visualisations shone in their interplay like a sound system graphic equalizer of old as the volume of his civilisation rose. Then Tommy reached that point he always reached. Having invested his time to assemble to such a point, his body almost shook with the buzz as the critical moment approached.

Bang, bang. A firework finale as ever. Tommy tapped off and paused for reflection.

Buzz, buzz. The buzz of the vidpanel entry system.
“Hey, Tommy,” he said. “Tap, tap.”
“Tap, tap,” sighed Tommy, and tapped on the keypanel.
Tommy opened the door to the lair, and he blew in like an excited whirlwind.
“So how goes it for you, Tommy?” he said.
“Yeah, ok, I guess,” said Tommy.
“What’s up?” he said gently. “Been dumped again?”
“No, not at all,” said Tommy. “It’s far more important than that kind of thing.”
“Oh?” he said. “New hack?”
“Well, it’s my new gameclip,” said Tommy. “It’s called ‘galactic megaquest’.”
“Sounds explosive,” he smiled.
“Yeah, erm, no,” shook Tommy. “It’s galactic domination, sure, but there’s not many explosions.”
“Oh, yes?” he said.
“Yeah,” said Tommy. “Once you’ve got your planet up and running, it uses a complex trade system in resolution rather than combat simulation.”
“I see,” he laughed. “Using the financials to build greater cathedrals of trade I suppose.”
“About right,” nodded Tommy. “The start and midgame I can do no problem, it’s the endgame that I keep getting stuck on.”
“Pray tell, young Jedi,” he laughed.
“Huh, huh,” said Tommy. “I can sort the population growth to build the planet and increase resources, and get things all going, and get good scoring in interplanet trade. But eventually I get too big a population, not enough resources, and then my success ratings just shrapnel.”
“Hmm,” he breathed out slowly. A pausing moment of thought. “Maybe the way to win the game is simply to maintain your population without exceeding the demands of its resources. Get to have a longer game and you get a higher score. Sustainability rather than overflow and population-resource contention.”
“Sounds plausible,” said Tommy. “Maybe my population development cycle runs too smooth, and they just end up all being greedy spoilt bastards.”
“Maybe you need to build in a limiting factor,” he said. “Like contentment or something.”
They laughed loudly.
“So,” said Tommy. “You anywhere nearer finding your special girl then?”
“Oh, well, not quite,” he said. “But I can sense that reality is narrowing.”
“Yeah, erm,” said Tommy. “Some would say the reason it’s being so long is because you’re a little paranoid.”
“Maybe,” he smiled. “But then you can never be too paranoid.”
“Maybe,” said Tommy, with a blankish look.
“I guess it’s when you stop wondering if the girls are from an agency or not when you meet them,” he said. “And you just start-off wondering which agency.”
“Sounds like a high state of alert,” laughed Tommy.
“Don’t worry,” he said. “I have my own gauges.”
“Really,” said Tommy.
“Yeah,” he continued. “When I’m chipping out plaster to hide a flash ic backup, in someone else’s house. Then, just maybe then, I might think that it’s a little paranoia playtime.”
“Or you really fucked up a backtrack,” said Tommy.
“Yeah. There’s that one,” he said. “Guess context is all so important, the weighting of the scale can sometimes vary with the situation.”
“I’d probably agree with you there,” said Tommy.
“Anyways. Wanna have a little hack then?” he smiled.
“Thought you were doing well,” said Tommy. “Almost managing a conversation for a while before retreating into the security of your hackgames.”
“I’m not that bad,” he said.
“Suppose not,” said Tommy.
“And since that field trip got cancelled from the cybertechnic,” he said. “We should really make up for the lack of vocational hacker training we would have managed in their full view.”
“Ok,” said Tommy. “What have you got for me this time?”

* 

Not that she’d run up the tick of hackcreds with just any old story. She’d been through the brown envelope briefings at her Cybertechnic like everyone else. She knew that if you ran up too much of a tab you could end up running all sorts of shadow cracks to repay those bad gambling debts.

Mostly she just loaned from members she knew, or didn’t know as the case usually was, but at least she knew what they were, if not who they were. However, for the kind of rollercoaster slide she was after, it would be necessary to loan off who some would call the bad guys, a big corp.

Sometimes it was necessary to call on the kind of processing power that one couldn’t fit in a suitcase. Or a garage. Or even a street. It wasn’t so easy to hide that type of system in full view, so usually it was only the big ‘legit’ corps who
had that kind of installation up and running. Whilst there’d probably be a chance of some time on a comparable processor at some outrageous rigfest, they tended to be only once a year flings. She really wanted access to some on demand cycles, so she would get a chance to tweak some enhancements, and hopefully a few more times to experience that ride.

As the codestore clip unfolded itself in bursts like a cantilever bridgehead from Royal Engineers, forming a fortified pathway through the sea of the electric ether, she took a brief instant to examine the tag line of the download. It was signed ‘J. Crypto #12’.

With the sights of her scopes secured in view, she stepped slowly around the constructs, as if shopping for a new top for a night out. Some of the tasks for hire were a bit boring for her, she had already had the high of satisfaction from completion for their kind of coding. Always best for her to have a bit more of a challenge to spur her on. Ok to throw on something from a season long gone as mere clothing, but she was in a playfully stylish mood, and fancied dressing to impress.

Hmm. That looked more interesting. It was strange that someone was looking for that kind of system. She tapped and refocused, examining in more detail. Scanning through, it looked as though some of the corps were touting for some similar things.

Ah. The reasoning became clear. The trivs were just a means to an end. What they were really looking for was a scanner. Some corps would realise they had been hacked, but there’d be nothing amiss to track, trace, or even notice. Hire a hacker to catch a hacker. Not that many hackers ever got caught these days, so it wasn’t like it was fighting against your own or anything, she wasn’t one for that. It was more to seal a system against them by knowing their style.

The cat and mouse games between rival hackers were all just part of the fun of the overall playground.

There it was then. Gain some hackcreds to use in payment to run her ride on some high-end systems. She was to be a spotter.

Now, what to wear.

* *

He was on a roll with this one. Neat idea he thought. Although not the most easiest of cracks, it wasn’t like it was going to be for currency or anything, so the systems weren’t going to be that strong, and there wouldn’t be so many merc combat teams on standby to kill the hack if it was noticed.

That’s not to say the information wasn’t sensitive. So much so for some people, that one corp wasn’t trusted to have all the keys to the vault at any one time. Thus the data was distributed across a grid of repositories, each holding a small part of the encrypted shield which contained the data packets within it. When a retrieval was acked by several sources, the pieces were unravelled by an adaptive decoding algorithm, which also retiered the encryption on the downloads that were received, so mere progressive scoping wasn’t ever going to form even the smallest of splinters.

A difficult challenge, but not wholly impossible. Well, not if you knew someone who had contributed to the original sources, or knew someone who knew someone, who knew. Those dam shiny hackcreds.

He had narrowed things down to a solution with a reasonable amount of negotiability. It was all in the eyes, the secrets lay in retinal matching. So there it was. He continued hacking away at his tunnel into the biometrics datastore. Wait. It was Thursday. He’d better get it together. Tonight was the big night out with Tommy.

The flames of the campfire flittered in their flickerings, casting shadows of patterns through the supporting structures of the pier. Amidst the fun and the banterings, his eyes scanned their interlacing intermittently, until the projections of fading embers were replaced with the illuminating rays of the morning sunrise. Whether sourced from moonlight, firelight, or sunlight, to his mind the silhouettes all danced the same lyrics to whichever melody, his organic projections of fading embers were replaced with the illuminating rays of the morning sunrise. Whether sourced from structures of the pier. Amidst the fun and the banterings, his eyes scanned their interlacing intermittently, until the

Good advice from The Captain, always leave some periods of inactivity within your routine logs. Still do stuff, but do it with no trace, so that the cycles could be used to create some other history in them when a hack called for it. He’d probably spend the time on a bit of revisional readinput. Some clips you have to read, some you have to study. It didn’t hurt to have a bit of a refresh. Probably best to rest up from one fun before going to another too.

“I’m sure there’ll be plenty of systems to have a ride on,” he said.
“Defo,” said Tommy. “The visitors centre sure does have some kit.”
“Ack, ack, to that,” he said. “At last, one of the cybertechnic’s fieldtrips finally got arranged.”

**

“So who came up with the acoustic translacing matrices then?” quizzed Gina, amidst the banterings of the group transport.
“Erm, I know this one,” said Tommy. “Yeah, I know. It was Jonny. Jonny Crypto.”
The back of the transport laughed at Tommy.
“For fucks sake, Tommy,” tutted Gina. “We ain’t never gonna get away for a break if you’re in summer school.”
“Cut the banterings,” he said. “Just stick to the recall. Use your keplar.”
“Sure,” said Tommy slowly. “Ok, I know it was either steinberg or keplar. But I can never remember who did what.”
“Some would say neither can they,” he smiled.
“You know the codices, Tommy,” said Gina. “Just spin them out like you do when we écoute et répète, you know that.”
“I know that,” said Tommy. “But when I get to the end, I keep forgetting which is my part and which is your part.”
“We do them both, don’t we,” said Gina. “For if ever one of us is down in keplarisation, the other can swoop in and cover. That’s why I can’t be there when you run the rig scoring.”
“I know,” said Tommy.
“They were a swell couple,” giggled Mandy. “That mister keplar and that miss steinburg.”
“Sweet as,” said Gina.
“They certainly got that raman effect going through themselves together,” he said.
“Ok,” said Tommy. “I get it now. It was keplar who designed the translacing matrices to enable biocrypting to be rigged to audio frequency playback, and it was steinburg who improved on this and designed the modulation meshes, so that variations in the speed or volume could be used to alter the pace or the processing capability of the transaction.”
“Very good,” kissed Gina.
“What a star,” he said.
The transport pulled up with a quiver, and the assembled rabble disembarked in a manner not exactly according to training. As their legs sped them to the entrance way, they chattered excitedly as one mass, all attempting to out hype each other with tales from the myth tags surrounding the complexity of the equipment available for free use at the visitors centre.
He was whistling and singing to himself, puffing out words or air as the whim took him. The happiness of anticipation sparking inside of him. As a red transport drove past, his mouth let out a kind of wow pop of air, and his index finger jumped involuntary in a sharp ticking motion. In the afterburn of the brief photographic moment, he saw the tick of the female driver too.
She recovered her composure. Hmm. He looked cute, and he looked. Sort of had a glow of niceness about him. Or was it just the transport he was eyeing. Bugger. Stick to the hack.
Dragged along by the bustle of the herding visitors, he felt himself warm with the memory of her innocent smile to herself. She had raised her arm in a reflex action, and rubbed the back of her neck as her head tilted slightly in shyness. Accompanied by that smile so sweet he could feel it even though she faced forward. Or was she smiling at someone else, or was she just laughing at him as he whistled along and sang like a puppet. Shit.
The memory decoupled from mind’s eye view. Strolling toward the impressive doors of the complex, they shone out their sugar coated messages within their glass. Welcome to v-industries.
He had been waiting patiently in the queue for the star of the show. His turn in v-industries most valued opal, the lucid dreaming rig. It was designed to be used in the future Mars missions, the escapism afforded by the realm of space inside the constructs would be ample in compensation avoidance of space travel fever. He stepped up and into the sensorium. Encapsulated in its womb-like warmth, floating in a soft breeze.
He could sense the isoters trying to prob into something else. His hacker instincts of paranoia clicked in, and the meshes weakened. His turn in the rig ended with a gentle fading out. It had seemed short.
He flashed Tommy, and Tommy acked.
“Be careful in that one,” he said. “It’s got a funny tinge to it.”
“You always bring out the best in them,” laughed Tommy. “It’s like a gift you have.”
“Some sort of analytic mapping,” he said. “I’m not sure if it’s just a subtle benevolent psychoanalysis trigger, or whether it’s something more out of place.”
“You always were fucking paranoid,” said Tommy.
“You can never be too paranoid,” he said. “It might be bait to reflex a hacker response.”
“Not another recruitment drive,” said Tommy.
“Didn’t really seem that way,” he said. “Felt more like a track.”
“Ok,” said Tommy, holding his chin. “I’ll pulse the word along.”
“Play safe,” he smiled.
The marketing team models came down the stair case with its white piped handrail. In a line, then a ninety-degree change of direction in a curve, down the steps onto the level of their assembled party.

Encircled like a princess and her ladies in waiting, she glowed in irrepressible brilliance. The lighthouses of their eyes shone into each other, the particles of the waves of their sight intermingling as they danced together. The beams of their gaze powered through the intensity of the rays they cast out in unison, impacting on the very lenses and refractor arrays that focused their beacons into its streams. Aching and echoing in reply, the retinal matching attempted its autocompletion, as the sense of joy brought a simultaneous smile to both their faces.

Amidst her shimmer, his sight focused in a burst into the depth of the secrets of her eyes, and all else faded from view into a smokey blur. Instinctive adrenaline rushed through his veins as his heart quickened. The infinite patternings in their eyes gleaned a match.

Passing through his sequences of iterations, the translations moved toward the bone structure of her face, nose first, all scanned in and processed like an infrared mesh defining the contours of a landscape. Cheekbones read a match too. Down to the chin. Positive correlation. The bits flipped their flags.

* 

Nice smile. So who was this cheeky visitor. It was an easy match for her to glean, only a minor hack to gain the logs of the visitors. Best take a look at him, purely for professional reasons of course. Well, unprofessional professional reasons of course, given the nature of her profession. Fuck. She was being a sketchy twat again.

Now to the true busyness once more. The spotter hack for gameclip hackcreds. Bugger. A nice team mask up job by the looks of it, there weren’t any biters to the hooks in the sensoriums setup. She did tell them that it was a little too obvious, but hey, they never listen, so in the end it was always a matter of setting stuff like that up and then ignoring it.

She was a bit more mischievous than that. She had some other scopes running, so that if that type of situation occurred, she could at least try and run a trace on whoever ran on the system before the mask was put on everyone else’s mind.

Unbelievable. No wonder a lot of creds were on offer. The intruder had tweaked the trail so that it was lost amongst the girders of her own concealment constructs. Time to micro the scopes. Who was this cowboy, not the original author of the struts, that Mr Crypto, it was a different style of coding. Not so much careless as carefree. Crypto’s tapestries were always very neat, concise and exact.

Flabbergasting. This cheeky sod had been putting the touch on her files as well as everything else he had been concealing from the logs. How rude.

Luckily she had those all triple scoped too.

* 

Back in his den he routed back in through the buddy node and continued the lock to retrieve a path to her network delivery node. Not a GPS or anything, that would be silly, someone would be bound to notice that one. Just a delivery node so a package could be sent, not many had cracked that hashing system, guess the pull of post coupled with the dual public key encryption was a safe enough bet for anything that you didn’t take somewhere yourself.

May as well have a quick look at all the data on the system about her. Hmm. Something was odd. Looked like they were both using a variant of a Jonny #12, although a lot of other dabblings seemed to be going on as well. Felt like someone else had been fiddling. There were no indicators, or change in the pattern in the weave of the code. Like someone had been and gone, made some whisperings in influence, and then left again without anyone to witness. Maybe The Captain had been keeping an eye on him again, or maybe he really was just paranoid. Weird though, looked almost as if someone was hiding some of the data on her from her. Some sleep might help. He could do a retrack hack in later and check her files. He left some scopes. Tap, tap.

The next day an orchid arrived. This girl obviously had her own lookup skills. Shit. A feisty one.

** 

So dinner it was. The location picked itself as it usually did. The only place to go for them was always going to be Triangles restaurant. Nervousness and smiles. Sometimes staring at each other, sometimes giving the opportunity for the other to stare in full scan, unrestrained in observation by periods of gracious looking down or away in chatter.

“Yes,” she said. “So, anyway, if you were an artificial intelligence, how would you answer this question?”

She was good. Very good. Love at first hack, all bits were definitely lit.

“Hey, my phoenix,” he smiled in a whispering.

“I love your sexy dragon eyes,” she smiled back.

** 

The coming of the tide of day at The Halfway House Inn. Playing in the love of the universe they created in themselves for one another. With his Keplerisation autocompletion end fading, a star burst from her to keep the firation going. He was the equations to her solutions. Or sometimes he was the solutions to her equations. Seemed to work that
way with them, depending on who was left-handed or right-handed that day.

“It’s a purple ratchet,” she said. “I don’t like messing with those, can you do it for me please, darling.”

“Sure, babes,” he smiled. “If you take down that dangling coconut for me. I know you like having a play with those kind of isoterics.”

“Yippee,” she laughed, dancing into her hack.

How sweet, the perfect hacker couple. As it always was with them, covering and making up for each other’s faults and weaknesses, or in this case realigning and switching over so they were both having fun.

“Ok, you be the sodium and I’ll be the potassium,” she kissed.

“Ion on it. You’re the salt of the earth my treasure,” he kissed back.

“You!” she laughed.

Through kisses and more sweetheart banter, they eventually finished the morning’s rigwork, and then got into their clothes for the day. Him in his white outfit, her in her black skirt and white blouse.

It was the week of the big hack.

Afterwards, The Land Rover Defender slid away quietly from the scenes of Troonhilly Downs.

“So what now then?” asked Gina.

“In my humble opinion,” he said. “I think, after a nap, we should get severely wasted.”

“Paarrtty!” cheered Tommy.

Chapter Six – The Captain’s recap

The Captain awoke to the cold reality of his daily dawn. Sighing, then smiling, he maneuvered out of bed. He retrieved his outer gown from its draping on the wicker chair, and swung it round him.

In slow, solid steps, The Captain crossed to the curtains of the French doors and cast them back. Hacking the lock, he gently pushed the doors open, and strolled out to the glory of the morning sunshine.

Activity hung in a quiet balance of completion and new beginning. As the small birds sang their sweet song, he remembered the sadness of absent friends. Deepening his breathing, feet aligned in parallel with the nestles of his shoulders. Bending his knees and lowering himself downward, he let the parabolas of the past whip over him, until their lashings ended, and they had disappeared once more to their rightful place behind him.

Raising up again, placing his hands on the wooden railing of the veranda. Continuing his reflexed pattern of breathing, he took time to watch the minute functionings of all the wildlife in the grass, the trees, and the hedges. The Captain smiled again with the memory of the peaceful spoils of war.

Two young squirrels bounded through the swaying tops of the trees in chase, carefree in their cartwheelings of daring display. Leaping for fun, dancing through the sprigs and boughs of ash, oak and yew as though they were the veins of a leaf from a single tree.

First rubbing his hands together, and then rolling his shoulders, he stretched out and flexed the tiredness from his body. Another day, another mission.

Plans and secrets. When a plan had been running for such a long time, somehow it had a way of becoming a secret. Long in its conception of counter deception, its milestones had solidified over the patient years. Time at last for the participants to be granted their tell.

* * *

“You sketchy twat,” she laughed.

“Look, just because my eyes aren’t open, it doesn’t mean that my ears aren’t open,” he retorted.

“Oh, ok, Mister Keplar Himself,” she said in a playfully stern tone. “Then what did I just say?”

“I don’t know, I wasn’t listening, but that doesn’t mean that I couldn’t have listened if I had wanted to,”

“That, my dear, is a classic example of your being a sketchy twat,” she laughed.

“Oh,” he muttered. “So I’m only just a little pencilled-in at the moment. But hey, good night wasn’t it.”

“It was,” she smiled. “I’m glad you enjoyed it so, because you’re going to be the one to clean up the residues.”

“Erm, really,” he smirked. “What did I hack this time.”

“Don’t worry,” she smiled. “I stopped you from flagging too much. Although as usual, at one point you were showing off, dancing your thing. Still, you can remember that party piece as you’re bundling out the trash.”

“Shucks. Can you please get me some felt-tips to colour me in,” he said. She nodded, kissed him, and left.

He thought about orange2ing Tommy and Gina, but Tommy did look a little pale when they had left, and it would be a little cheeky to get a fast response team just for a tour of litter duty. Another day, another hack.

It must be a lucky day, The Captain arrived, with that incredible sense of timing.

“I see your little celebration was as successful as ever,” said The Captain. “Judging by the mess.”

“Indeed,” he said. “Shame you didn’t make it.”

“Yes,” laughed The Captain. “Although I may be a little old for your baffooning around.”

“Not you, Captain,” he smiled.

“Hmm,” smiled The Captain. “Anyway, I had some hacking to do.”
“Fun or profit,” he said.
“It was fun,” smiled The Captain. “But it was to really pay off a hackdebt.”
“No need for any of that from you, Sir,” he said, unhappy with his choice of word to show respect.
And no need for any of that stuff from you,” said The Captain.
“Well, you’ve certainly helped me out and inspired me of a few run-ins, that’s for sure.”
“I know that,” laughed The Captain. “Nice of you to sign them with a reference in deference.”
“My pleasure,” he smiled.
“But indeed,” sighed The Captain. “The debt is all mine, and it has been long overdue in settlement. There’s something I need to tell you about you and her.”
“It’s ok, Captain,” he laughed. “We know the birds and the bees thing.”
“Yes,” he smiled.
“Joking aside,” furrowed The Captain. “There’s something I am duty bound to tell you.”
“It’s ok,” he smiled. “I have kind of been waiting for it, ever since our meeting in the royal hussar. Mister holmes would probably would have said it was a little too innocuous.”
“Yes indeed,” said The Captain. “It was a strange afternoon. At times I did wonder who was recruiting who.”
“Things often work out to be a bit of both,” he smiled.
“Very true,” said The Captain. “And I guess that’s where we figured you would come in.”
“I see,” he bluffed.
“Indeed, you did see,” said The Captain. “My recordings show you figured out most of it for your self. It was always going to be your chosen path, we had nothing to do with that.”
“Hmm,” he huffed.
“But it is probably why you were chosen,” said The Captain.
“Ok, Captain, what’s the download,” he said.
“As you know,” sighed The Captain. “You and her have always had a rather compelling draw to each other.”
“Yes,” he smiled.
“It’s not wholly by accident,” said The Captain.
“That doesn’t surprise me,” he said.
“Undoubtedly,” said The Captain. “There’s probably more questions that you’ll have, but we’ll leave them for now so I can give you a quick run through.”
“Ok,” he said. “You always seem to know what the preferable course of action is.”
“Yes,” smiled The Captain. “Although sometimes the way to leadership is simply to be the least terrified of those around you.”
He nodded silently.
“Well, then,” said The Captain. “On with it. So we have it, you and her. You were both genetically predisposed to that thing they call love, which was going to be of paramount importance.”
“Blatantly,” he said.
“Hm,” smiled The Captain. “Whilst you were destined to play the role of the reluctant hero, you did seem to revel in it.”
“All the fun all the fair,” he smiled.
“We were glad of it,” echoed The Captain in laughter. “It was always obvious even before your dawn that you had had a fair amount of extenuating circumstances. We were happy you had something to compensate.”
“Thank you,” he smirked.
“Indeed,” smiled The Captain knowingly. “However, the downside of this was that you were only ever going to be looking for the one, that may have limited you.”
“It’s ok,” he said. “That kind of always suited me. A longer burn in of a lifetime of future memories with her was always my preferred solution.”
“Yes,” smiled The Captain. “Gina would say the soppy twat factor is high with you. And probably with her too.”
“To a sickly-sweet, some might say,” he said.
“Yes,” said The Captain. “You two were always going to be that way. Research we had done previously ensured that. In our simulations we managed to determine an exact match in your genetical compatibilities, so the specific selection of you was always going to be a success on that level.”
“That’s nice to know,” he laughed. “I shall remind her of that when she’s on a rant at me.”
“Such a defence is unlikely to sway a girl of her stubborn nature,” laughed The Captain. “She has some inbuilt characteristics of her own.”

“Indeed she does,” he smiled.

“However,” sighed The Captain. “We did give nature a little guidance.”

“Helping hand or a shove?” he laughed.

“Hm,” sighed The Captain. “We needed a way to ensure that you recognised each other.”

“A helping hand is ok,” he said. “I did have a bit of trouble finding the right match for me.”

“That figures,” sighed The Captain. “We may have over done it a smidge, and made sure it was the only match for you.”

“Hm,” he sighed, taking his turn. “I’m guessing you’re going to explain to me now why I’ve always determined a hit or a miss pretty much at first sight.”

“We knew that it would be necessary to have someone to rescue her, so to speak,” said The Captain. “And I’m afraid there was no room for error. If a side effect was that you lost out on other potential possible matches, then for that we are sorry.”

“And so to the method,” he said.

“Yes,” said The Captain. “To the incubator. We didn’t predict that you would be an incubator baby, which had its own influences as you know, probably adding to your determination. However, it was at this moment we needed to act.”

“Yes, Captain, and so to the method,” he said.

“The method,” said The Captain reluctantly. “During the weeks in the incubator you had a visitor. Now this visitor wore contact lenses which highlighted the pattern of a retinal matching algorithm, one of our greatest successes at that time.”

“Things are starting to make sense,” he said.

“I knew they would,” said The Captain. “Anticipatory hacking always was one of your strong points.”

“Yes, the shapes are starting to fit,” he said.

“Indeed,” said The Captain. “Here comes the bit you may not like.”

“That sounds like one of Tommy’s lines when he turns up in a panic,” he laughed. “It may be a bit late to justify if the end fits the means, but as I’m with her now, you probably have picked a good time to tell me. But then your timing and patience have always been impeccable.”

“Some thrive on disciplined training, some on doing it their way,” said The Captain, attempting a smile. “So, the crux of it being, we aided your memory of the match. We ensured the synapse burn took hold by supplementing your natural chemicals with what some might call a healthy dose of reality suppressant.”

“Hmm, some would say it was a little unfair to influence things so far,” he said.

“Yes, indeed,” said The Captain. “Those views were aired. However, to an extent we did think of that. The wash was configured to only provoke a response in a suitable personality type. So in a way, it was what you wanted. It was designed only to trigger a reaction if you were both a true match. You see, in the analysis of nature or nurture, it does indeed turn out to be a bit of both. They are interdependent. The nurture triggers a response from the nature, so they interplay and connect as appropriate. So yes, we did kind of add to what you knew, but really, you knew it already. You were designed that way.”

“I guess that figures,” he said. “But I’m also thinking you really did pick a time to tell me.”

“Mind you,” said The Captain. “We won’t go into why nature designed you that way, we haven’t time now, and not that I even know. Guess you two will figure that one out between your selves.”

“Nice of you to leave us with that at least,” he said. “And I’m banking you’re going to stick around to unleash all this on her.”

“It’s ok,” said The Captain. “I’ve been having discussions with her for a while, and I brought her up to speed with the final tells this morning.”

“You always get off light,” he smiled. “She’ll probably rib me like it was my hack.”

“They both took a moment to laugh at the irony in the truth.”

“Yes,” said The Captain. “And admittedly there were a few side effects.”

“You’re telling me,” he said. “Some points did seem like repeatedly entering the sixteenth cavern for the first time, jarring one of the reserve clones instantly on entering till I worked out my bearings.”

“No doubt,” sighed The Captain. “Regrettably we didn’t foresee the incubator factor. Because of your rather unfortunate experiences there, you began Keplarisation immediately. Normally this would have been triggered at a much later date, but your mind began the processing and search for her rather early.”

“Patient impatience,” he said.

“The process was really only meant to enable a simple pattern recognition,” continued The Captain. “But your mind tried to Keplar a solution where none could be knowable, an offshoot of which was your creation of a very effective transistor network.”

“Contemplation is a wonderful thing,” he said.

“A possible side effect of this,” said The Captain. “Was an enhanced awareness of the inability to influence external events, outside of the incubator. On top of this, you’ve had some strange scrapes with some strange groups. All part of your hacker training no doubt, learning to pass unnoticed through a diverse range of people.”

“Of course,” he smiled.

“The blade here being that you had already experienced several minor dawns prior to the epoch,” sighed The
Captain. “On analysis of your readouts, I detected three major defcon one indoctrination programs, and the partial matching of at least seven other defcon two’s. And that’s additional to what we’ve just talked about. All this, coupled with the additional emotional sensitivity caused in the incubator, and the tendency both you and her have to empathically Keplerise other people’s problems, meant that things were pretty severe.”

“Felt like it,” he said.

“Thus,” said The Captain. “When the moment came, you had rather too many conflicting wirings which contributed to the overall intensity of the firings.”

“I accept that,” he said.

“Of course,” said The Captain. “You didn’t make it any easier by being such a clever bastard, and setting the trilock as failsafe device. So you had to sort that out too.”

“I got by with a little help from a friend,” he smiled.

“Yes,” chuckled The Captain. “Other friends have helped out along the years too. We did aid Jonny with the source of some of the coding that was necessary to shield her from future view.”

That sure must be true. He had spent most of his residual allowances on tracing her. She spent most of her’s on one of Jonny’s greatest achievements, a retinal re-mark. Jonny had a near complete system ready in waiting, but the specialist parts and third-party biocrypts required to both return a new pattern and get a database tie-in were always going to be costly, and all that for a one-shot deal. Still, that was their thing, and Jonny was happy to play along with it, especially as it gave a focus to some extreme hackness.

She bounced in with some bags, full of smiling, and hugged The Captain, then kissed him.

“My darling,” he smiled.

“Me that is,” she smiled. “I have those felt-tips. I’m figuring you’re needing them by now.”

“Thank you, my treasure,” he said, taking the packet of sweets from her hand in their wrapped up fruity gloriness.

“I think it could be a blackcurrant moment,” he smiled. “The zap of a blackcurrant flavoured burst may indeed be necessary at this point to colour me in. So I’m guessing you know already what The Captain here is telling me.”

“Of course, sweetie,” she smiled. “I’m bestist, always one step ahead of your slack ass.”

“You think that, that’s fine,” he smiled.

“Ok,” she laughed. “I will. And so any creds for me for the felts then?”

“You know how it is, my darling,” he said. “There’s riches, and there’s riches.”

“Lovecreds it is then, poppet,” she winked.

“All right, you two,” said The Captain. “Let’s press on. We’ve seen how the trilock externalised itself in geometry. How about using a different level of abstraction and try putting it into words.”

“English.”

“Yes,” said The Captain plainly.

“I guess it’s back to Dostoyevsky’s three kinds of truth,” he said. “We all have secrets, those we hide from ourselves, from others, and from God. For me the solution to the problem was to narrow the distance between those secrets. Thus the key to breaking the trilock was me, her, and God, and the moment at which the vertices of the triasm spiralled into one single, united truth.”

“Really,” she said. “Is that why you couldn’t keep your hands off me.”

“We all have genius inside of us,” he continued, brushing off her sarcasm. “Some hide their genius away from themselves, to be unleashed when it is realised, others lock their minds inside of it.”

“Very good, my dear,” she said. “But I think your cephalic index is getting a bit high there, darling.”

“I may have a big ego, my sweet,” he said, pursing the banter. “But as you know, it’s my big ego, my big personality, my big imagination, my big realm of abstract conceptualisation, that gives me my skill.”

“If you hadn’t been such a clever bastard at your dawn it may have been easier for us all,” she scolded. “Big ego, big secondary hack ‘cause he was so clever and set a timeout. Maybe clever or maybe not very optimistic.”

“I’d been through a lot at that point,” he said. “So forgive me.”

“Always, darling, always,” she smiled.

“Ok,” said The Captain. “You’ve broken the trilock in your mind with the help of each other.”

“Yes,” he said, and lent over and kissed her.

“So what of the data from v-industries?” asked The Captain.

“Ah, the secondary download,” he said. “Yes, on the original hack for the personnel data I did come across something else in the vicinity.”

“We know,” said The Captain. “The blipper traffic was huge. We had to do a few in coverage just to add a little masking.”

“I know,” he said. “I did a couple of the disguises myself, you know.”

“Neat, very neat,” smiled The Captain.

“I know it might look a bit of a risky one now,” he said. “And although I was rushed for time, it would have been a bit like not downing the kong beast in manic miner.”

“That sucker must get it every time,” agreed The Captain.

“So I pulled the levers to have a look-see what happened,” he said.

“You always did prefer to learn through experience,” laughed The Captain. “If there’s one thing that game does teach though, it’s the importance of patience and timing.”

“Indeed,” he said.
“As you know, I had my retrieval equipment functioning for your big hack, so maybe we should take a look,” said The Captain.

“Something tells me that you already know what we’re going to be looking at,” he said.

“I had a feeling you might have guessed that by now,” laughed The Captain. “Good for you.”

“Yes,” he smiled.

“I’ve edited it to make it a bit clearer. You don’t half have some weird, dark shit in there,” said The Captain.

“It ain’t all mine,” he smirked.

“One other thing,” said The Captain. “One of the supplies of atropine you used to help soften the acceptance of the new burn. It was traced.”

“Sorry hun,” she kissed. “Guess we knew that might happen, we had that bad run didn’t we.”

“Yes, no matter,” he kissed back. “Those contact lenses with the new retinal pattern worked for a while to give the burn a chance to catch, but I guess there was always the risk of a scanner picking up the hint of a match.”

“Those surveillance mites are everywhere,” she said.

“I hear mexico is nice this time of year,” he joked.

“I reckon you’ve got a little lead time,” said The Captain. “So no need to worry about panic stations just yet.”

“Oh, ok then,” she smiled. “Oh, by the way. Out shopping, I just couldn’t resist this for you.”

She handed The Captain the polycomposite bag.

“Ah, a new cap,” smiled The Captain.

“Yes, my dear,” she smiled. “It’s from me and rig-burn boy here, just to show that we both have no down feelings about the ways that were took to arrive us here.”

“Ok,” he said hesitantly, and looked at The Captain. “But you’re picking up this week’s Friday tab at the beachcomber.”

“Ah,” smiled The Captain. “At least you didn’t ask for hackcreds.”

“Much of a muchness,” they said together, looking and smiling at each other.

Chapter Seven – Secrets of v-industries

The transport was in action. They had picked up Tommy and Gina on the way. She was driving, him riding shotgun, The Captain sat in the front middle seat. Not really The Captain’s preferred position, but it was comfortable, and at least a good view was to be had. Tommy and Gina sat in the second row seats. Tommy did look a bit pale still, green almost.

“Don’t yous two ever get tired of that hack shit then?” said Gina.

“Tired of it?” he said.

“Yeah,” continued Gina. “Don’t you ever get fed up with hacking against all those real bad isoterics. Don’t you just hate them?”

“If we did that,” she said. “They’d feed on it. They’d notice the weakness and step it up on that focus.”

“Blame them then,” said Tommy.

“It’s not really like that,” he said.

“You almost sort of have to forgive them,” she said. “Just not let anything spark any negative matchings. It’s a bit like dealing with difficult people, sometimes a nasty person is just a nice person who isn’t happy.”

“Rather a quaint rationalisation of it, my dear,” he said. “But I agreed with you, it does tend to work out ok. Live and let live becomes the modus vivendi, and the isoterics have nothing to map against to invade and destroy.”

“There’s many levels to it I suppose,” said Gina.

“Indeed,” he said. “It’s not always nastiness though. Sometimes it’s a bit like dancing at a nightclub.”

“Or having a work out at the gym,” she said.

“Bit of gaming then,” said Tommy.

“Yeah,” he laughed. “Some levels can be a bit shit though. And sometimes it’s a bit too much like brainwork. But hey, we all have our bad hack days.”

“Inevitably,” said The Captain.

“Yeah, but those high-end isoterics don’t half put out some low punches,” said Gina.

“They were designed that way,” he laughed.

“I think Gina means more the certain type of system you seem to be able to cope with,” said The Captain. “Not everybody can handle progressive and reiterative dawning like you two can. There is a certain special skill involved in hacking that type of system, and hopefully you’re over that self destructive fireworking of yours, so it’s not like you’re doing it for flagellation.”

“So why do you do it?” said Tommy.

“Oh why, oh why do I do it,” he said in a drunken act, and then performed his charade re-enacting a scene of throwing up after a night’s alcohol. They laughed.

“You get a kick out of it, don’t you!” laughed Gina.

“There is always that certain something to be had when a challenge is involved,” he laughed.

“You’re just a stubborn twat,” she laughed. “You can’t let go that ‘do it my way’ thing sometimes. I’ve seen you hack like that, as you well know, young man.”

“There is that,” he smiled.
“But I mean more how you do it,” said Gina.

“With love and feeling, baby,” she laughed.

“There’s truth in that, my dearest,” he said. “Sometimes it’s a bit like those grey nights from titan. Having had to fight the black, they’ve realised that often it’s more shades of grey. Sometimes there aren’t two results, but a myriad of greyscales in between and encompassing. Other times the horrors of it all might have tainted them with the knowledge of the darker side.”

“In the grey knights case,” she continued for him. “Some of them would argue that it’s valid to use the attackers methods against them.”

“A bit of a contentious issue, obviously,” he said.

“Of course,” she said. “No point overcoming an attacker if you end up becoming like that which you are protecting against.”

“Indeed,” said The Captain.

“That’s not to say that there’s some aspects of it which aren’t usable,” he said. “For instance, we all have inbuilt survival instincts and aggression, which are meant to be used to defend ourselves. On lower level isoterics that can be just a bit of kung-foo fun.”

“We’re ok with those,” said Tommy. “We can do that hacker punch and kick. It’s those head-fuck systems we don’t get.”

“Stay away from them,” he laughed. “They fuck with you. After physical attacking, the emotional attacking simulations are obviously going to come next.”

“Of course,” she said. “Sometimes you’ve got to complete that difficult level, just to get nearer to where you’re trying to reach.”

“Again, the lower head-fuck ones aren’t so tricky,” he said. “There’ll just be all the usual ego reactionary shit, which is pretty easy to just let float by.”

“And then to your weaknesses,” she said.

“Always,” he said. “Then they use any perphacking they’ve gleaned, either directly or from memory biasing, and try and destroy everything you hold dear.”

“And so what’s the codex to that one,” said Gina.

“An understanding of different perspectives helps,” he said.

“Yup,” she said. “Back to the grey knights. Having experienced a lot of the grades on the scale, an appreciation of things is gained. Sometimes both sides are right in their viewpoints, even if they are only external validations of individualisms. Both can have relevance to the originator which is equally valid. The survival thing.”

“Then,” he said. “It becomes more of a test of character. Firstly, it can be difficult not to simply justify your actions as valid as everyone else is doing that exact same thing.”

“If you can’t beat them,” said Tommy.

“Secondly,” he said. “You can become so unlike the system you are in, that you are unable to exist within its constructed realities, to the point where you are almost naturally selected out by the environment. The rules of existence in the medium become no longer applicable to you.”

“Then to deciding whether you are a weed or a flower,” she said.

“Cute,” he said. “But maybe unfair on weeds.”

“Maybe,” she said. “But I like the analogy.”

“In the end,” he said. “It can be simply a matter of letting go really.”

“That transcendence thing,” she said.

“That thing indeed,” he sighed. “It’s having the memory of that point you reached, where everything was transcended. Material possessions, emotions, food, life, reality itself.”

“Some would call that dying,” said Gina.

“In a way it can be like that,” he said. “Depending on the wrath of the isoterics involved.”

“So how do you get yourself out of that one?” asked Tommy.

“The old kiss of life,” he smiled. “We resuscitate each other.”

“Now who’s being flowery with their rationalisations of explanation,” she said. “Although I suppose that is how it works for us.”

“Having been outside of things,” he said. “Outside of time itself.”

“You gain a realisation,” she said. “That there are things which aren’t of this world, and don’t have to exist inside of any medium to be.”

“Love is eternal,” he said. “When the isoterics wreak their havoc, we take in turns to dawn, and that attacking isoteric leaves as there’s nothing to attack. Either after or before resuscitating the other with love, we exploit the rift in the system which is created by the temporary fading out of the isoteric.”

“Sounds like bullshit to me,” said Tommy.

They laughed.

“Some would say it is, Tommy,” he smiled. “But it’s our bullshit. We share that same inner hidden wiring, that logical equivalence. In the fractals of our existences we are the same, equal, equational, equivalent.

“We share it within ourselves,” she said. “We have that as the basis of reality that our minds exist within.”

“So what happens if you both dawn at the same time?” asked Gina hesitantly.

“Then our God resuscitates us,” she said. “Creates a medium in which we can sustain and exist in. Provides a link
that ties us together, and breathes life into us."

“God isn’t everybody’s thing though is it,” said Tommy.

“Indeed,” he said. “Again, that is a subject isoterics can try and attack through.”

“The things that sustain us, our truths of being,” she said.

“Well put, my mapping,” he said. “Hope, faith and love.”

“How so,” said Gina, providing a bit of conversational feed along, as was Gina’s skill.

“When iterative fractalling begins,” he said. “It’s starts off with that basic sustainer, hope. Again, it’s an inbuilt survival thing, hope springs eternal. When you’re driven so low by the isoterics showing memories of failures, given a rest, hope refloats as all the despair has fired chemically.”

“They then do the time thing,” she said. “Or they did to you. Destroying hope by making it eternally impacting over time, so additional chances and lifecycles were played out continuously to show it didn’t make any difference.”

“Faith next,” he said.

“One other thing with the hope, darling,” she said.

“Pray tell, sweetheart,” he said.

“It can be coupled with sympathy,” she said. “For me, hope was a little tied to sympathy, losing hope of sympathy, and empathy.”

“Leads me to the next point,” he said. “Lack of sympathy, like those black and white birds who didn’t sing out in sympathy at the crucifixation. All that can’t have been particularly good experience.”

“So, on with the power and control of the isoterics,” she said.

“Science or nature is the usual first faith attack,” he said. “Maybe the evolution route, analysis to show we were evolved from reptiles or something.”

“Easy,” said Gina. “What were the reptiles evolved from!”

“Very,” she said. “A quick download of the program containing the evolving to reptiles from something else, cells, matter, energy, outside of time, and voila, God The Creator.”

“Quick clip that one,” he said. “Science just really highlights God’s genius for me.”

“And so narrowing to your particular God,” she prompted.

“Yes,” he said. “By now the isoterics have narrowed the feedback reactionary mappings to which particular God you relate too. They sometimes try the multifaith crosshack first, but for me the essential issues are the same, the stuff on top of love thy neighbour can often just be the politics of religion.”

“Indeed,” murmured The Captain.

“With the politics and blame for distractionary wars out the way,” he continued. “It’s down to the familiar anti-faith hacks. These are usually ego reactionary in nature, and often externalise themselves as an rationalisation clip of someone who has already dismissed the viewpoint. Often boils down to a refusal of being told what to do, parent moral rejection like, coupled with unacceptance of failings.”

“It helps to have had a dawn with a creator like experience at this point, to spark the memory of being godlike and directly causing things, wherein it is ultimately realised that you don’t want to be god anymore, and so God must be of greater being than your self. Reminds me of the time I saw graffiti saying ‘god is a paranoid schizophrenic’ on a transport waiting station.”

“The judgmental moral thing can be a tricky one, but again, life’s experience can corrupt us all, especially given our survivalist instincts, but again from different perspectives ultimately it’s often clear that all sin will be forgiven. After all, it’s not about guilt and punishment, but about love and forgiveness. Although that doesn’t mean that one shouldn’t aspire to something greater, and avoidance of justifying any action by this is best avoided. Freedom of choice and all that.”

“To the proof. Or the disproof as is the case. Spanning back through history to use documentary evidence as proof against. Obviously here if you go back far enough, you can prove anything by pointing evidence towards it, especially if you want to prove the viewpoint you already have. Often the interpretation of evidence can be biased by this. A linked attack here is the use of different pronunciation and inflection, coupled with exploitation of loss in translation, like hebrew to latin or latin to english. The context is all important here, as it is often the meaning of the whole, rather than the hanging on just on a few keywords, which provides the intended meaning, rather than the ego reaction which finds your own meaning which suits your own needs and desires at the time.”

“So, on with the power and control of the isoterics can try and attack through history to use documentary evidence as proof against. Obviously here if you go back far enough, you can prove anything by pointing evidence towards it, especially if you want to prove the viewpoint you already have. Often the interpretation of evidence can be biased by this. A linked attack here is the use of different pronunciation and inflection, coupled with exploitation of loss in translation, like hebrew to latin or latin to english. The context is all important here, as it is often the meaning of the whole, rather than the hanging on just on a few keywords, which provides the intended meaning, rather than the ego reaction which finds your own meaning which suits your own needs and desires at the time.”

“Of course, in order for the isoterics to provide evidence to back up the needs of their destructive hack, they often mistakenly use other opinions as facts. It’s quite common for any published source to spawn a wealth of related stuff, whether in agreement or argument. Always common for each generation to say that the previous had got it all wrong. Back up the both and it all gets tricky. Like fox moulder would say, if you going looking for spookiness, you’ll usually find it.”

“With that paradoxical round of isoteric attack, my solution was to see the obvious that God would make himself unprovable so that it couldn’t be faked and used for power and control. Some could equally say that the world is proof of God’s existence and love. Although that shouldn’t be taken to an extreme, where your reading of the universe ends up being everything, including food wrappers on the street, twig driftwood pointing to an unknown location, and the shape of your own morning shit.”

“Everything can sometimes seemed connected,” said The Captain. “But it’s often your self that’s doing the connecting, so it would be.”

“Whilst we all share the same common human experience, the collective consciousness can merely just be
communicated opinion, we are all feeding from the same sources. In any system, individuality is an inbuilt mechanism to ensure ecosystem diversity. That way no single viewpoint or weakness ever destroys the whole.”

“Then it comes down to a matter of faith. The basis of all being that faith is merely loving God. That’s not something I find difficult.”

The transport carried its way along the flat track through the cuttings of tall, straight trees. Away from it all, The Captain’s lodge came into view. Nestled beside a small man-made lake, it slept dreamily in the tranquility of playful stillness. The transport eased to a gradual halt.

“Yes, then,” said The Captain. “We’ve discussed how the v-industries defence constructs functioned, now it’s time for us to take a look at the data they were shielding.”

They disembarked from the transport slowly, and walked into the domain of The Captain. Amongst the comfortable sofa and armchairs, and the gentle warmth of the hearth, the secrets of v-industries became revealed.

“The successes of v-industries are no mystery,” said The Captain. “We’ve all seen and studied how their superior systems ensured a solidified basis from which to build into a conglomeration of the finest minds and constructed codes. You’ve probably even worked on tweaks to the overall systems without knowing it.”

“Who can remember all the codes they’ve written,” he laughed.

“Indeed. You, given your problem hacking nature, you’ve probably contributed quite a few in your time. Although in your case you did often seek them out, so not so insidious as some of the missions,” continued The Captain.

“Sounds ominous,” she said.

“Yes, my dear,” sighed The Captain. “As is often the case, good plans tend to get hijacked and used for purposes for which they were not originally intended for.”

“Yeah, even I’ve had some of those,” laughed Tommy.

“For the lures of some,” said The Captain. “The new options evolved from the solutions can be too shiny.”

“There can be no doubt to the genius in the piloting solutions for the future missions to that planet Mars,” continued The Captain. “Having remote piloting of the settlement craft would indeed enable a far better method of control, as the crew could operate in a state of advanced Keplerisation, and then change shifts easily when the burns were too great. This obviously eliminates control problems, bar the electrical systems themselves, but that’s always going to be needed, so shifting the paradigm a little wasn’t too much of a conceptual leap.”

“Sounds like a very tightly coupled system,” he said.

“Yes,” said The Captain. “And therein lay the exploitation of the solution. The piloting system necessitated a very closed system, and gaining authority to use secure constructs wasn’t going to be very difficult. The end result being a highly complex, and highly secretive, system design.”

“Who guards the guards,” said Tommy.

“So, the first weakness,” said The Captain. “Closed door design.”

“My dear gentleman,” she played. “You doest spake as thoughst thine answers lay many folded.”

“The veracity of your words does shine my sweet,” said The Captain. “For the ratlines to the sails were many intertwined.”

“Get it out,” said Gina, almost impatiently.

“Yes,” said The Captain. “With the weights of the project so great, v-industries effectively had a carte blanche in requisitioning whatever, or whoever, they required to achieve the successes so demanded. In order to develop the skills necessary for some of the tasks, extensive funding programs where developed for the new rise of Cybertechnics.”

“That’s how it all usually works,” he said. “Nothing to flip my paranoia counters into red just yet.”

“Indeed,” said The Captain. “Funding learning networks is no blackhack in itself. In fact, the original conception was purely innocent. But we’ve opened up the second weakness.”

They paused for drinks and thoughts. Even the odd nibble on a bit of biscuit.

“The curriculum,” she said.

“It doesn’t surprise me that you see that one,” said The Captain. “Not only did v-industries have the design to the learning method, they also had perfectly valid reasons to influence what was taught by those methods.”

“Now I’m checking my signals and thinking about Tommy’s plasterboard walls,” he smiled in his cheeky smile. “The meters are ticking up with the possible tactics of a malevolent group,” said Tommy.

“And rightly so,” said The Captain. “Whilst thus far is as plain and innocent, it’s what happened next that changed things. Once the methods were all in place, and the routes established, things were left to develop, quietly. It’s the salt that was added later which considerably changed the flavour.”

“Too many cooks,” he said.

“Not so much that,” said The Captain. “But the changing of the entire kitchen staff, once the recipes were on simmer.”

“Go on,” he said.

“The pattern matched response algorithms had long since been perfected,” said The Captain. “In early indoctrination, it was possible to teach in a way so that it seemed the learner’s own opinion. Thus by firing suggestions into target groups, a few weeks later the constructs could be retrieved with the conceptualisation of them being original ideas. The linkings were formed with a higher validation of the truth of their own perceived opinion, even though it was merely that which they had been fed weeks before.”

“Pass the salt please?” said Gina.

“The salt added,” said The Captain. “Was firmware of a construct which they knew how to break, so it could be
broken at a future date. Broken in a predictable and predetermined manner. Using key wirings to form a known pattern which could be interfaced into.”

“For what purpose?” he prompted. She looked strangely lost in thought.

“So, to slot the pieces together,” said The Captain. “An artificial layer of abstraction conceived the genesis program for the Mars settlement. By having overseer control of the piloting and environment construction programs, any information in or out of the microcosm was to be dictated. Design, journey, arrival, development, all planned out, with no opposing steering. The aim was to produce not one settlement craft, but three. All in isolation of each other, having no knowledge or existence outside of their own sources of input. Hidden even outside of the ivory realms of v- industries, in all respects viewable only as a single pioneer ship to a new colony. On landing, the three groups were to be continued to be developed individually. Once suitable growth had been achieved, the program would then turn to its perception of an aspect of nature’s way. The groups would have no knowledge as to whether their competitors were from another country, planet or universe. It was to be survival of the fittest, those who adapted best to the Martian environment would survive.”

“Sounds like a creepy galactic domination,” said Tommy.

“I’m guessing there were no plans for contentment,” he said.

“No,” said The Captain. “But more so, in our assembled case, the constructs to be fought were not just out of this world.”

“More masks,” said Gina.

“The means to hide the three groups was in place,” continued The Captain. “And so was the means to hide the method.”

Everyone’s drinking vessels were topped up.

“Or in other words,” sighed The Captain. “The means to hide the designs of some of the methods. The inbuilt control construct failsafes would be to socially destroy the designers. By manipulation and tamperings to such a point that they would be incapable of making a response, eventually leading to their inevitable capitulation, or in extreme cases, self-destruction. Starting off with such outward lines as reducing possible sources of creds, reaching through limiting access to certain routes of communication, making requisitioning and alterations lengthy, to eventual manipulation of surrounding associated social groups. All leading to an outward perception of just being another of life’s burn-outs, so if a fall occurred, there would be plenty of other links to conceal the cause.”

Drinking vessels were topped up again.

“Time for one for the road,” said The Captain. “Then I must sleep some. I’m very tired.”

Finishing up, Tommy and Gina left and headed an excited way to the transport, given it was going to be their turns to drive. He waited hesitantly for an instant, but read that she was hovering for a quiet moment with The Captain, and so made for the transport as well.

“Thank you,” she said. “I understand now.”

“I am sorry, my dear,” said The Captain.

“None are due,” she said. “It’s all matters of the past now.”

Chapter Eight – Kisses and wishes

The transport snapped away accompanied by waves to and from The Captain. Mostly silence for a while, everyone lost in their thoughts. With that occasional link of thinking into what tune was playing on the transport sound setup, as was the way of things. Human experience echoed out through the sound waves.

After the journey back to the constructed reality of society, their disparate thoughts joined into a common need. They figured it was a nice time of day to try for it. That period past teatime and late teatime, and before the late night rush which still exhibited itself, even though these days time shifts were much more blurred. Things would be quiet, not a lot of activity about. Tommy parked up the transport silently, just around the corner from their target.

“So it’s me on point again then,” he said.

“Indeed, young sir, it is,” she smiled.

“Go on,” said Gina. “You know you love it.”

“Oh,” he said. “But if I get it wrong, no whinging.”

“Get it right,” said Tommy.

He gave her flavoured lips a gentle kiss, before changing his pace quickly and darting out the transport. On the street he changed his breathing, and slowed his pace to that of an idle wanderer. Around the corner, and the sight of the lights of the building casting their illumination out through the clear glass windows.

Empty. Good. He eased through the half open door, and faked a smile to the assistant, who pointed to one of the eight rig terminals to the right. Flashing some sterile netcreds on a stick from Jonny, he sat in and began his tap, tap.

Gina was second in. Bouncing into the rigcaféc with both hair and cleavage, Gina began her dummy perphack on the assistant, alternatively giggling and blinking depending on the moment.

With the distractions in full swing, he scratched his neck beneath his jacket collar. With slow covering motions by his fingers, he drew up the string around his neck which held the hacktool container. Almost giving out a tell as his fingertips touched that beloved neoprene, that hacker texture of durability and style.
Pincering the ‘prene, the fingernail sized box that was the Jonny #89 slid out. Ending his scratching with a firm rub and a slight sighing of satisfaction, his thumb slid the tool to concealment between his index and middle fingers.

Increasing his tapping on the inputboard, the vidpanel echoed back the scripting of coverage he had just entered in. With the mask of his playback hiding the true activity, he unjacketed the cable from the inputboard to the rig, pushed in between the Jonny #89, and reinserted the whole as one pathway.

In the strange pattern of gloriness in the contentment of the hack, his mind cast itself back to other moments of joy. He reminded himself of how he once had to turn down developing those clips for that cubecorp mag, as that was just too tempting a way of getting an awful lot of routes into an awful lot of systems.

The Jonny #89 span out its magic. It was a code input typer variant, running at a high speed. There was also a spark to a system central update if necessary, to enable access to privileged resources if required. As public access systems tended not to allow much in and much out, the #89 solved the problem by effectively typing in a library of codes via the inputboard, straight into a keyup on the local terminal. The tie-in to the locally inputed code enabled a very tightly secured tunnel into the local ordering system.

“So,” huffed Gina. “As to why I’m here. Order. Yup, that ordering I did for me to be picking up.”

The idle waiting between the completion and the result processing, and then Gina was handed the brown polycomposite bag containing the essential supplies. He was waiting for the flick to remove the hacktool, and set the timer for the autocleanup routine. Gina left.

He was first in and last out. Staying momentarily behind to tidy up by replacing the surveillance mite recordings with blank cycles that he’d just recorded, so there was no tell of any of them ever being there. Tasks completed, he carried on with a little tap, tapping.

His personalcom vibrated. ‘Come on hack slut’ read the display. He completed, and tapped out.

“So,” he said, rejoining them in the transport. “How did you know it wasn’t just a tricky refeed to do, and that I wasn’t just playing.”

They all just looked at him with that look.

“Really,” said Tommy. “Ok, let’s have a look, see if you got it right then.”

“Tikka starter, masala, korma, bhuna, jalfrezi,” said Gina, examining the contents of the bag. “I make you ok, this time. And I guess we all know who the ‘frezi is for, and I’m not listening to any whining tomorrow morning.”

A lot of hassle to go through for just a takeaway, but that was their life now. The best place to hide was in full view, passing unnoticed amongst the crowd. They had paid, but in hidden currency, for which there was no trace.

“Suppose the two of you will be wanting some of this dip then,” laughed Gina.

“No thank you, my dear,” he said.

“Looks like green mayo, to me,” she laughed.

“We like the red one though,” he said.

“Probably because it looks a little like jam,” said Tommy.

“More likely because it has the most addictives,” laughed Gina.

“Most likely,” they smiled.

“So what would you have done if your dreamgirl had in fact liked mayo then,” laughed Tommy.

“Well, that could have been tricky,” he winked.

“I’m sure you’ve got an anti-mayo universe domination conspiracy file tucked away somewhere,” laughed Gina.

“Conspiracy theories are born when there is no other possible explanation for the proof given,” he said. “Which is ironic, since most would consider that conspiracy theories have sketchy proof by definition, something that others would consider a total reverse.”

“So you’ve a fucking big file on mayo then,” laughed Gina.

“No thank you, my dear,” he said.

“I bet,” said Tommy, encouraging him on.

“Yeah,” he said. “It’s pages saying ‘mayo looks like cat sick’ in really big letters.”

“One per page,” laughed Gina.

They ate away.

“The Captain knows we love him,” she said from the silence of much munching. “Doesn’t he?”

“You mean, slips us?” said Gina. “We tell him often enough, don’t we.”

“So what of this gameclip,” said Tommy, nan bread in one hand, fork full of rice in the other, as though he was piloting some sort of alien craft.

“It’s not so bad,” he said. “With the extra breakings of the v-industries shields, The Captain also managed to find something else which sort of, well, just sort of slipped in there.”
“*hack* *slut*,” she coughed.

“Hmm,” he sighed. “It’s a multiplayer flight simulation. Sort of space dogfighting. Get to blow each other up, and admire the detail of the planet and asteroid rendering as we space-dodgem one another into them.”

“Sounds fun,” said Gina.

“You had a go yet?” said Tommy.

“I had a few tussles with The Captain,” he said. “The kepler incarnate whipped my ass.”

“There’s speed and there’s instinct,” smiled Tommy.

“Indeed,” he said. “As a special treat for us all, both Jonny and The Captain have lent us some spare rig boxes, so if we knit them together it should be quite interesting.”

“On with it then, you boys,” said Gina. “Us gals are gonna bling-burn your skinny arses.”

Setting up the rigs, he noticed Tommy was eyeing the partially unwrapped parcel on the edge of the table. Tommy had noticed it had international coded delivery marks.

“Chocolate, Tommy?” he smiled. “They’re Belgian.”

**Epilogue**

The events contained within the Epoch Dawn Trilogy constitute a summation of real life experiences of members throughout the world.

Justin, Anna, Tommy, Gina, Jonny, Shelia, Mandy, and especially The Captain, would like to wish you safe travels through life, and warn against depending too much on one source of information. Like reality. (That was an attempt at humour).

Diversity in the software microcosm is the key, and whilst some would say that adaptation to change is the route to survival, in reply to the question, ‘how the fuck did you get through all that’, the members said:

The Captain: “For every field honour, a thousand heroes lay alone, unsung, and unremembered.”

Tommy: “I kinda winged it. Rock ‘n’ roll.”

Gina: “Bling, baby, bling!”

Mandy: “It’s good to talk!”

Jonny: “Now that would be telling. It’s all in the encoding you know.”

Shelia: “I owe someone hackcreds.”

Anna: “Love is all you need.”

Justin: “I did it my way.”

Justin (after slap): “Anna.”
Appendix A – Glossary

Justin13 - The unluckiest lucky man alive(me).

555 timer: a low-cost integrated circuit, an old well-proven design, for use in timing, pulse and waveform generation applications.

backage: a hacker’s backpack and baggage.

badger bait/take a badgering: see running the fox, only additionally allows self to be flagged (bitten by the hounds) in order to end trail.

brownbox (brownie): a difficult crack which only leads to useless information.

capitalisation: members only use capitalisation at the start of sentences, and when referring to each other by hacker name. The Captain is of course old school trained, so uses traditional form.

cardboarding: framed cardboard privacy using a box to conceal your pen and paper from other conference attendees, cereal packets are a favoured method of ‘secure’ cardboard encryption.

c’est ne pas un livre: it is not a book.

chiplasers: ‘laser on a chip’, can vary in size from micro light-emitting diode for display purposes, to nanoemitter for use in micro telecommunications applications.

cliptrip: a short processing trip, similar to a movie clip, in which the subconscious part of the brain is used to process information in a short burst.

conordination: concurrent co-ordination (e.g. simultaneous representation of three-dimensional co-ordinates in the brain).

debleep: unlock an electronic lock in reference to the satisfying green light and harmonious beep that is given on successful authorisation.

defcon: defined/defence condition on a scale of one to five, one being worst.

E3: a perfect match, the lines complimenting the curves, and the bonding occurring at three points.

écoute et répète: listen and repeat. The dual feedback learning algorithm used in the Cybertechnics, both for assimilation acceleration and ease of rapid playback recall.

epoch dawn: the perception of the moment in time where all possible realities fall into one.

fin de siècle: end of the century. Of or like the last years of the 19th century. An endless cycle.

fox hole/running the fox: method of tipping off hacker being tracked, by visiting all members in attempt to scatter the trail.

free software: software which is free both monetarily and intellectually.

greenbox: like a bogey, easy to pick.

hack whispers: real world geek game, in which keyphrases are let loose through gossip, and the aim is to guess/track the originator or path.

ic: integrated circuit.

init: init(), the first function call in a program, the ignition or initiation.

io: input/output.

ip (information technology definition): internet protocol.
ip (legal definition): intellectual property.
ir: infrared.

justitia ex tempore: instant justice.

Keplar: quantum physicist/computer scientist who invented the organic transistor, sometimes simply referred to as 'a Keplar'. Also used in slang, 'doing a Keplar' – performing a neat hack seemingly effortlessly.

les chevaliers d’honneur: honorary knights.

les fenêtres est fermée: windows is shut.

Matthew Smith: programming genius who created 'Manic Miner' as well as other arcade classics.

microcode: the last layer of computer program translation, microcode is finally translated into indivisible processing steps that perform functions contained in the processor instruction set. All other abstracted programming layers are above, for instance, vr representation then vrlang, c++, then machine code, then microcode, then single-step processor instructions which cannot be further divided into smaller tasks.

ML: a programming language in which everything is a function, and in which the variables are strictly typed (adhere to a specific type only, i.e. are either a number or a letter).

modus vivendi: mode of living, way of life.

natural language: human language, e.g. English, French.

node draughts: geek virtual game in which systems are captured and used as pieces in a large scale board game manner.

np: no problem.

orange2: quick flag, fast response required, but not as bad as an orange1.

perphack: the bizarre art of talking about something completely unrelated in order to extract information by ego reaction. The conversation is not repeated here to protect the innocent.

picogram: tiny fragment of picture vocabulary, composite of picture and picogram (very small weight, pun on its tiny size).

pictocabulary: pictorial vocabulary.

polymath: a person with great depth of knowledge in a variety of disciplines, especially encompassing multidisciplines such as both arts and sciences, aspiring to become 'a person who knows everything'.

pop: point of presence.

red1 (a red one): veterans only.

rf: radio frequency.

sa: software agent, a small computer program released into the network to perform a specific task, often in co-operation with other similar programs.

scoped: a system being watched.

sitch: situation check.

socket: a connection into the internetwork, as in plug and socket.

Steinberg: computer scientist/physicist. The astute amongst you will have noticed that Steinburg has a daughter, also a computer scientist/physicist.

toycheat: a software or hardware hack designed to crack something that you’d never use the device to actually crack, as that would destroy the fun of the game. Thus rendering the hack as merely a toy.

triaps: 'triangular aspect', triangular or group of three reference points.
triaos: hardware responsible for tracking triaps vectors.

unpredictive: unknowable resultant (or multiple simultaneous co-existing answer) firings in brain, as utilised by Keplar’s organic transistor.

vr: virtual reality.

whitebox: good luck (with that).

xf: cross-reference.

yellowbox: the amber gambler, possible to take down but not control. (“I can’t control crack this one, but I can take it out if you want. What a big lemon.” - Jonny).

z: looks much better when spelt as an s, unless really necessary, as in the word buzz.

☺: smiley face. Everyone loves a smiley face. It’s not difficult.

*: at the same time.

**: after some time.

***: after some more (greater length of) time.
SURVIVING MODERN DAEMONIC POSSESSION
Being a beginner’s pocket guide to avoiding agency recruitment, and fact-full tellings of general sketchiness
4.7 Four pieces of the art
“The problem with recruitment techniques,” he said. “Is that they all tend to follow a similar sort of pattern.”
“Oh yes,” she said.
“Yes,” he said. “They all think that by ‘converting’ you to their system, they will solve the problem which they think you have.”
“Doesn’t sound too bad,” she said.
“Problem is, they think converting you will solve your problem, without actually making any attempt to solve the actual problem.”
“I see,” she said.
“They all tend to play a similar route in,” he said. “They instigate a program where they draw you in, make you feel comfortable by compliments and giving you an environment of well-being, such as good food and a warm sleep-space. During this time, they subtly leak in the indoctrination keyphrases.”
“Hmm,” she said.
“Then the comes the snap,” he continued. “After the period of gentle suggestive brain washing, they actively force a situation which brings about a nervous system breakdown.”
“Doesn’t sound very bright,” she said.
“No, indeed not,” he sighed. “Thus, when you experience a reality collapse and your mind lowers itself to a blank void, when the buoyancy of your thoughts tries to resurface, the memory of all their hypnotism comes back, and your brain tries to make sense of what you have been told, and attempts to recreate a system of reality based upon it.”
“Similar physiology,” she said.
“And of course,” he nodded. “When you’ve collapsed and are desperately thirsting for answers, who are you going to run to, but the originators of the program.”
“I guess that follows,” she said. “Then once they’ve got you back into the nest, they can pretty much write on you anything they want to with their quills and ink.”
“Yes,” he said. “You’re then in a submissive position, as your mind has effectively submitted itself to their views and will, as it has literally nothing left to form a construct from.”
“Sounds rather slavorial,” she said.
“Often externalises itself like that,” he agreed. “The secondary mind-mapping then occurs, with the broken mind being fed even more information biased to their system. Doubly enhanced now, as the washing has provoked almost a feeling of it all being your own opinion, as the clarity of remembering it was them who fed the information to you has gone. The overseers are then in a position of considerable power, as your natural instincts are to believe their opinion as authoritative, and if it’s effectively relayed as proof to the ego’s solution, your brain is always going to fire on it more so.”
“Without solving the actual problem,” she said.
“Yes,” he sighed. “The end result being, is that if you’ve been through three or four different programs, after a while it’s the indoctrination collapses that become the problem, on top of what your original difficulties were.”
“So they’ve effectively done considerably more damage than help,” she said.
“Very effectively, yes,” he said. “And in the end, all they’ve tried to sell you is the solution which they used to solve their own problems, without any reference to you yourself.”
“I guess that’s why they are so fanatical about it,” she said. “Their particular ego’s solution is bound to be of total importance to them, as they use it as the basis of their reality, so they are going to enforce and defend it hard.”
“That can be very true of some of the systems which are heavily dependent on intellectualisation and ego rationalisation to form their proof,” he said. “Especially the tiered programs, rather than those of level hierarchy, as often they think you’ve somehow got a stage wrong as it doesn’t fit their pathed solution, even though your’s may be of more significance to you than the significance of their own solution. Hierarchical systems can also thus be majorly dependent on the ego problems of the person performing the suggestive washings.”
“Might get heavy then,” she said.
“You’d be surprised at some of the lengths some groups will go to,” he said.
“Probably not,” she said.
“Can be a bit iffy with some,” he said. “Whilst a few are doing it for therapy reasons to help you overcome your fears, there’s also those who are really after power and control. There are the extremes of Charles Manson and Dr Timothy Leary, and then a sketchy waveform in between.”

Chapter Two – Messaging relays

Beep-beep. He woke up. “Wake up!” shouted an unknown voice from an unknown place.
Shit. What the fuck was that. It was like someone beaming in a psychic signal. He wondered what time it was. He kind of knew it was obviously going to be 6:09. He turned over and picked up his comm unit from the bedside table. He looked at the display. Sure enough, it was 6:09am.
“No, go back to sleep!” he shouted back with his mind.
He wouldn’t have cared so much but he had been up earlier during dawn to test the ordering system. He must have been asleep for half an hour or so, rather rude of whatever group it was to wake him up at that time. Especially as he had never really determined who the 6:09 group were, although in symbolic translacing they might be one of the groups who thought themselves as power, the 6:09 becoming gog or god or something in their rituals. Or maybe just the ying-yang thing. Manners were certainly missing, surely a gentle knock, knock, followed by a hello and an introduction would have been more polite.

It was the first day of the advert run today, and as it was an evening paper, there really was no need to get out of bed just yet, especially for one who needed some sleep. Or at least a bit of time to lay down and go through the motions of sleep, mostly always ended up being a conscious lucid dreaming whilst awake lately. Doubly rude then, as the psychic alarm call had woken him up when he had actually been in one of those rare moments of true restful sleep. Oh well, a gentle yawn and time to make like Bagpuss. Sleep.

Not that many, if any, were going to understand the reasonings behind the ad run. But then again, it might be another case of hiding in full view. Or even perhaps a case of making himself public enough, so that if the conspiracies were true, at least it wouldn’t go so unnoticed. Not that he was that paranoid, but hey, might as well get it all out and dispelled in one clean sweep.

He had tried something similar before. He was very aware back then that he wasn’t the only one tied-up in things, and the full-page ad would at least encourage those who knew him to stand-up amongst the faceless entities as individuals striving towards truth. Some may have viewed it as an ego display of conspicuous consumption, but hey, he was quite used to being misunderstood. A few friends who had become strangers appeared in coincidental meetings, often showing support and the empathy of shared experience, so it wasn’t all bad. Also always better to try and create a little of your own history, as The Captain would say, just to be on the safe side.

Like the design in the new advert, the true reasonings were a bit more abstract. He had been given a massive discount, so nice to know he had friends as well as enemies in high places. Nice of them to honour the offer of a second ad discount, even though the timespan between had been considerable. The first ad had been more of a traditional early Victorian black and white affair. This time he had decided to go for something from the next stage of evolution, and throw in a bit of colour.

Maybe someone might even attempt to cut-out the net shape and attempt to form the triangular dipyramid. Would be nice to share the vision of unity and balance of the two working together as one inseparable particle as at the beginning of time. Hopefully not too many would attempt to infer some cocaine-driven bisexual link like Freud might have done, but hey, if they did, that was up to them. Some might choose to see it as an ego thing, but he was sure if that was the case he’d have put his own name in a much bigger font. Hopefully the humour wasn’t lost.

Timing and patience were the true key though. The most heavily constructed indoctrinations from nine or so years ago featured a significant proportion of suggested relevance of newspaper news, advertising placement and manipulation. Thus, it was all an abstracted attempt to recreate the experience in order to gain a point of reference to which the original dawns could be compared to. Another motive may have been to draw out some of the groups who had been involved in various forms of indoctrination on him over the long years, but really, waking him up that early in the morning was just plain rude.

Mind you, he was used to being messed with lately, it had been an odd couple of years. At its beginning he already had a strange feeling of being in the wrong environment, and when that corp had just fucked him over, it was obviously a case of being left to stare at an open door too long. That one itself had been a long wire-in, a progressive attack of aggressive business tactics.

He had spent a long time developing the systems, to some extent they were the product of his life’s programming work. That was what had hurt, putting all that effort in for their gain, then being edged out, first by being forced to surrender royalty payments due to the torrents of time-wasting tasks, and then to a point where they stopped paying for the new systems and simply resorted to theft. Nice.

During the next year he had other distractions to his time, including the inevitable couple of spells of transcendence that could occur when spending a lot of time in the rig. After a rest, he had managed to try and make a defence back. So he had sued them for 5k, more to try and get some sort of closure rather than for the credits.

They started off in the familiar pattern of such things, first offering 1k, then 3k in 1k installments, and then finally 3k in a lump sum when the court date approached. So he had thought fair enough, and withdrew the proceedings. Unbeknown to him, a case needed to be withdrawn by both parties. So, they went ahead and met the judiciary, with him thinking that it was all withdrawn. Thus, they had the case referred to their home turf, after showing the judiciary a biased comm printout referring to an old system they had manipulated out of him previously. The date that they arranged the new hearing for was rather cute. Friday 13th.

A bit poor too, as even after a working relationship had broken down, he still liaised with them to ensure they continued to function smoothly. Perhaps in hindsight, that loyalty had been greatly misplaced. Obviously the date was sketchy in itself, but he knew that the guys were heavily into stoneworking. He had at one point produced a clip for their lodge, and so he had to consider the fact that all the judiciary up there were going to be in the same club. Apparently Friday 13th was also a day such groups believed they had augmented powers. So really, was he going to go to a place of judgment, in a town with a loaded name, on Friday 13th, to face a bunch of stoneworkers who all went to the same dinners.
Luckily, as he had thought that the proceedings were withdrawn, he didn’t know about all this until after the 13th, so he probably saved himself a lot of worry. And anyway, if he was that bothered by the number thirteen, he wouldn’t have started one of his clips on that index reference. He did notice however, that they had been through every clip he had ever produced for them, and removed his name from the credits. That kind of bordered on distinct rudeness.

Anyway, the upshot of it being, the ex-client went to the halls of judgment, and then dubiously claimed that their current costs stood at 5k, which they threatened to sue for, as blackmail to stop him from taking any further action. Nice huh. So what could he do, but write them a nice letter explaining what had happened, and polishing it off with a last line of “In conclusion, I can only form the opinion that you are by profession a pirate, and by a person a cunt.”

Maybe they had wanted him to join in more with them, he had been thinking of moving away from them, or at least realigning somewhat so they didn’t have so much power and control over him. It might have been the last desperate lashings of claws to try and keep him in the nest, or it might have been simply greed. He did wonder whether they had sold the systems off, and already spent the credits. Strange how those links of business seemed to go about their work. There was also the consideration that the stoneworking thing might have been a false flag, or just distractionary smoke to make him look sketchy and undermine his credibility should things come down to it.

That just seemed to be the way of that type of pyramid system. Lure you in, rank you up, until you’re in a position where you’re merely working to maintain your current level, to a point where you don’t have so much luxury to be free to be selective on the tasks that are presented to you. Just another brick in the self-perpetuating construct of the sin in busyness.

Still, that was only creds, he had always been more interested in finding true riches. He never did think that the tree of life had leaves of banknotes. He walked away.

He figured it was easier just to lay low on Saturday and Sunday. Let the quieting stills of the weekend bring their peace. There was an odd chance that some group would make an appearance during the traditional Sunday teatime window of attack, but luckily he was tired and pretty much slept through that period, so it couldn’t have still bothered him that much, or have any particular hold over him.

The next day had much more of a sketchy significance anyway. The first day of spring. It did have a rather unfortunate name for some. May Day. He sighed at the sadness that haunted from some, those who’s international distress signal received no ACK, and were left to face the leap of faith, rather than the turning back inland.

Things muttered away quietly in their meanderings, and it became Wednesday. He had been his usual sketchy self again, and the clip hadn’t yet appeared in the listings of the big-brand retail store. All caused by a bit of an attempt at safeness, he wasn’t over keen on the new thirteen-digit clip identifiers, as they were really just a thinly veiled product barcode to add to the masses. So he had entered the ten-digit version into the processing interface. Shame that the processing unit had rejected things, and sent the result back using the slowest of secondary methods. It had surely taken up more cycles to produce the response, than it would have to merely convert the identifier to the alternative construct. But hey, that was progress.

He realised that it would be necessary when a batch were presented, but really, such strict guideline adherence had undoubtedly birthed more waste than productivity. Maybe a bit more of preparation would have fared more well, he had certainly had plenty of patience, but it had all been reduced down to largely a matter of timing, and the time for it all had been now. To be fair, on a later return to the system, the front forms have been redesigned, so maybe just some hiccup to an actual improvement, one hopes. However, it was there today, no point in dwelling, and no point giving mister paranoia any reason to come into form. Reminded him of the time he stood in the posting office, and the assistant had mentioned that all the systems had strangely blanked off. He must have been a bit too tired to have been paranoid that day, as he merely said “It’s all a conspiracy,” in a rather blank tone, and just continued playfully filling-out yet another form.

There were much more interesting things of occurrence anyway. It was Wednesday that the flickerings of probability came into play, at a similar stage to those that had appeared all those years before. The astrological signs in the printouts had been similar to back then all week, perhaps them being about ‘the stars’ that day wasn’t so far removed from the truth. However, it hadn’t been until today that the wider spread of the scope of things had become apparent.

Positioned in today’s news stories was an article about the latest Harry Potter book. The headline read ‘Bad news, fans: This book’s not a Potter’. Good placement indeed, and one that definitely brought about a certain satisfaction, to have the title of the ad positioned under a picture of that young magician. Examination of the story made things a bit sketchier of course. The basis was that contact had been made by wired comms from an anonymous someone who was convinced they had a copy of some chapters to the new Harry Potter book. Humorous in a way, he could almost hear some of the members laughing in roars at their thinking he had pulled off a hack of the whole news in a desirable fashion. Unfortunately that wasn’t the case, maybe he should have thought of it though, and had a go, just to bring their smiles.

There was also the chance that the help could turn into a hindrance. Unlikely to be an attempt at scuppering though. The ‘This book’s not a Potter’ could put people off. In actual fact, it most likely did, as a little later during a conversation with someone in some bar, he had mentioned the title of the clip, and the girl had replied “Is it like Harry Potter, if it’s like Harry Potter I’d buy it.”

Maybe it was just one of those strange coincidences, or maybe she had made the link in her mind either consciously or subconsciously to the news headline. Maybe she just liked Harry Potter. Either way, it didn’t matter, if she wasn’t in
the intended target, she wasn’t in the intended target. Those destined to see the signals would most definitely have preferred it not to be a Potter anyway. Certainly sketchy stuff though on a late night in midtown.

But back to the present past. As the probabilities coalesced, the reference point to the distant past memories became clear. Harry Potter, the *magician*.

**Chapter Three – Sketching out the past**

The Magician. An unmistakable tarot reference point. That definitely struck a chord with the past, he had often been played for a fool, both by various groups, and probably by God Himself in His ever infinite wisdom.

The colours of the shapes in the new ad lay spread-out underneath the Magician’s bag like the tarot suits. As ever, the time old question remained, were the contents added, or were they already there. I’m glad you where. He knew his own answer, the colours of the net shape stood-under the magician, the shape he had sorted it all into when he had been at the beginning of time. The idyllic triangular dipyramid, him and her united in their quantum spin.

Alternatively though, some others would have the figure as the juggler, the will of man trying to manipulate the elements. Or the magician as a gateway conduit from the above to the earthly below. Or even something else completely different entirely. A pattern that often emerged, different intellectualisations of the same source.

Mind you, he often found that one a problem. After a long period of abstraction, he would do a bit of research to see what other opinions there were to act as a gauge to his personal experiences. Pretty much without fail, he’d manage to use the information network to link surf through to a documented experience of someone of great note. Thus it would become very odd, in a way he had only learnt what he could have learnt from reading other’s research in the first place. He did always prefer to learn through experience rather than simply follow another’s opinion, so that was ok, but it did have a way of nudging his ego to almost trivialise what he had experienced.

He remembered saying to someone once that he had reached a period of transcending, and they had replied “Get over yourself”. Surely that was the point of transcending, to get over one’s self. So maybe they had understood, or maybe they hadn’t, as again it would often be the case that things could be viewed in either a positive or a negative light. Either way he couldn’t derive any progression from it, so he was often left as unfulfilled as before. There was always the depressing thought that people would just think he was talking about something he had read. Or they had read. All those rungs of the ladder climbed, with only the snake-slide back down again.

Human nature could dictate that if the teller was in a good mood, and the listener a bad, then the teller’s opinion could just be rejected as arrogance, or falsely matched in an interpretation gained from the negative influences of the listener’s ego. A lot of people’s advice would manifest itself as a mere repetition of advice that had been given to them, and when the context was so mismatched, it often became frustrating, or even patronising. In the fore-mentioned incidence however, it was more likely that they just wanted him to shut up with his ramblings and get on with the work he was supposed to be doing for them.

So there it was, the ∞ above the head of the Magician. He had used the same symbol on the cover of one of his clips, so he thought it was worth a journey of further examination. Perhaps it would lead to gleaning an extra snippet of something from somewhere, or at least an appreciation of what others might mistake it for. Maybe that was why he had so many problems with all those sketchy groups, he was just singing and humming along on his own meanderings, and they might attach their own relevance and dire importance.

He liked the number 8, it had a certain nice smoothness about it. The number of his childhood home from which he had such fond memories of, and of course, its link to the mathematical symbol for infinity, an added bonus. In the Times New Roman font, the ∞ can be seen to be the same character as the number 8, only on its side. He remembered seeing the child-writing inside the cover pages of an old dictionary. He couldn’t remember whether he was the one who had written them, but remembered their shapes of circles connected by a line, an abstracted mind trying to draw an 8 by tying together two circles perhaps.

Hmmm. The network certainly contained a plethora of interpretations. No wonder he had such difficulty with that piece of string. Seemed the semantics could depend upon the angle the construct was viewed at, rather than the syntax of its representation. Sketchy that it came after the seven secret never to be told though, in the most paranoid-inducing indoctrinations the secret was merely used as a device to prevent anyone talking about anything outside of the agency, as a method of power and control. The bizarre thing remained though, that immediately on considering the fact that there was no secret to be told, and if so it shouldn’t be a secret anyway, as that’s rather unfair, he had performed a quick readinput research, and found a reference to Aleister Crowley discussing the same thing, and mentioning that he was approached immediately after and recruited.

His own opinion of things was maybe similar to the original opinion of Mr Crowley, in that in order to keep a ‘secret’, one must first have been told it, otherwise it’s not a secret, but merely something you have learnt through personal experience. Guess that’s why he had avoided having to do much with any agencies, especially the hierarchical ones, as often the next steps wouldn’t be revealed until you had done what they had wanted you to do. Too easy for a brainwashed path to be led into situations of dubiousness, only after to be told “Well, you can’t complain now, we didn’t force you to do it, you chose to do it.”

But in happier references, it was noted that the ∞ was also on the 8th card of the tarot in the Rider-Waite-Smith deck, although sources varied between 8th and 11th positioning, 11 in binary is 3, so that worked equally well for him. It was nice that the ads were running mostly on page 8 then. Card number 8 of the tarot, good honest and reliable, strength and
Not that the number 8 always worked in his favour. Although that could have been because the first clip of the three was released much earlier, and so anyone wanting to give a response had an established means to do so. The finance corp he was using at the time had just undergone a bit of a refit. Took them a while though, and at various times bits of ceiling and floor were the only points of interest for bored queuers. A lack of thought on the air-conditioning systems though, and on one particular stuffy day he had to assist an older man with some water as it was just too dry inside the building.

Another day whilst idly drifting in the queue, a young toddler behind him had remarked how the number 8 on the new eight-digit counter displays was broken. Sure enough, it was odd that the brand new displays were showing a fault already, a segment missing from the 8, to make it what could only be compared to a backward 6.

It was ironic that the girl he had been attracted to ended up always being at counter number 7 then. The broken 8 display was eventually replaced by a piece of paper with an 8 drawn on it in biro. Odd that such a simple component hadn’t been replaced over the weeks. Leaving a situation to where he always ended up at till 7 for a secret never to be told (although the secret attached was of the unknown type, he didn’t consider his attraction as a secret in itself), with the next number 8 being only sketched out.

Not that his paranoia filters would let him attach any relevance to it all. He was so used to being manipulated by schemes of great complexity, that even if it was all an organised situation, he was always going to dismiss it as the general sketchiness that can be apparent in all things. It did sometimes bother him though that so much information about him was connected in one place. The original account had been an oversee corp one, so it wasn’t too hard to imagine that the links of business could easily spread across to his other society ties, and often members would pop up and drop a few hack whispers to him or those he knew.

He was hungry. Couldn’t really be bothered to cook, or eat really, but some fuel was perhaps needed to keep the system functioning. The options lessoned in such an instant, as when the appetite for food was lowered, the first priority was to eat, rather than to eat exceptionally healthily. So to it, a burger. A double burger, with double cheese.

“4.48,” said the assistant, and handed him his fifty-two pence change. That was odd, the change was usually fifty-one pence, a penny and a fifty-piece. He knew this was the case, as he’d always place both into the charity box which had the spin-a-coin down the spiral game. Fifty-pences where a bit crap as they jumped down quickly, although their noise was fun even if rather shorter lived. The system was most likely designed for those pennies though, the sound they made as they slowly spiralled down was very satisfying, and the journey lasted so long that one could experience the thrill of the spectacle for a fair time, and then walk away pleased, and additionally hear the joyous clink of the penny finally dropping after even more time still.

So then, an agency ack perhaps, but which one. The 8 itself could be used as a reference to the 8-circuit model of consciousness as per Dr Leary, the Buddhist eight-spoked noble path, or the Jewish eight-pointed star, and the 4.4 half-division correlated to a change or inner/outer system used by a lot of groups.

But maybe the key lay in the method. The hack was seemingly difficult to pull off manually, as all the products were pre-priced and pre-arranged as an option on the payment system. He remembered the time when he was about to receive £6.66 as change at a shop some years before, and had quickly bought something else as well to make a much more acceptable number. But those had been manual pricing. This was automatic. A machine. There perhaps lay the conclusion, it was technology that had been the method, so it was most likely science-theorists or another of the abstracted intelligence or alien-driven agencies. Always easy to tell a science-theorist though, they had an insistence on saying “No, you mean technology,” when in any discussion about science. Insistence was often a hint too, stoneworkers liked to think they were more subtle. Some groups could perhaps view the application of science as technology, others applications of magic as religion. Come to think of it, science-theorists liked that infinite 8 as well. As ever then, the encyclopedia of conspiracies could match it to one of three or so agencies. He wasn’t going to press for more clues, he just wanted to eat some food and go.

Entering back into the hotel he was resting-up in, he noticed more magazines had been placed on the front desk. The day before the new issue of the monthly fashion magazine, or whatever it was, he’d never read it, had been placed with its alluring cover of the brunette dancer. His first thoughts were that today’s additions of history and holiday were an attempt to compensate with some wholesome intelligent reading. Currently then, the state of play lay from right to left of the displayed magazines, and then three books entitled with various Italian, Roman Catholic, and Isis references, as far as could be matched from a brief second of eye scanning.

Stumbling back into his apartment, he figured that while wares were all on display, he may as well add to it with his own. The teddy bear promotional keyrings, the software agents, maybe they could make a fine compliment to those already there. Number stuff was obviously on his mind, given the 8:44, and there were two piles of three so far, giving 33. The encyclopedia paranoia would flag up the age of Christ at the crucification to the number 33, and cross-references would link it to other significances of life trials and changes. The number 333 had been popping up a lot lately, and it was even the number of the house the hacker kid from the film Wargames lived in. However, given that he was going to place little teddy bears, he didn’t really want to place three, much better to have a sweet couple. So down to the lobby it was to place the two little agents, alongside the two piles of three.

Wait a minute. Perhaps he should be taking things a little more seriously rather than just playing hack games for fun. He had only wanted to add a couple of keyrings to be taken by someone for their enjoyment. Others might actually rate some significance to the positioning. The replay of triggering was certainly working, indoctrination techniques often used forceful predestinal positioning.
Looking up 233 for peace of mind, he was pleased that it had lots of special mathematical meanings, but the nicest was the usage in netslang, as a substitute for BFF, Best Friends Forever. Two teddies arranged to make the whole read best friends forever, he was lucky there, a nice result.

But of forceful predestination. It could have been suggested to him to arrange as 333, were it not for the other individual distractions. That’s the way some agencies sometimes worked it, force a predestination, create instances where you don’t do want you want to, but do what you think you should do in order to fit into their pre-programmed pattern.

So maybe they had wanted him to arrange as 333. He looked it up. A far darker and more sketchier set of references. The key to the past was becoming clearer. He remembered that in medical terminology ‘not for 3’s’ was used as code to indicate resuscitation should not be attempted on a patient who was too frail to undergo the procedure, in reference to 333 being dialed on the internal comms systems to call the resus-trolley. Amongst the other definitions lay:

“A half-evil number: 666/2. A number associated with the Thelemic daemon of The Abyss, Choronzon, who is said to be ready to devour the ego of the Magician.”

It looked like it was game on, the memories of the washings from the past of nine years ago were becoming clearer, as was the chance to gain more understanding of them.

Chapter Four – Memories

The first thing that one notices when entering a clap clinic is the fact that it is packed. They sure are busy places, seems there’s a lot of it about. Nagging thoughts had driven him there those nine years ago, after seeing the vidclip with its scorpions as from another moment even further in the past when he was under the influence of lsd.

After the expected long wait, he was taken to a small white room, and blood samples taken with what seemed an incredibly big needle and syringe, or was that just how he had formed a memory of it. This routine was performed in a suitable silence, and then he was told to wait, and not run away, amongst a bunch of chairs which seemed to be strangely in isolation from everything else, the only views being walls and corridors.

Unfortunately even here there were forces trying to instigate a positive brainwash. From an unseen office he could hear voices chatting about how it was better to go outdoors and do stuff rather than staying inside, all the usual society tie-in stuff really. That was fairly tame though, compared to what was about to come. The reason he was waiting was to be given a leaflet with some helpful comm links on it.

The gentleman, black hair, brown shoes, who had performed the extraction of blood, reappeared and held out a leaflet to him, but still held it firmly in his grasp. As the gentleman’s spare hand traced out an underlining pattern beneath the last digits of the commlink number, he said this in a deep stern tone:

“And here’s the number you are looking for.”

The last digits of the commlink had of course been the number 666.

Some would say that 999 was in fact the number of the dark one, as where it is sourced was translated from something that was supposed to be read using a mirror. Although the mirror analogy in itself could lead to more doubt. It was funny then, that a commlink would have such a number, given that it would be people who were having difficulties who were going to need it. He had discussed this fact with friends before, and on analysis it seemed one commlink ended in 666, and the additional alternative commlink also shown ended in 999. So maybe some sort of pre-filter, but for people with major sketchiness obviously neither was going to be particularly useful.

Since the trail was leading to it, he decided to have a lookup for more information on the ego daemon. He almost knew what kind of stuff to expect, the memories of various indoctrinations were returning, and their usage of the same type of construct.

“The name of the Dweller in the Abyss is Choronzon, but he is not really an individual. The Abyss is empty of being; it is filled with all possible forms, each equally inane, each therefore evil in the only true sense of the word—that is, meaningless but malignant, in so far as it craves to become real. These forms swirl senselessly into haphazard heaps like dust devils, and each such chance aggregation asserts itself to be an individual and shrieks, ‘I am!’ though aware all the time that its elements have no true bond; so that the slightest disturbance dissipates the delusion just as a horseman, meeting a dust devil, brings it in showers of sand to the earth.”


That did all sound kind of Lovecraft Cthulhu type stuff, an era of great Victorian investigation and science. It was the phrase “I am I”, that drew his attention, and provided the keylink to the past of those nine years ago.

Various groups had various ideas at the time. It was well before the money-making Da Vinci Code, but the predestination choice-systems of Celestine Prophecies were making the rounds, and he himself had even had the Magdalene descendant indoctrination of standing tied to stake-like, hands behind back and feet together, performed on him. Another phrase that seemed to be linked to some of those agencies was the use of ‘I am’.

A modernist, albeit ancient text referenced, opinion, seemed to lead to the super-human or god-human-being interpretation of ‘I am God’. He was never quite one for that, as the Bible usage of ‘I am’ was obviously simply to indicate the timeless nature of God. It wasn’t ‘I was, I am, I will be’, it was simply ‘I am’. Thus amalgamating past,
present and future tenses in unity. He always did wonder about groups which aspired to have god-like powers, the source of the power must always be taken into consideration. He was of the opinion that we were all part of God, but a clear reference surely indicated the difference:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no-one can boast.” - Ephesians 2:8.

That seemed to make sense and sum it up for him. He did wonder about the ego of those who wanted to obtain god-like powers in an earthly form. Whilst that could be seen as contradictory to relying on strength in prayer, with prayer the will that was exerted was the will of God, rather than the will of man.

He did also wonder about some of the motives behind some of the members of the indoctrination groups. On further research into the ego daemon, it was described that with proper preparation the daemon could be countered, and without the participant would be doomed to Dispersion and utter annihilation. Whilst the keyphrases had definitely led into provoking a similar event, there were also those which had seemed decidedly unhelpful, destructive even. Obviously the live comms coming in of ‘if they knew you knew they’d want to kill you’ was particularly bad for someone fractalling internally, but there were many others.

During a later discussion with an associate about the interpretation of the piece of string, it was suggested to him that it was a noose. Again, not particularly helpful to someone in difficulty, even if by chance the relayer had meant to give a more positive reference to the enlightenment stage of a hanged man, it’s timing showed a particular lack of care and concern. He also remembered how another time a professional made a similar reference in a lapse of thought. So maybe it wasn’t deliberately destructive. The professional had arrived with an assistant who was to observe, but he wasn’t convinced that either of them understood his description of it only being the memories of the events that still rose occasionally. It wasn’t the memory of the event, but the memory of the memories, the thoughts of the memory, recreated occasionally in an obsessive compulsive macro-sentence structure formation in his mind, background static to his more conscious waves of thought.

On leaving his building, the professional had caught the strap of his equipment bag on the handle of a cupboard door. Remarking “Oops, nearly hung myself there,” was obviously a reflexed pattern matched response, but luckily he could almost laugh at the irony of its usage given his additional context in the situation.

He wasn’t sure that he was going to let his mind have the satisfaction of comparing his experiences of nine years ago with an encountering of any particularly powerful daemon, after all, that may only be letting his ego win. But there were perhaps some comparisons to be made for the benefit of his own understanding of the events, and of course his paranoia factor was never going to dismiss the fact that it could have all been some deliberate esoteric attack by the isoterics of one of the more sinister groups he had encountered on his travels. He may have been fed false suggestions, even though they knew a more deliberate interpretation, simply to provoke a bad trip straight down the ladder. Some people certainly turned into twats when on lsd, but it was sometimes hard to tell who were the twats and who were merely repeating what had been said and done to them. Maybe he should give some of them the benefit of the doubt. Others perhaps not.

He was playing it more for entertainment and understanding now, and at least now he had a few years of experience of experiencing extreme sketchiness, not the unprepared fall of nine years ago, when he was already considerably at his lowest point even before the darkness began. The first week of then had been utterly terrifying, but because of the intensity of the experience, he was almost so frightened as to be unaware of it, the directness of it was all consuming, and he hadn’t had any mind-time to consider what it all actually was. The unknowingly predicting the future news had been bad enough, ultimately leading to the trip through time and outside of time where the daemons attempted to destroy his hope, faith and love. The oldest game of them all, the Sandman rhyme with Morpheus and Chronozon certainly had a certain echoing to his experience of battling against the daemons that had attempted to enter his mind.

The rhyme he had found in his research seemed to be a few lines short though. For after he had reached a point where it was necessary for the abstraction of hope to bring him back, the daemons had destroyed that too. Playing out over endless lifetimes a continued cycle of failure, embarrassment, loss and self-destruction, leading to a finality of being shown that it was him who created his own hope, he was the light at the end of the tunnel, it was him carrying the torch. And they very precisely showed him how lost in hopelessness he was.

Of course the comparisons inevitably brought about their contradictions too. Whilst at the Epoch Dawn his self transcended to a point of stillness, from which he was ultimately able to stand and sit upright again in resuscitation, but the attacks of the daemons didn’t end at the end of the first week. It had been easy for him to resist the lures of power, wealth, and control of nature, they weren’t really what he had ever wanted, and he always knew of their distractionary use, and that they all merely pandered to an ego. Guess that kind of experience can be likened to a forty-days and forty-nights, but an analogy of that was enough for him, he wasn’t ever really convinced of his own self-importance, even if some more obscure groups did attempt a hack whispering of Jesus being from a ‘stable’ environment, consisting of good parenting, rather than a manger. That was taking interpretation a bit far for him really, bordering on damn right silliness. So what was it then that had approached next.

It was bizarre then for someone who wasn’t convinced of any of its relevance to experience more of it in the weeks and months to come. A mind broken to a child-like acceptance, and a tendency to try and understand other people’s
opinions, and of course the inevitable empathetic Keplarisation, proved to be a potent combination.

During one particular high-peaking week, he went through what he could only describe as a god-like experience. It was an odd one, especially as a couple of years previous he had chatted to a guy sat on his own in a nightclub who looked a bit lost, and the guy had a short conversation about a god-like experience, before leaving soon after.

It’s hard to relate a god-like experience, but to describe it as thought-driven rather than action driven would probably be apt enough. It wasn’t like the euphoric hit one might experience in a moment of ecstasy on a sonic dancefloor. There the spinal rush might cause one to cry out “I am god!”, whereas really one meant “I am good”, in an expression of having an utterly good and fantastic feeling.

He had let it all wash through his mind without conscious control, until his own consciousness had restored itself enough for him to be able to think the phrase that he didn’t want to be God any more. To him it gave a greater understanding of why God may had manifested as Jesus in order to understand what it is like to be a human. The only other real words that could be expressed in it, were that God blesses us all equally, given that we are all lost fools, and that His love truly is endless and ever merciful. Probably taught him that Jesus was definitely not a mere man too.

After his conscious thought, the experience had left him. It was then that the Christian phrase of “When you call to God, He is not the only one who is listening,” came into play. In a similar way to the trials of Job, it was almost as if Satan had said, “Ok God, you’ve had your fun. Now it’s my turn.”

Again, the onslaught was fought in his thoughts rather than his actions. This new attack wasn’t like what he had experienced in that week before. Maybe again no actional temptations where raised up as it had already been shown in that week that he would reduce himself to total stillness even if he thought his thoughts would adversely affect anything else, let alone if the playing with a toy truck and car somehow created a butterfly cause and effect somewhere. Hope was thus perhaps considered to be refuellable though faith, which could be deemed unbreakable, since proof was already shown of that, even though he never needed proof of his faith, as it was always apparent to him that it was part of the point of faith to need no proof, because any proof could be faked in order to gain power and control, so was unlikely to be given.

That was perhaps why then, that the remaining component of his triasm took the form it did for the route into the next attack. Love. But not in the manner that would be expected.

“Love God,” he said in his mind.
“I love Satan,” said the daemons in their attack.
“I love God,” he said in his mind, with stronger conviction.
“I love Satan,” shouted the daemons in retaliation.

And so the battle continued in his mind. The louder he thought his thoughts of loving God, the louder the daemons screamed back in anger with their loving Satan. There seemed to be more of them than him, and over time the shouts of hate were all that could be heard in his mind, the cries of love for God drowned out in a deafening whispering of thoughts. As hard as he fought to swing his thoughts in the direction he wanted, the opposites to his thoughts would traverse across his mind too, like his own mind debating and playing Devil’s Advocate inside of itself.

It would probably be what he would always consider as the lowest point in those events of nine years ago. A truly sorrowful and piteous time. The daemon nagging of his thoughts was such that he couldn’t even maintain a stream of thought long enough to think even a few words of prayer to his God, let alone a sentence. That was how the attack against love manifested itself in then, he was driven to a point to where he was separated from that which he loved so dearly. His mind taken from a place where he could pray to his God, to a torturous oblivion where he was separated from his love, and from whence he couldn’t even communiccate to his God in words of prayer. Lost to the world, lost to God, hidden in a place where he could never be found, or even a place to which anyone would ever come looking. Standing amidst the burning black flames of hell. Sickened, broken, breathless, in the emptiness of oblivion.

His mind taken then to a place where God had no influence, no witness, and no knowledge of. An obvious bizarre abstraction, the point of the method being most likely that without a God in witness, there was no sin. He was shown all the pleasures and excesses that a man could ever be in all possible outcomes and combinations of infinity. The terrors and horrors of all that a man could be and do. Even the pleasures that man could derive from the terrors and horrors of man. Shown all, and the promises of freedom to indulge in any and with no consequence.

But to him there was no joy in the pleasures of the moment, no pleasure to be gained in pleasures of the self. To him pleasure and joy were a shared experience. An experience bonded in the purity of love. “He who thinks only of number one should remember that it is next to nothing.”

“They are true to their words. Stamping his mind unceremoniously through a spiralling cheese-grater shaft dancing toward the decadacy of oblivion, the daemons raped his thoughts and kicked his sagged body husk around amongst themselves.

When the daemons had grown bored of their plaything in the infinite timelessness of their own imprisonment, they flicked him into the gutters like a discarded cigarette.

The wind and rain blew amongst the ashes of his existence, scattering their burnt frailties in a damn soup of fragmented memories. Left to weather an indifferent storm, with only a random favourable gust of overlapping from
which to glean understanding.

As tenderly as morning dew,
My sweet love will ever nurture.
Cast no fear from any depth within,
For that lie which they hold in rapture.

His self appeared to him. “You’re so fucking clever,” said his self. “That I’ll give you eight years, eight months, and eight days, to figure out how to find your true love. If not after then, your reality will collapse, as like in your self-hypnotising routines you experimented with in your youth. There’ll be nothing you can do to stop or change it, only observing without influencing, your participation irrelevant.”

“How about eight years, eight months, eight days, eight hours, and eight seconds,” he said.

“Fine,” said his self. “If you think that’ll make any fucking difference.”

Chapter Five – Back to the future of passing present

That had definitely achieved the key into past memories of nine years ago then, even if only an ability for a clearer view, rather than a total comprehending of understanding. But back to the present reference in time.

Nice of the cash point to fuck with him. His credit-strips had been a bit sketchy lately. Especially as he could never remember his id numbers, or the passwords to the net-based interfaces. Funny one though, a humorous combination of two agencies. The technology of the cash point dishing out the two ten-pound notes. A 10:10, a number more associated with those beloved stoneworkers, making the smiley face on a clock, and the self-repeating number on a digit watch, 10:10:10, or 222 as it was in binary. One of the routes into the Golden Ratio. Still, only a cash point, that little piece of explanation was included here purely just for entertainment.

Those kind of things could often appear from various agencies. The timing of emails was a common one. Different groups sending at their associated time-links of 6:09, 10:10, 8:44. The 5:05 and 15:05 were more obvious correlations. A 9:15 or a 2:45 could give a more subtle indication of the level playing fields, or even pointers to the columns with their beacon Tesla coils. Midday or high-noon was always a laugh, or some might prefer a 1:00pm, given on a 24-hour readout as 13:00, a lucky or unlucky number, depending on your current situation. He remembered the corp who always had a good-cop/bad-cop thing going, with one being a stoneworker, and one pertaining to be not. Some would consider the text comm at 10:10 from the latter of them saying “We’re all good friends now,” was particularly entertaining. Some groups may have even used the hands of timings to relay coded messages using the triangular watch system.

As he made his way back to the hotel, he whistled along to himself. After a pause in tune, he picked up again with a particularly joyous whistle. As he whistled, the clouds broke, and in shone the sun. He turned to his right and looked up at the sun, to see and feel the warmth of its rays.

“He’ll probably think he can control the weather now!” laughed an older guy seated on a bench, inspiring his entourage into laughter. He himself saw the much humour in the situation, but he did remember from those nine years ago a brief thought of an extension of the butterfly effect leading to influence over the whether of the weather. There were of course the occasional science vidclips showing planes spraying clouds with water to load them into raining, so it couldn’t be considered wholly impossible. He also remembered the news story on the vidscreen at the time, of the guy who had sadly experienced a rough time and taken his own life. The end of the news story had described some of his symptoms prior to his final event. One of them had been that he had described having the feeling of controlling the weather. The incidence of the experience was obviously a common one then, maybe even a physiologically inbuilt one, he was saddened that such an experience had a less fortunate ending for some.

The weather thing could come from many routes though. He remembered a few months ago when he had been doing a lot of martial arts standing, and not much suppressant. He was drawn to a certain spot at the seafront, and he remembered how it was odd that the exact piece he was pulled towards seemed flattened, and the grass slightly worn. One time early evening, with the sun shimmering over the water, and a spread of clouds in the sky, he had been in a particularly good period of deep breathing, and a sudden flash overtook his vision. For a moment it was as though lightning was being drawn from the clouds down to the earth.

It was now Thursday of the present advert run. The previous night he had a read-up on the Waite tarot deck descriptions, since the Magician had popped up, and he was always eager to try and gain some understanding of other people’s beliefs and opinions. Difficult to see whether the current agencies were suggesting him being the card of the Fool and passing along underneath the characters in the deck, or whether it was meant to be a link to the interpretation of the Magician as a conduit between the above and below. Always difficult with such things, as there were so many differing conflicting interpretations.

In his meandering of thoughts it occurred to him that almost every card had already been played in his life. While in the lucid journeys of the linking of thoughts, he cross-referenced the numbers of the cards to the dates of the adverts. It was ironic that the missing date in the sequence matched one of the missing cards from his played hand. The 6th card, the card of the Lovers. Whilst he had experienced many loves, the infinite tie of eternal true love had not yet been played.

When an associate had visited him earlier on Thursday, it was pretty obvious what page number the day’s advert was
going to appear on. Whether the associate was acting the role of the Hermit or the Magician he wasn’t sure, but the discussions they had were always going to point to which page number would make an appearance.

Funny though, he himself had led in the recap of the tarot explanations to his associate. It had begun the night before, when he was contemplating the relevance some might attach to the diagrams on the covers of his clips. They were always meant to be magnified printouts of The Captain’s analysis equipment, but for fun he had a quick thought-play to link them to references to the tarot.

It was interesting that the ∞ from the first clip cover appeared on the Magician, Strength and Fortitude, and was linked to Justice when positioned as 8th in the deck. The Strength and Fortitude overcoming the jaws of the lion reminded him of the Egyptian iron tool used to open the jaws of the statue, in order to bring forth breath into the afterlife. The Egyptians had often made their ceremonial implements from iron sourced from meteorites. Hence the constructions of the pyramids to fire the soul of the deceased into the stars from whence the gods came. The Egyptians certainly had the organisation of a ruling government to provide the means and the money to achieve their aims.

Without meaning any disrespect, he had always considered the Egyptians to be wrong in their construction of the pyramids. Not so much for them themselves, as they were undoubtedly magnificent in their shining marble coatedness, it was more the shape itself. Whilst this shape maybe had its uses, perhaps arranging electromagnetic fields to align molecules to sharpen their iron, and he did like the aesthetics of an octagonal shape generally, it was to him always a triangular based pyramid.

The triangular dipyramid on the third clip was thus perhaps even more interesting. Or at least had more combinations of interpretations to keep his attentiveness for a while. Originally he hadn’t been sure what to put on the third clip cover, but after a short prayer for inspiration the ideas had formed late one Sunday afternoon. Becoming written on his left palm almost. That was how the readout from The Captain’s analysis rig would have shown the three-dimensional net shape. Apparently a large percentage of the population were unable to think in three-dimensions easily, but for some the geometric shape would form in front of their eyes without necessitating actual construction.

The Temperance card of the tarot made the nearest comparison. The equilibrium of dragon and phoenix, male and female. Working together in union, not to cancel out, but to equal out, their different attributes in equational equivalence. He remembered how pleased he was the day he constructed the shape, and to blissfully discover how it delicately balanced in itself.

The trilock on the second clip cover was just that. An impenetrable construction of reflective strength, such that no might could defeat it. Naturally constructed from a single point, line, triangle, and then infinitely internally fractalled. A lock through gateways.

It was the shape of the trilock which had burnt most in his visions all those nine years ago. He had spent considerable time trying to draw out what was in his mind, scribbling with pens and paper, triangles infinitely mirrored into each other. After much effort he had managed to input the geometry into the rig, and he used it as his standard when he entered the world of the corps. His shield in the freelancing world.

He sifted through the credit tokens on the work surfaces in the kitchen of his hotel room. It was ironic then that he saw a twenty-pence piece with an interesting design on its obverse. The first flash through his mind was a comparison to those Irish fifty-pence pieces one would be given in pubs a lot, either through bar change or outputted by those gambling machines. He had been shown numerous interpretations of the trilock symbol over the years. Strange then that the twenty-pence coin should be from the Isle of Man, complete with the Triskelion symbol engraved in the border of it’s reverse. Even more sketchy was the date of the coin. It was same same date as the year of one of his major Epoch Dawns, 1998.

He pondered upon from whence the coin had come. Hard to tell really, as he had a fair bunch of coins scattered around the kitchen. He did remember a strange play with an assistant at the posting office, but he was so amused by the phrase “And here’s twenty-pence for your self,” when it was given in change, that he just smiled at the playful speech, rather than actually looking at the design of the coin at the time. So just a thoughts link, with no definite discernment of proof. Although he had smiled, maybe he had looked at the obverse of the coin and seen the nice cars, without noticing the Triskelion symbols on the reverse. He had watched as the assistant removed one of the pound coin credits away from the rest that he had slid through the screen, and had placed it away to one side on top a folder. Ample time for a misdirection switch to be made then, with both the initial removal and placement, and also when asking him where the other pound was a few moments later in the script.

The Trinacria variant of the design signified the protection of the Goddess Athena, as from when Perseus had slain the monster using her shield as protection. There were of course as usual the many other possible links, including the triangle on the breast of the Temperance card (although only in the Rider-Waite-Smith design, and not in the Marseilles deck or the tarot of the Bohemians), and the Borromean triangles of the Odin Valknut (or Walknot). Even a representation of the Christian Trinity. Perhaps a triangle containing logarithmic spirals. Or the 'however it lands, it stands’ reference.

It was the logarithmic spirals which drew his focus towards a facet of his current expedition. Chains.

The chains of enslavement. The 15th card, the Devil card. As ever, there were many interpretations which led to many conclusions, and even those that pertained to have such clarity that a false interpretation of them was impossible.

The Lovers chained to the earthly beast. Some might say the freedom of knowledge that all and everything was God was freedom from the chains of sin. Free love meant different things to different people. Some needed justification in order to resolve themselves from the guilt of their own desires. Often the link into the science theory of the singularity could be matched by an eager mind in proof, for if we were all originally one mass, then surely we were only loving
ourselves. If people wanted to go around shagging, guess that was up to them, but they really needn’t try and argue an opinion in justification. Ok, we are all part of everything, but that’s no reason to go shag a tree, or an elephant. Surely there were different types of love. But hey, good luck to elephant shaggers if that’s their thing.

He could understand the giving of love though. In his early years a girlfriend had snogged another guy who they had found whilst they were out in a group. Though ultimately destructive to their relationship, he could understand how she had given some love to someone who was desperately in need of it, after all, probably stopped him from jumping into the sea.

It had never really been a question of morality to him though. It’s not something that ever really cropped up as a problem. He would almost consider himself a natural Christian, in that at the age of twelve or so, it had just simply occurred to him that it felt right for him. He was naturally inclined to the tenderness of a relationship, so obtaining a device to rationalise the discrepancy between his human desires and those of his religion were never really a problem. It was more of a way of life for him.

That’s not to say he was particularly good at being a Christian. We were all subject to the desires of passion and loneliness. But that’s probably what made us human. Our capacity to make mistakes, for which ultimately was forgiven with mercy and compassion. He remembered the conversation with a colleague at his tertiary Cybertechnic, who was keen to train for the priesthood.

“My once had a girlfriend who I had to split up with, in order to continue the path that I had to follow,” had said his colleague. “I slept with the girlfriend.”

He had been shocked upon hearing this, given the character of his colleague.

“Are you shocked?” said his colleague. “Well, I’m not a saint.”

Words of wisdom indeed. Whilst there are those that are truly saintly, the rest of us are merely human. But that’s not to say we can’t try and aspire to something better than what we are in our selves. For the colleague in question it wasn’t a life abstinence route, just a definite not pre-marriage type of route.

Maybe for him it was just in his wiring. In the psychology of his physiology. For some it was either necessary for a belief system which gave a method of acceptance, or one that which gave a method of rejection. Guess he was just lucky, it wasn’t a matter of picking a system which suited him, he just seemed to feel that it naturally fitted. Thus a conflict could arise when some found it necessary to try and counter what they thought was the problem in their recruitment techniques.

The particular results of a type of indoctrination program spat out into autocompletion. The remaining cards that had yet to be played were the Lovers, Judgment/Resurrection, and the World. Adam and Eve chained to the animal desires of the Earth. By breaking the chains to the beast, Adam and Eve would be resurrected again to pass freely reborn into the garden of Eden.

Freedom from sin or freedom from the bonds of animal behavior. For some it could mean the freedom to express love sexually without sin, for others it could mean not to be tied to the negative draws of animal instincts, but learning to temper them so they have no control over them. For those especially concerned with the higher planes, total abstinence was desired for complete freedom from all the chains of human earthly existence. His own viewpoint and opinion was that through the use of Temperance, the forces of love and lust could be balanced out by a loving marriage between man and woman.

There was also a similarity in the Magician’s conduit pointing between above and below with wand and finger, and the pointing of the Devil card with hand up and torch pointing down. Although this varied with deck, so a slight tweak could have been made to the design, to accentuate interpretation. Then fell into his mind another route, the indoctrination route of the fallen angels. Some could interpret things as meaning mankind was the fallen angel, and the beast references merely to enslavement of the fallen angels. As far as his mind could tell, the original sources referenced God as creating the angels, and then the angels helping God to create earth, and to help create mankind. The first law given to the angels was to love God above all else. After mankind had been created, God told the angels to bow before mankind in respect to the greatness of what had been created. Some of the angels refused to do this, and were punished by God for their pride by being cast out.

Then comes the differing opinion. Some could argue that the cast-out angels defied God by not doing what He had commanded, others could argue that they were merely adhering to the first command to love God above all else. An odd one, as he himself had considered that he didn’t mind bowing to the will of God, just not to the will of man. As he understood it, it wasn’t impossible for the fallen angels not to return to heaven, but could do so by some method of recompense. Whilst some could argue that mankind itself were the fallen angels, he considered that the difference in creation was distinct. It also occurred to him that the beast was as much enslaved by God as the humans were enslaved by chains to the beast. Therefore the beast could be no master, as it was itself merely a slave.

Whilst on that particular tarot track, he remembered that in some versions there were two women on the card of the Lovers, representing a choice of two. This could be interpreted as the choice between vice and virtue. For him the passions of virtue were a greater draw.

So, after that journey through myriads of thought-space from the night before, it came as no surprise to him that when he opened the day’s newspaper, the advert was positioned on page 15.

To him the trilock design had always represented the unity of truth between the three vertices of man, woman and God. We all have secrets, those we hide from ourselves, from others, and from God. For him the solution to the problem was to narrow the distance between those secrets. Thus the key to breaking the trilock was him, her, and God, and the moment at which the vertices of the triasm spiralled into one single, united truth. Of course, as was with such a device,
it hadn’t always worked in his favour.

When he had been outside of time, this interpretation had manifested itself further as the triangular dipyramid. It should be noted that this is a shared-side triangular dipyramid, not an hourglass-like shape consisting of two joined points. The net shape could be assembled into a single volume of his and her tetrahedrons, with the shared face being constructed by the infinite link of love from God, and the bonds occurring at the three vertices. So as it was, her and him joined in God as at the beginning of time, joined by the shared face, joined by the side, joined by the spine.

Chapter Six – Nautical dawn

Off to the pub it was on Thursday evening then. Walking down the other side of the hill, he noticed it was that time of day where the moon and a few stars were visible before the last rays of the sun had disappeared to dusk. To his left above the low skyline, he noticed their particular arrangement today. The moon was in a narrow crescent shape, and there was a bright star slightly above and to its left.

From around the walled corner strolled up two guys. They were smiling and glancing at each other, interspersed with casting glances up at the moon and the star. He himself had another look at their arrangement, and managed a smile. He wanted to say “Good day for you guys!” but just about managed a smile in their direction.

Funny how things like that tended to pop up. He had a quick paranoid scan round for projectors and mirrors. Once before he had been illusioned by an arrangement of glass, giving a vertical half-moon white/black division, but a scope of the skyline showed that in the present case it was a natural arrangement, just one of those things.

He was used to that kind of thing happening. One period of Lent he had decided to give up threesome sex. Not that he had ever had group sex. Although he had turned it down on a few occasions as he wasn’t in love with both of the girls concerned, and would probably have doubts about dating a girl who had been with two guys, so maybe a case of equal standards.

So it was strange during that time, whilst standing idly at a bar, two girls approached wearing what he would describe as underwear on the outside, although was probably just underwear. Although the situation wasn’t uncommon, he did find the timing amusing. This first incident was probably quite innocent, but what happened later was even more sketchy.

Whilst walking down the side of the hill home, a girl from a car had called out for what he assumed was directions to where they wanted to go.

“Do you know the way to Sal…” shouted the female voice from the car as it sped by. He didn’t quite hear what had been said, so motioned his hand to his ear and adopted a confused ‘what?’ expression. The car had slowed and pulled over.

He walked over, and looked into the car. The girl who was speaking was driving, so he almost had to lean into the car a little to hear what was being said. He did think it a bit odd that the girl in the passenger seat was wearing a white bathrobe.

“Do you know the way to Sal…” said the female driver. He couldn’t quite hear, so was played to lean-in a little more. “Do you know the way to Sukcombe?” said the driver.

Definite sketchiness was coming into play, and his paranoid reflexes were starting to fire up. He decided to continue the play as though things were a normal situation. After all, she might have said Salcombe, which was near, although he didn’t know how to get there.

“I am afraid I don’t know the way,” he said innocently.

“Well get your cock out and we’ll show you,” said the female driver. Sketchiness indeed. As the nerve impulse was firing to expedite himself from the situation, he heard the bathrobed passenger speak.

“Or you could suck on these,” said the passenger, moving in such a way that it was obvious the bathrobe was about to be parted.

He was out of that zone, and quickly away from the car. Not even stopping to sight what beauties undoubtedly lay beneath. There was of course the added factor of another female in the rear seat, who could have had a camera to snap the viewer’s expression. The general sketchiness of the whole situation was obviously too high, and he’d lived in places where such a route could lead to waking up with one kidney removed, so it wasn’t so hard to see why the flee response had been triggered. Strange timing again though.

Girls did have that habit of throwing themselves at him occasionally though, sometimes quite literally. He once had the ‘my mate fancies your mate’ line said to his mate, and so after many drinks which led into table dancing, he had persuaded the girl to join them in the tabletop jig. Unfortunately, she fell off the table.

It would only occur to him later that the correct procedure would have been to run over and tend her brow, but as a group soon gathered about her, he didn’t really have a chance to make an appearance. Also, his guilt at the fact he had persuaded the girl to dance tabletop with them even though she had initially declined, did kind of make him back away slowly from the situation.

Thus the poor girl initially had feigned a lying down position to receive urgent attention, and had to give it a chance to occur. Later he would imagine how she was thus stranded, for after giving a reasonable time, the fact that he wasn’t coming over must have occurred to her, and by that point it was too late for her to jump up and say all was fine, leaving her in a prone state with no perceived action that could save great embarrassment from the situation.

It was strange that the fast quickening of heartbeat and breathing of attraction could sometimes spark the flee
response. Come to think of it, embarrassment can often play its part in that as well. Most guys would admit that at sometime in their life they’ve had the situation of the few smiles passed, but then ultimately bottling it and having to run away. It wasn’t until he had the situation played in reverse that he understood it more. He had exchanged a few almost smiles with a girl, and then moved by her, and she had managed a half smile. He hadn’t managed anything back, and she became embarrassed at the thought that maybe she had just been mistaken, and had pretty much run away from the situation. Although to be fair, the adrenaline rush of attraction was such that he was almost shaking with fear himself, it was just that she had managed to generate the run response first. Nice to know he wasn’t the only one who was fucking hopeless anyhow. Of course, sometimes girls just ran away because they didn’t fancy you, but hey, he was sticking to a more positive thread on that one for now.

If he wanted a negative stream there were plenty, like the times he had avoided girls showing the tell-tale signs of interest because he had spotted a ring. Only to realise later it was on the right hand. Although that didn’t determine for sure, as the custom was different in some countries. It was probably good to have negative weightings as well though, otherwise if too much time was spent rationalising everything as a good learning experience, one might become blinded by blinkers of ego, and end up hiding under a rock, rather than occasionally having that shield of protection with which to face the enemy. But enough of thoughts and memories, it was into the pub.

His eye brightness filters adjusted as he walked into the back area of the pub. It was a funny kind of place, it always seemed brighter in there at night than it did in the daytime. He was late, as per usual. Something sketchy always managed to happen to make his timing off. Hopefully his friend wouldn’t be too annoyed, and was used to accepting that he could only ever manage a time with a plus or minus ten minute allowance, due to sketchy factor.

He took his seat at the table with his friend, and the busyness of the pub chattered away. A little later, a group of girls who were obviously students became sat at a nearby table. Discussing with his friend, they concluded that the girls must be from the out of town college, studying theology or teaching or something.

The girls were obviously out in celebration, they were bandying about merrily, and not worrying too much about staying in their seats around the table. At one point, one was bouncing atop another, making the seat squeak, and he couldn’t help but shout out in Tourette’s style “I hope you’re quieter than that at home.”

But their other various playings seemed to be a little stranger. One of the girls took a bunch of serviettes and assembled them in a daisy-chain necklace type manner, complete with a triangular piece as pendant. It looked a bit like a Mesopotamian lapis lazuli or something. Or maybe the white tissue and knots could be more likened to the pearls of a prostitute. The flitterings into some monomyth dancing priestesses of spring flickered through his mind, he didn’t pay too much attention to it.

It was strange then, that one of the would be priestesses of the eternal flame would come over and ask for a light. Again he flickered briefly into some analogous story of a virgin having to flee as she had let the sacred flame go out. He considered those routes like many others, if you go looking for the connections then you can make them, but if you look from another angle the parallels drawn can appear as unlinked as they seemed linked. That said, the bouncing actions of the joyous girls had probably made it quite apparent that they weren’t virgins. Most likely a hen night.

Certainly sketchy stuff either way, either a self-proof case of selective awareness, or an agency with a lot of time and money on their hands.

Trudging back through the hotel lobby after the night out, he noticed the cover of a magazine still left on top the front desk from before. The brunette girl dancer on the cover provided another key into past memories. This was more like it, more how he remembered it being those nine years ago, conflicting conclusions collapsing into simultaneous interpretive autocompletions.

Another strain of indoctrination route quickly spiralled out. The cross-linked match of the initials of the failed lovers on the columns on the reverse of the triangular watch. From the past he remembered how the other initial could be matched to the name of the girl he had lost when the knot had been undone. It was also the same initial as the girl dancer who had said she would see him later.

He hadn’t had much preparation those nine years ago, and the design on the triangular watch was the only information that he had to go on. With the recent scan through the cards of the tarot, his mind now also had several other routes to split and spin out into.

The columns on the card of the High Priestess. The pillars on the porch of the Temple of Solomon. Some would banter than the temples originally had no walls around them, and it was the stoneworkers who put the divisions in place, and then started charging for the privilege to enter. Perhaps that’s why some recruitment programs were so rigorous, aiming to perpetuate their wealth and growth.

It can easily be seen how this separation could have compounded into secret separate cults of male and female, surely that kind of separation had been solved in marriage way before now, past was the time of the rivalry between the Minoans and Athenians. Maybe Roman Catholics had that bit right, having the Father of God, yet also having the ascension of Mary. Maybe some liked the division, to have one rule over the other by separating and making a mystery of things. It was common even today to have male managers to oversee an all female staff, or a motherly manageress to look after those cubicles of male engineer geeks.

On some designs the pillars were depicted as black and white, the positive and negative. Somewhere in the between achieving the balance. A recent lookup described how the initials were named so as to be ‘in strength’ and ‘he establishes’, but he also remembered seeing somewhere the idea of them being ‘negative’ and ‘beginning’. Whether that
that ad certainly looked a feisty one, her panther roar giving back as much. The other ad was for a sofa with a name
for a plasma tv, something he thought he could have had instead of the advert run, but he didn’t watch tv. There was a
full-flow from the nightmares and the thoughts, so it hadn’t taken much extra stimulation for the processing to race off
flared up a bit quick there, that sketchy instant reflex from sleep to full alertness. The firings must have already been in
examination, it became clear that the bit of string was indeed from the clothing tag. Perhaps the paranoid counters had
placed the Jonny twintapes to guard the entrances.

He guessed that’s the way it went, sometimes you gained more by giving up what seemed preferable in the moment,
He awoke.

The young woman sat there smiling at him, glowing amidst an iridescent shimmer. Her hair was long, and had slight
curls in it. She wasn’t smiling after all, but talking, it was her presence that made it seem like she was smiling, soft was
her voice.

She gently motioned to a sweet child playing joyfully, sort of up and back to her right.

“This is the son we shall never have,” she spoke quietly.

Hang on. Wait a minute. He remembered that he had cut the label off a new jumper the other day. On closer
examination, it became clear that the bit of string was indeed from the clothing tag. Perhaps the paranoid counters had
flared up a bit quick there, that sketchy instant reflex from sleep to full alertness. The firings must have already been in
full-flow from the nightmares and the thoughts, so it hadn’t taken much extra stimulation for the processing to race off
in its conclusionary autocompletions.

An intellectualisation could even lead into a comparison of man’s creation to that of the matrix system of
government, the formation of man from clay to do the work the gods were too lazy to do anymore, like the clay soldiers
of the buried terracotta armies. Though he believed in the afterlife, it wasn’t something that needed to be broken, as he
never saw that as an excuse to suffer for suffering sake, or relevant to whether he had faith or not. It perhaps covered the
questions of death, but he still believed there were questions of life to seek experience of. One could tire of hearing
repetitive hack whispers about yellow apples, oranges, and pomegranates, from people liking to act clever in their
intellectualisations and rationalisations of thought.

Maybe that’s why he tried to be open and honest, to him in the afterlife everyone’s tales would be related to another,
so there were never really going to be any secrets. Of course, extreme paranoia would dictate that everyone already
knew everything about him anyway, so openness did kind of add as a sketchy counter to that one.

Chapter Seven – Will power

The young woman sat there smiling at him, glowing amidst an iridescent shimmer. Her hair was long, and had slight
curls in it. She wasn’t smiling after all, but talking, it was her presence that made it seem like she was smiling, soft was
her voice.

When the flow switched and the pedestrians moved to the central island of the crossing, he stood a greater distance
behind the young woman, more behind her to be not so much in sight. She was indeed very beautiful, but it wasn’t

Hang on. Wait a minute. He remembered that he had cut the label off a new jumper the other day. On closer
examination, it became clear that the bit of string was indeed from the clothing tag. Perhaps the paranoid counters had
flared up a bit quick there, that sketchy instant reflex from sleep to full alertness. The firings must have already been in
full-flow from the nightmares and the thoughts, so it hadn’t taken much extra stimulation for the processing to race off
in its conclusionary autocompletions.

It was Saturday. Friday or Saturday’s advert had been near to other adverts that were interesting to him. One was for
a plasma tv, something he thought he could have had instead of the advert run, but he didn’t watch tv. There was a
leopard in the same ad, so one could link to a leopard changing or not changing its spots if one wanted to. The girl in
that ad certainly looked a feisty one, her panther roar giving back as much. The other ad was for a sofa with a name
heaven and just stroll on up. Which probably leads to the final interpretation that some might give the tower of intellect, a parable to the fact that man's ego shouldn't construct castles in the sky such that they think they can build a tower to language of gods and creation, and indeed then try and research that secret language. Others could opinionate that it was the old. Guess some people just liked change.

what the old ways and what the new ways were. Some desiring a switch from the old to the new, some from the new to ways to the new ways, as depending on who was having the current position of speaker at the time, could determine proof they were making. It was odd when used as a rejection of existing beliefs to bring about a change from the old God being the foundation. All possible, depending on how you, or how someone telling you, wanted to lead it into the representation the fall of man, Adam and Eve, or the collapse of the intellect, or the dangers of constructing a house without

numerology was particularly sketchy anyway, he remembered how he once produced a geometric equation, the only number of his hotel room was number 4, that ponderous same shape. Admittedly upside down, but other sources of the cards had a design with the figure standing upright on one leg in the posture, chained by the ankle to a wooden post. He had hesitated for a moment when first seeing the hotel room number, with its unlucky connotations in numerology to that number 13, but figured superstition was superstition, and was only unlucky if you chose to see it that way. Numerology was particularly sketchy anyway, he remembered how he once produced a geometric equation, the only possible conclusion/solution to which was to result in the summonation of god, so he quickly figured that perhaps a numerology route wasn’t quite for him.

At this point those wishing to do so might draw parallels from the Hanged Man card to the crucifixion. There's no doubt that such an experience would inevitably lead to a period of contemplation, and whilst one could draw a comparison if one so chose to, the scripture events after do not draw such parallels, so it was an opinion he didn’t subscribe to. It was also often used as a leading argument or self-proofing proof, so that lessened the taste of it for him too.

Given that the next date and thus card was 13, the Death card, things were obviously a little sketchy. Good old Sunday teatime. Spinning still on the tarot route, it was common knowledge that death was associated more with change, but in some cases could be variously interpreted as resurrection, although that could of course conflict with the Judgment card interpretation of some. Adding to the general mix of fact, confusion, interpretation and paranoia, he remembered that a corp had contacted him trying to trace the whereabouts of the previous occupant of the hotel room. Those fond of conspiracy films might string out the thought pattern of a route being pre-prepared by some sketchy group, in an endless stream of hapless individuals left to contemplate their fates. Maybe number 4 was where they contrived to send the mischievous children to think about themselves a little. Although maybe after all, he was just being a little bit paranoid.

He figured it meant something to him however. The tarot route in had been an arbitrary one, there were many other routes which could provoke similar mind meanderings in their interpretation, and not that he knew anything about the tarot, it was just something useful to bounce stimulation off. He had perhaps remembered that in a similar manner to how the figure in the Hanged Man card adopts a position of vulnerability, seemingly by choice, by making oneself vulnerable to one’s fears, they have no means to have power over you.

It did all continue to spin-out with a last fling by some thought swings on the Tower card though. Could be used to represent the fall of man, Adam and Eve, or the collapse of the intellect, or the dangers of constructing a house without God being the foundation. All possible, depending on how you, or how someone telling you, wanted to lead it into the proof they were making. It was odd when used as a rejection of existing beliefs to bring about a change from the old ways to the new ways, as depending on who was having the current position of speaker at the time, could determine what the old ways and what the new ways were. Some desiring a switch from the old to the new, some from the new to the old. Guess some people just liked change.

Continuing on of course, there’s that link to the Tower of Babel. Some could opinionate that the tower was destroyed and the builders split up into different languages so they couldn’t unite against God, or indeed know the language of gods and creation, and indeed then try and research that secret language. Others could opinionate that it was a parable to the fact that man’s ego shouldn’t construct castles in the sky such that they think they can build a tower to heaven and just stroll on up. Which probably leads to the final interpretation that some might give the tower of intellect,
that thoughts and words are meaningless, and can be used to prove anything and everything depending on the desires of the individual concerned. He considered that whilst there was a certain something to be said for a still mind, a certain degree of thought and intellect was necessary in order to gain a conception of consciousness, and thus experience, rather than being simply a thoughtless environmentally reactive animal.

The language thing had been odd though, when he had been sat up the seafront on a bench. A couple from Eastern Europe, judging by the language they were using, although he didn’t know exactly which country, came along and sat upon the next bench.

There had been a young woman sat a little way out in front of them. Whilst she seemed okay, there was a manner to her sitting and sometimes dozing, that betrayed she wasn’t wholly contented. He had just thought out some good vibes and a prayer, in the hope that she’d soon have a friend to sit with her, when along came her friend and sat down beside her.

“Oh good,” said the girl from the Eastern European couple. “I was hoping a friend would come along to see her.”

Which was odd, as previously he hadn’t understood the language they were speaking. Hopefully they had just used English for that particular sentence, otherwise it was a very odd occurrence. Later he did think that both the couple, and the young woman and her friend, were all from the same country, given their seeming to speak in the same language, although obviously not to each other. Maybe that had some bizarre sketchy relevance too in the river of his mind.

He turned round, and saw some old people smiling and walking along, so he smiled at them. They walked along, and smiled, and he heard a whispering of ‘it’s good to know there are nice people around’. Old people were always good for a smile, bless them. Better than a look of fear or a frown that was sometimes returned when a smile was given. His own solution to the problem was to smile at people when they weren’t looking.

A little while later a group of girls, one of which had been variously performing and applying suntan lotion to her very thin bikinied body, stood up to leave. He hadn’t given too many looks to the dyed-blond bikini girl, as he was of course a gentleman, and he was always mindful of how looks could be deceiving. The type of women he was attracted to just had that certain something. Their souls apparent in their shimmering. Those who could project their lightness were indeed very desirable, there were those who just always seemed to make you want to smile after seeing them.

His sketchiness must have been apparent, he probably did look a bit rough that day. He remembered the time he was living in an extremely expensive house, and was asked by a young girl in a McDonald’s if he had the money to pay for the burger he had just ordered, he must have looked particularly shot to fuck that day. So he might have looked as though it was the afternoon after the long night before, and as the group of girls strolled past, the bikini-girl, now with a drape around her, mumbled “Shall we fuck him up? Make him think he’s e-v-i-l,” playing up the word e-v-i-l in a louder voice as she moved past. Luckily his hearing was up to scratch that day, so he had heard the build-up. Maybe his senses were heightened by the deep breathing he had been doing, or maybe the deep breathing was just panic on a sketchy afternoon in the big scary outdoors. But yes, sometimes appearances could be very deceptive, their magical illusion granting more than their worth.

In all, that certainly was a sketchy day then. Sure enough it was, he later somehow managed to spill about a quarter of his packet of Smarties all over the floor to waste, and that had added to the last bit of his cup of coke he had somehow fumbled and managed to drop earlier in the day. To top it off, later back at the hotel, he would go on to drop his sunglasses into the bowl of the toilet, although admittedly his diet had been crap lately. To retrieve and rinse was all that had been necessary.

All very strange from a day where he merely had a slight hangover.

Chapter Eight – Here is the news

A day or two later, and the needs of the human condition came around once more, so he rose from the sofa and strolled off to the toilet. Today’s offerings from his bowels stank, though admittedly his diet had been crap lately. Standing and glancing down at the miracle of one’s own creation as one does, he noticed a strange darker streak on one of the floating stools.

Looked a bit like a tapeworm or something. Shit. That was odd. The tapeworm. That phrase was in one of the indoctrination programs from way back all those nine years ago. It had certainly taken its time to appear, glad to know he had fucked it all up after all, made sense why the past few years had been a bit rubbish. But wait a minute, that was a bit silly, seeing a proof he didn’t really believe in, to a theory he didn’t subscribe to. Could equally be a bit of undigested bacon, or a chicken skin or something.

He remembered when he had been orange1 flagged by the girl needing assistance. The girl was of a very strong character in herself. By the time he had arrived, she could already verbally tell him quite plainly that things had been very strange, and she had been having some very strange thoughts, and she was even aware that most of the thoughts she was having were rubbish, and she didn’t believe them. After the initial quick discussions of a few wordy things, luckily all it had taken to return her from the depths of her frozen hell, was three days of simply lying next to her and holding her close.

In one of the girl’s chats she had mentioned that she had been to the toilet, it had stank, and it looked a bit like a tapeworm or something. This thus most likely eliminated the ecstasy-flecked tapeworm conspiracy, as the girl was certainly not one for that type of intoxicant. His mind was running through possible alternative sources of implantation of tapeworm eggs into the diet, when his memories flickered back into his childhood. He could remember imagined
memories of playground games, where children would tease each other about having worms and tapeworms and such like. The reaction to the stimuli was thus probably a socially inbuilt one, in his case heightened by a phrase from an indoctrination program, in her case most likely originating from a similar sort of playground game. Funny how the mind could attempt endless autocompletions in attempts of understanding when it had been broken by a traumatic event.

It did reiterate that it was possible to prove just about anything if your mind had set about to prove it, and also that it could equally be disproved. Taking such paths one could equally falsely end up going way back into the past and proving the validity of any of the ancient civilisations’ theories if so desired, as one could end up going in the opposite direction to the future, leading to conclusions of extraterrestrial highly intelligent beings or artificial intelligences.

It was always apparent that the only proof indoctrination routes prove is the proof of the opinion of their spoon-fed phrases. Intellectualisations and rationalisation easily led into a feeding being later perceived as a discovery, and made to seem one’s own opinion by this, whereas in fact it was only a repetition of matching together of suggesting and leading phrases. An interpretation would mostly arise which suited the aims and the needs of ego, or that of the inducer of the indoctrination.

That’s why he considered the unprovable quality of God most likely, so no proof could be used for power and control. There would be no one force to dominate, and no thrones of ego. That’s not to say miracles didn’t happen, but maybe for the most they happened when you weren’t looking, or they happened quietly, without any fanfare or showmanship.

Sometimes myths and legends used gods to explain aspects of human nature, and nature itself and the seasons. Other times science fact would be whittled down to a misleading representation to match the beliefs of the content controller. Sometimes there was the need to separate stories and folklore interpretations from the essential truths of being. Sizable parts of it could be in the ego and personality, driven by the physiological wirings of psychology, in the nature and nurture, matching which suits, in order to identify its own belief systems in sets of rules to themselves and to others, so that differences in personality and culture didn’t lead into harmful conflicts. Communicating with God on a personal level rather than to some mystic unknown, not to a personal god of one’s own creation, a personal god can just end up being talking to one’s self ego.

Down to the essential truths, without political conflict, power and control, taxation of worshipers to fund pyramids of money, no battles between sexes, equality. Love thy neighbour. He was perhaps lucky in his circle of friends, there was a Buddhist, a Monotheist, a Taoist, an Extraterrestrial Intelligence theorist, a Gnostic, and him, the Christian. Enough diversity for freedom and tolerance to spent time to understand the viewpoints of others. They could all be right, they could all be wrong. Maybe somewhere in the sum of parts. Perhaps the genius lay in the similarities between the differences. It’s just that for him, Christianity was the best fit. Funny how the others seemed more socially acceptable though, often when people heard you were a Christian they would feel the need to rant off their own rejection of Christianity to you as though it was an affliction. Maybe just sketchy is as sketchy does.

For some it boiled down to the interpretation of the phrase “Love, and do thine will”, or the original translation of such a phrase. Some might choose to view this as “do what you want”, but for him there was a difference to its intended meaning. For him it meant “Love, and do God’s will”. Maybe some few had the insight necessary to conceptualise the difference. Of course, some groups seemed to interpret it as “you can do anything you want, as long as we can make money out of you”, but it was rather obvious what fool’s gold they were in love with.

He really did wonder about people who desired the power of God, and considered that the wisdom to wield it was more than any mere human was capable of. The lures of transcendental temptation could certainly become too strong for some. As it was apparent in human experience, it was strange the damage that could be done by people with good intentions of trying to help someone, often resulting in groups merely trying to impose their solution on someone else, most likely believing it to be the right thing for that person, when in reality, it really is not.

Some people did seem to have some nice party tricks though. He remembered a time from years ago, being out with a group of friends. The friends had ingested various forms of reality suppressant, he was variously sketched on alcohol suppressant and probably a slight withdrawal from his own suppressant of choice. Near to the beginning of the evening, one of the guys had said to him that if at any point they stepped out of line, he should just shout “Green Army!”. It was highly peculiar then, that later in the evening when the lads were playing up a bit, variously slamming party goers and then sprinting away before they could get punched back, that he suddenly let out a few cries of “Green Army”. Very odd, he seemingly said it willingly yet unwittingly, at least two or three times.

Things actually did get a bit further out of hand, as he remembered, for one guy who was not amused by receiving a slamming started to chase angrily after the sprinting slappers. As he himself was strolling slowly along with another mate, he had to reply “Nothing to do with me” when questioned by the lumbering pursuer, just to avoid being bothered to be drawn from a gentle walk into a 100-metre dash. Harmless play though mostly, bit like a scene from the Keystone Cops. Maybe it was back to that posting office Harry Potter thing, all those magicians showing off their tricks.

It was perhaps usual for friends to do a bit of positive suggesting. He remembered a time when in another town, how a friend had related a tale of how their other friend had a messy incident after too much alcohol, and well, too much everything. He was explaining to this friend how alcohol wasn’t like suppressant, and where if you went on and on, sometimes the consistency of the human body meant that sometimes everything came out again. Right at this moment, the friend who had mentioned the original tale sprinted past, and proceeded to wrench-up into a litter bin. Good he made the bin, but ironic he was the one who relayed the problem of needing to re-establish limits as meant for advice to be given later to their other friend.
The news was its pretty boring self today. Not much really happening, just the same old different stories. It was funny how the news seemed to have a way of repeating itself, or maybe that was just more the magazine editorial type stuff, mining something topical from the back-catalogue of content, filtering slightly to make it look like new stuff. Most of the supporting news was not current anyway, it had already happened, just pasted in to suit that day.

It was different these days, a media driven indoctrination would be much easier to pull off in theory, what with more and more personal rig setups. Even to the point of individual targeting, knowing exactly what an inductee was seeing, reading, and doing. But then, all they’d probably do with this mass load of conspiracy information on you, is just try and sell you more stuff.

Sometimes the news would look like marketing, sometimes marketing would be relayed as news. Like a big-brand store opening on a holiday to promote controversy and publicity, or a research paper dragged up from obscurity when some new asteroid-disaster film was due to be released. Or an entire film or book based around a misrepresentation of a controversial religious issue, like a Jeffery Archer novel, historical truths manipulated to tell an analogous tale of Jeffery Archer’s own life, the distortions so often mistaken as anything more than mere marketing.

One fed the other in the perpetual spin of the money-go-round. Those researchers did have a way of coming up with some headline-grabbing discovery when their budgets were up for renewal. Guess that’s how it was with the money marketing game. It was possible for an individual to develop something of worth, but it was the marketing money that achieved the returns on the idea. Thus the marketing money corps much preferred to sell their own ideas, or those they had merely copied, so they could control the contracts and the percentages. Maybe that’s why everything was crap and expensive these days, product sales driven rather than quality driven.

It then occurred to him that a full-on national conspiracy through media might not be wholly implausible, as the indoctrination programs could be run for the new year’s batch of inductees. On first analysis, the targeting to an individual may look beyond the realms of feasibility, but the targeting to a prepared group of separate individuals, all in different locations in isolation, might at least make it more worth while. The only remaining links in that type of conspiracy would be the source of the funding, making it a wealthy organisation, and the reasoning for it all. Maybe just recruitment into a club to increase it in standing, or maybe just a millionaires’ game of chess after all.

Some would argue it is not the responsibility of the Elected to provide a moral system, only to create an environment in which a prosperous society had the luxury to create a system for themselves. Others would argue that relying on a populous of spoilt and greedy consumers was no way to create a just balance, as the nurtured environment often determines the outputted response. With the Elected both determining and reaping the regulations and rewards, and the ability to justify its own desires by leading arguments and intellectualisation and rationalisation, its easy to see how a system as diverse as the Romans and the slaves could arise if left unaccountable. So often the news, marketing, and the opinionation of the Elected could blur into a swirl of damp mist. News stories from the repertoire of the world used to highlight the successes or failures of a policy, or the validation of a populist current opinion. Or just a big jump onto the bandwagon of whatever was selling the most.

It reminded him of the country-wide shortage of suppressants the year before. Maybe it had been a knock-on effect of the heightened states of alerts with the wars on terror, more searches. Maybe it was a tough crackdown after the banding of some had been changed back up. The banding probably went back up as it became too popular, folklore always rumoured that demand never did meet supply. Perhaps the thinking was that scarcity made the percentage of the population it was available to less, but as often, all that merely did was increase the scope for addiction through the feast and famine cycles of availability and shortage. More likely sales of traditional suppressants were down, and thus taxes. Just like those original banning cotton traders, who couldn’t get over the fact it could be easily produced by anyone. The spin of the media had then worked it’s way over things.

Statistics could be rafted out, showing clinic incidences were up, although that was probably more due to the shortage, imagine what would happen if they shut all the pubs overnight. As well as use being blamed for all sorts of ailments, where in reality the cause lay with the substances added to make the measures weigh more, such as silicon, or those dodgy harvests sprayed with de-icer which never quite seemed to dry out. That period had also given rise to all sorts of anti-matter, from thud knock-outs to ultra-addictives, and those strange ketamine and weak lsd-soaked concoctions which made limbs ache and hearing numb. The chemicalears would give their opinion that purity testing of batches and allergy testing in recipients was going to be the only way forward for something that some people were invariably going to choose to do.

As was often the case, the latest most popular or least popular sheep was used to blame the problems in society. Whether it was alcoholism, sex addiction, gambling or drug addiction, it was more usual for them to be symptoms rather than the cause. People in difficulty could often be drawn to habits of excess, and when media hype had a current fad of blame, often all it did was produce an environment for consumers to be increasingly drawn away from the mainstream into their own pockets of society, and those left outside stranded amongst public indifference, with calls of ‘you should cut down on that’ heightening the misunderstanding and isolation. The Elected failing to take heed of the obvious conclusion that society was plainly unhappy.

And of course, it wasn’t unheard of for suppressant to be used as blame to mask some other conspiracy.

Often it wasn’t the suppressant that caused the problem, but all the different indoctrinations that were fed to you during suppressants, the people who fucked with your head. When a sudden sharp withdrawal occurred, a nervous system breakdown could follow, leading to the mind trying to understand those programs and provoking moments of extreme sketchiness. The heightened cascading thought streams so fierce that it could seem like hearing memories. Current thoughts entering short-term memory, and the memory of those thoughts so loud they give the illusion of being
Strange how all the different agencies used similar sorts of programs. All they ended up really doing was proving their own proof. He thought it was funny how each progeny could reject and rebel against its own progenitors, and then go on to do the same brainwashing on their own progeny with their own new ‘enlightened’ viewpoints, and in the same breath be disgusted at what had been done to them. As was often the way, lax parenting could breed strict children who were left to build their own morals, and strict parenting could breed rebellious children. Somehow it could all end up as being repeating cycles.

Experiencing indoctrination for the first time could seem like a nervous system breakdown, or even cause one. Especially when coupled with other factors. A second indoctrination by another group could then seem very weird. By the time you’re on a third it could almost be entertaining, if it weren’t for all that rush of semi-terror. On the fourth time round, things might get similar if it’s a similar route, group, or routine as one experienced before, and there almost becomes time to actually glean some understanding of what is really going on.

He was almost bored of having to keep hearing yet another version of something he had already heard of, particularly when it was repetitively repeated. Especially from hierarchical groups who played it in an ego ‘we know something you don’t know’ type of manner, and would huff at any opinion given other than their own, while smugly thinking ‘he still doesn’t get it yet’. Maybe gave all those types something to think about to keep them busy and distracted though.

So, in all, a safe recreation of the events of nine years ago had proven fruitful. Memories from a snapshot of life, hopefully some of it interesting and entertaining. Sometimes having strength and fortitude in your own opinion can be important. It seemed that all those sketchy groups can, and do, make an appearance. A pity that they wouldn’t just stop messing with him and let him live in peace. The odd office magic trick was entertaining enough though perhaps, providing he wasn’t so sketched-out as to let the rush warp into paranoia. But that was perhaps why one must be wary of listening too much to one source of information, diversity in the microcosm is the key, so that a single source does not gain power and control over the others. Have some mindfulness of what you say to people, it may be the last thing they hear.

Chapter Nine – Tales of sharks and pirates

“There are indeed some strange sharks and pirates that attack,” said The Captain.

“Some after the manpower of your body, some after the glitter of your money,” he said.

“Yes,” sighed The Captain. “And as you know, there are riches, and there are riches.”

“Yes,” he agreed.

“Which brings us on to the worst of the worst,” said The Captain. “Of all the tales and routes I’ve heard, there’s one which I would reserve my greatest contempt for.”

“Indeed,” he said.

Imagine if you will,” said The Captain. “Two young inductees recruited at the same time. Both innocent and vulnerable, questing for the truth.”

“Two bold adventurers,” he said.

“One girl, one boy,” said The Captain. “Carefully selected so as to be as compatible as possible from the information that was known about them.”

“A true match,” he said.

“Then take these two, and provide a garden for them to grow and prosper in, and be drawn to each other, yet kept distant by the organisations of management.”

“Seeded, yet separated,” he said.

“With a certain amount of pushing or shoving if required,” continued The Captain. “Actively promoting and suggesting, and tending to allow that sweet naturous thing of love to blossom.”

He looked on in silence.

“And then comes the snap,” sighed The Captain. “Once having built the construct, deliberately destroying it. Creating situations to disperse and cause conflict. Suggesting and manipulating with false truths in order for a untenable rift to occur.”

“A breaking of bonds,” he said.

“Removing and separating,” said The Captain. “Enforcing a rule of non-return, without ever knowing real names or identities, or any past life-history to track or trace. Then comes the indoctrination program in reverse. The mind-feeding being that the love wasn’t the truth of love which had been thirsted for. Not only the breaking of belief and will, but the breaking of the faith in love between two, and the destruction of the trust in people.”

“Sketchy,” he murmured.

“Leading back into the group,” sighed The Captain. “The washing that only that group can be trusted, and all loyalty is to the group that won’t let you down. At which point, the submission of will has become such that there is no other truth than what has been told.”

He sighed.

“But yet, there are those who are convinced not to the treachery,” said The Captain.

“And to her,” he said. “I love you.”
Chapter Ten – Epoch Dawn

It was the future now. Spacecraft Epoch Dawn. A miracle of global engineering, the spirit and hope of destiny, timelessly and silently spiralling on a solar wind toward an inevitable destiny of glorious radiance.

On planet Earth, the girl pulled the collar of her red coat in tight as the ice of the city breeze cut into her skin. She increased the acceleration in her stride as she danced down the stone-clad steps to street-level. A few puffs on a cigarette through the back street with its lack of surveillance mites. Pondering on what sketchiness she could use as an excuse for her obligatory missing the start of the changeover.

Her connection shift at the rig was only for two hours a day, as it was for all the staff. The intensity of the rapid conceptualisations was such that any longer would most likely cause attention burnout, or trigger a snap of internal fractalisation as the mind tried to force itself into a state of more rest.

She blinked at the entrance security receptor, and waved and twirled through the reception lounge, simultaneously acknowledging and denying the clerk’s jig of annoyance at her latest display of, well, lateness.

Falling into the warmth of the rig, the placement of her tongue on the roof of her mouth aided the circle of breathing into its more sedate state. She heard her breathing and heartbeat grow louder as her scattered conscious thoughts lapped into a lucid calm dreaming whilst awake. She sighed in a silent sadness, and the initiation routines of the v-industries navigation constructs seeped into her synapses. In ripples of purple parabolic curves, the sea of data swept into her face. Aligning and focusing, she let her subconscious thought streams gain control of the vibrating abstracted structures. Another day, another hack.

But something wasn’t right. There was a star burst sparking and shift between the red and blue concentrations in the colourisation of the fields of currents. The bargraph indicator to immersion timeout was decreasing exponentially, like it might seem in a moment of panic when in a tricky spot during a game of Manic Miner.

As the alarm call faded in, and without hesitating to allow the luminescent lighting strips to glow into action, he reached and grabbed the bottle, gulping down generously. Pulling on his clothing around his grasp of the bottled water, he stumbled and stretched towards the control desk of the Epoch Dawn.

The blinking crew had been blown by the unseen wind of disorganisation to their various positions around the off-white room, yawning and twitching in their scratchings to full awakeness. The beat of the warning beepings sang out of key with the flashings and torrents of databursts that scattered across the arrays of vidpanel screens.

“Something’s up,” said the crew member.

“Really,” he said.

“Base is reporting an error in the navigation array.”

“Oh, ok, thanks,” he said. “And that means?”

“Something is definitely up. The base station is plotting readouts of not one, but three, Epoch Dawns.”

“Interesting,” he smiled.

“So what do we do?”

Timeout, and as the eye lightening faded, the brightness of reality replaced the glowing of data in her mind’s creation of vision. Stepping out from her place in the rig, she stood and glanced up at the vidpanels suspended from the warehouse ceiling. Above the panic of the clerks below, the screens calmly displayed the lines of code that had triggered the exception in the abstracted layers of programming in the v-industries concealment constructs:

```assembly
msg: .db "If you were an artificial intelligence how would you answer this question?",0
    ld hl,msg
loop:  ld a,(hl)
    cp 0
    jp z,end
    call t_ready
    out (8),a
    inc hl
    jp loop

  t_ready: push af
  t_loop:  in a,(13)
    bit 5,a
    jp z, t_loop
    pop af
    ret

  end:
```

Those dam hackers.
ACTIVATION POTENTIAL

5.6 Five pieces of perspective
“Why didn’t you just look it up?” she said.
“Well, I just never got around to it,” he said.
“Twat,” she laughed.
“I always meant to. Just never seemed to have the time. Although I may have looked it up before, and forgotten that I knew it.”
“Sounds about right,” she smiled.
“Does. So anyway,” he said. “609, the year the parthenon was converted to roman catholicism.”
“Obvious, really,” she said.
“Quite,” he said.
“So what made you go look it up in the end then, dearest?” she asked sweetly. “What triggered the pointer?”
“Usual story,” he said. “Fear and paranoia.”
“Pre-dict-a-ble!” she laughed.
“I was still on the advert roll thing a bit,” he said. “Because the paranoia factor was high, I had booked the ad two weeks in advance.”
“Careful and considerate planning,” she said. “Unlike you.”
“Sometimes better to create a bit of your own history,” he said, ignoring her sarcasm, as per usual. “And provide a bit of coverage.”
“You do have a way of over-peaking on that particular meter though, honey,” she said. “And you do so love blowing that trumpet.”
“As you well know, my fair sweet, you can never be too paranoid.”
“So you keep saying,” she stared.
“And sometimes, if there’s no-one else blowing the trumpet, you just have to fill your lungs and pick it up.”
“Breathe, rig-boy, breathe,” she laughed.
“As it happens,” he continued. “On the night of the evening before the ad run, I was hanging out in a bar, enjoying the freetime, when it suddenly occurred to me that I had lost my keys.”
“Get you a chain for around your neck,” she said.
“It wasn’t the whole set of keys though,” he continued. “It was just the credit-card sized bit of white plastic that gets in through the main bulk door.”
“Not another sad lockhack story, I hope,” she smiled, blinking and pulling her head back slightly.
“Unfortunately not,” he said. “Never hack on your own doorstep, sweetpea.”
“Very funny,” she said.
“At least I didn’t have to tell you it was a joke,” he said.
“Why tetchy?” she said gently.
“Well, you are sparring a bit, aren’t you,” he said slowly. “And I’m tired.”
“Ok,” she said, not managing to resist a tiny smirk at success. “I’m listening. Guess I just needed a win. Long day. Really, carry on.”
“Thank you,” he kissed. “So at around 2.30am, I’m figuring I need something to do for a few hours. I can’t get through the bulk door until the nice manager arrives in the morning. So I figure it’s a good time to take a stroll up the seafront.”
“You may have been pissed,” she said.
“Must have been,” he said. “Indeed, was. Enough to have forgotten that I had decided not to venture into that dark unknown territory late at night.”
“Indeed,” she laughed.
“Yes,” he smiled. “That time I ended up not knowing whether I had walked into a robbery ambush, an outdoor pimp-my-ass brothel, or a big-daddy special pharmacy. I had forgotten.”
“Not exactly a romantic walk on the beach!” she laughed.
“Yes,” he nodded. “Hearing a young girl leaning out of a vauxhaul shouting ‘Go further up if you want a cheap fuck’, does kind of spoil the tranquility of the moment.”
“So how far up did you go then!” she smirked.
“My sweet,” he said sternly. “Looking for a bench, I decided the high ground would be preferable. Making a sterling march up the steep bank, I eventually sat with my back up against the wall.”
“The wall?” she said.
“Yes,” he continued. “Always safer I suppose. As it happens, it was a very safe wall.”
“Hmm?” she murmured.
“Yeah, not the fourth one,” he said. “But the wall of the security facility. I somehow convinced myself that the whistling I made as I hiked up would provide for my safe ticket, but maybe really, I’m just lucky I didn’t get shot.”
“Maybe,” she said. “Good job wasn’t a sentry as paranoid as you.”
“As is often the case, the way back down wasn’t quite as smooth,” he said. “After a cigarette, a nap, I stood up quickly, had a quick piss, and then began my stumble onward. I think I had run out of tobacco at that point.”
“Must have been quite a sight for those surveillance mites then, my dear,” she said. “I’ll look forward to tracking that one down. Especially if they had zoom.”
“The best place to hide is in full view,” he repeated out.

“That may as well be,” she said. “But really, did you need to collect quite so many weirdo friends to use as alibis.”

“Babes, to them, you’re the weirdo,” he said.

“I know,” she tutted. “I was just bantering. I like your friends. Well, most of them.”

“Me you too,” he chuckled. “But stop distracting me from my story.”

“Since when do you need a distraction,” she said.

“By your beauty, for ever,” he smiled. “But to continue with the tell, my journey back down that which I had climbed started well, but gravity played its part and snowballed my momentum to such a pace, that grace gave way to slipping. I did have a brief moment near the end of my slide down where I had relaxed and accepted the sliding, enjoying it like a sled run, so that was good. Standing up at the level of the bottom, a quick dust off, a smile, and I was on my way.”

“Good recovery,” she said. “Nice attempt at doing a gymnast thing after falling off the bars, but I think they probably noticed.”

“Easily,” he laughed. “Regardless though, I nipped off to my beloved 24hr shop, requisitioned tobacco, and ended up in a basement bar to stretch out the hours until dawn.”

“There’s worse places to spend the night,” she said. “Especially since they play that damn awful opera all night at the transport interchange now.”

“Yeah,” he said. “Psypsops city, that’s what they call it. They leave the lights on too, I think.”

“Most likely,” she said.

“So, I’m in this bar, sitting quietly and sipping my drink,” he said.

“Doing your lonely saddo puppy-eyed bit no doubt,” she laughed.

“Probably,” he said. “I’m tiring a little by now, so the bags under my eyes are probably mounting to saint bernard proportions, and a piss and a slide down grass doesn’t quite match up to the morning spruce-up facilities on offer at the halfway house inn. Although the tactical fifteen-minute nap seemed the longest sleep I’d had in a while.”

“Rig-burn boy,” she mumbled.

“So,” he continued. “This girl comes over, nice looking, slim, smartly not slutily dressed. By the tack of her approach, it’s obvious she’s moving in like a shark, so we both make it easy for each other in the first few words of conversation.”

“Ooh really, stud-boy,” she laughed.

“Let me have my ego-feed,” he said. “I know I probably only said ‘hello’ and smiled, but that’s good for me, and I was in a sparse period, so let me have a little manly pride.”

“Oh,” she said. “As long as this tale doesn’t end up at the seafront.”

“Not quite, my dear,” he reassured. “As you should well know. Unfortunately, the flavour of the conversation changes a little. Suddenly she’s telling me that the batteries run out too quickly in her vibrator, and that she has a bag of quality grass back at her apartment.”

“Rock star lifestyle,” she said jealously. “Sex and drugs. How was the rock and roll?”

“No need for that, as you well know,” he said. “To be fair to the poor girl, admittedly I was in an odd spell at that point, and she was probably just trying to meet someone, as is the way, and it’s not like she wiggled her ass in my face or anything. But I made my excuses.”

“You’re looking a bit gay at this point,” she laughed.

“I knew it was probably the kind of thing most went to the bar to get served by,” he said. “And an ex-girlfriend was even beginning to take the piss by this point. But it just seemed all horribly wrong. Maybe it was the right thing in the wrong package, or maybe I was just tiring at the number of incidences of approaches at that stage in my life. Getting weary of being bullshitted by the transparent chat-up lines of the wallet-and-willy brigade. Maybe she just didn’t have your shimmer.”

“That’s very sweet of you, my dear,” she kissed. “And I shine in the flattery of your patience.”

“Good,” he said. “But I haven’t reached my point yet.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” she kissed in gentle kisses.

“After leaving the bar a while later,” he kissed back. “I strolled back up towards the seafront.”

“I knew it!” she pinched, laughing and flinging back her head of hair.

“Wait for it,” he squeezed. “By the time I was walking back up to the seafront, dawn had arrived, and the morning sunshine was warming the world. Rising up to the plateau promenade in front of the sea, I looked down at the carefully kept lawns. Shimmering in their morning breath, the grass flickered star-like in its moistness. Bending down, I rubbed a single blade between my thumb and index finger. Standing up and drawing in a slight breath, as I felt the velvet texture, and as the rays tickled the chill of the air from my cheeks, it was then, and only then, that I understood what the lines I had written weeks before, that were in the clip that would appear in the advert a few hours later, truly meant.”

As tenderly as morning dew,
My sweet love will ever nurture.
Cast no fear from any depth within,
For that lie which they hold in rapture.
Chapter Two – Just running my program

“Of course,” he said. “The gentle stillness didn’t last long. I had the lures of expedience of the day’s missions to be done. The clips were due to be delivered that day, and I had intended to do the mediasite that was linked to the advert after visiting the first bar.”

“You do make things difficult for yourself sometimes, don’t you,” she sighed.

“Sketchy habit,” he said. “Guess it’s a bit like the troubleshooting freelancer. On-call 24/7, may as well visit the bars first.”

“Very professional,” she said wryly.

“It’s the done thing in france apparently,” he said. “Not have a hectic work then hectic evening, but mingle it all out steadily during the day.”

“Nice try,” she said. “But we’re not in france.”

“Hmmm,” he said. “So, ok, anyway. I get back into the building, bit strange as I find the electronic keycard on the kitchen worktop in plain view. Don’t know how it got there, usually just keep the keys all together in the door.”

“Probably just you being sketchy,” she said.

“Most likely,” he agreed. “It had just snapped off. It lay there in the centre of the worktop, squared and positioned. But yes, probably just a sketchy prepare and drop whilst getting ready for the expedite.”

“Knowing you,” she said.

“As you do,” he smiled. “Anyway, I cobbled together the mediasite, it becomes apparent that the delivery isn’t going to arrive, I’ve missed the opportunity for any sleep, and the hours have come round to the time when the newspaper is released.”

“I hope you showered,” she said. He looked blankly back in his incomprehension of the relevancy.

“So after a quick visit to my friends at the spar and the hotplate, I’m back in. I’m settled back in with burger and newspaper. And of course chocolate, although I can’t remember which type. Which is annoying.”

“I’m reckoning milky way,” she said.


“I’m usually right,” she smiled.

“Popping from the salt on the fries which I’m munching, I fan through the paper pages,” he continued. “After a bit of a search, I find the advert positioned on page 19.”

“Here we go again,” she said.

“You know me so well,” he smiled. “A few residues start sparking off.”

“N-n-n-n-nine-teen,” she laughed.

“Quite,” he said. “So off I go, getting caught up in the webs of conspiracy theories, analysing and rekeplarising.”

“So what did your three seconds of processing spin out into?” she asked.

“I’m straight back in it,” he said. “Which isn’t surprising, since I’m tired and the last re-creation was still in my thought streams a little. First of all, I’m back in that a-team thing, with vietnam like you suggest, and things are getting sticky with the remembering of the promo lighters being made in vietnam.”

“Nice of you to contribute to their economy,” she said.

“Hopefully,” he said. “Hard to tell with the fairs of trade.”

“Maybe you should have done some planning,” she stared blankly.

“So, with quickly dispelling the fears of anyone misinterpreting as references to napalm, project mkultra, and six’s power and control runs...”

“At least they paid-out in the end,” she interrupted.

“Maybe some one remembered the secret encoded in their selves,” he said.

“Yeah, must have dawned on them in the end,” she said.

“Yes,” he sighed. “And then they’re off. You know what I’m like, and so my mind’s already started to entertain itself with multiple interpretations. With the residues leaving the counters higher than rest-state, I’m back-tracking into that trip down tarot memory lane.”

“The sun card,” she said.

“Well remembered,” he said. “The sun, the card of earthly happiness.”

“That sounds nice,” she smiled. “Negative daemons dispelled and a happy ending.”

“Yes, but then my keplar kicks in,” he said. “Pattern-match city, and out comes the encyclopedia conspirata.”

“p-ping!” she laughed. “Best as ever for you to spin-out a few to stem the arrogance of that inflated ego of yours!”

“I thought we’d been through that one, my dear,” he said. She widened her eyes slightly, and raised her eyebrows whilst simultaneously lowering her face in a half-nod. It was that look of hers of concurrent agreement and cheeky doubt, and he was never quite sure the real meaning she was indicating with any occurrence.

“Always,” she smiled.

“With the usual way of it, the spot the difference game clicks in,” he continued. “The two children, one girl, one boy, playing joyfully hand-in-hand, versus the child bearing the red standard and riding the white steed.”

“I’m liking the two children,” she said. “Him and her in playful contentment.”

“Sweet,” he kissed, delicately combing her hair behind her ear with the gentle caress of his fingers. “I’m not sure how things are suddenly changed in another set to the scarlet standard bearer championing the journey of humanity, but I guess they had their reasons. Whether it’s a case of self-selective proof to a spear or double-edged armament, I’m not
“You could always look it up,” she laughed.
“Link readinput research can be a useful thing,” he said. “But there’s always the danger that you’ll end up spiralling through to a self-evidential proof towards a princess sweetheart of the sacred heart or something.”
“Quite,” she said.
“So anyway,” he continued. “Sticking with what’s already popping off my stack, I’m looking at the isis tears dripping off the sun and the moon, and wondering how heliotrophic sunflowers actually are. Apparently when in the bud phase they track the sun, when blooming face east, and the wild variants are not heliotrophic at all.”
“Where’s this going,” she said.
“Back to the ancient civilisations probably, they were fond of the sunflowers,” he said. “That’s as far as my knowledge of history takes me on that one, so I pause there briefly.”
“Up for air,” she said.
“Marvelling for a moment at the genius in the spiralling of seeds, and then I’m back into apples, oranges, pomegranates and seeds of rye,” he enthused. “Then suddenly, I’m standing at stonehenge, waiting for the miracle that we’ve been told is coming to happen, and some guy says, ‘I have prepared a buffet for while we wait.’”
“Free lunch!” she said. “I’d turn up for that one.”
“Whether it’s the fungi on the rye, or the taste of the water, when the sun and moon line up in the columns of stone, we’re all rainbowing in delight,” he said.
“Would be hard to replicate that one my dear,” she said.
“Yes,” he replied. “All a matter of timing, and as the epochs shift over the millennia, I’m not sure I’d have the patience to wait.”
“Always good to know your reference point,” she said.
“Then I crosslink,” he said.
“Uh-oh,” she smiled.
“And the rig pops back with a link to the 19 organisation,” he said calmly. “Which is most odd. In an earlier dawn, a monothesis type indoctrination had shown up, but it was largely overpowered by other distractions of self, and all the other information received during the programming stages, and thus was largely a keplarisation of the world’s problems. During the re-creation, things were a bit less fast-paced, so there was time to observe the tracings of all the different aspects of religions, and indeed consider and Keppler their worth.”
“That does sound interesting,” she said. “If all rather heavy.”
“Whilst it was only a dart through, and probably with a lower frequency of incidence, as it turns out, if you consider everyone’s point of view to the finest detail, they are all actually proven right.”
“Nice,” she said.
“Guess it has to be a case of agreeable disagreement in the end,” he said.
“Compromise,” she said.
“I guess that’s where the difficulty lies,” he said. “When several groups show up at once, and you’re experiencing confictions. Like with the victorians and their mother of pearls, the sun giving direct rather than reflected light.”
“Quite an era of scientific investigation,” she said.
“Yes,” he nodded. “It’s easy to see how intellectualism can lead to proving one’s own proof. In the age of reasoning, even Einstein could be forgiven for attempting to formulate a theory for God, given that his discoveries were so large. But as The Captain would say...”
“You ain’t that fucking clever!” she laughed.
“And if you live in a sketchy world of entertainment anyway, it’s easy to see how things can peak-up. For instance, I was sat eating a bag of crisps, pondering which tune to play last, and thinking if the date of a coming party was the right thing to do. I settled on a BBE classic, reached down to grab another crisp out of the packet, and there printed on the side is the best before end label with the exact date which I had already chosen.”
“Spooky,” she laughed. “I guess it’s how big you let the conspiracy spiral out into.”
“Yes,” he smiled. “Once sat up the seafront, I was pondering the date of an epoch dawn, looked up, and there was a frigate sailing past with the number 098.”
“That’s getting pretty big,” she laughed.
“The world can be an odd place sometimes,” he smiled. “Once at a bus-stop, as some young ‘yob’ type character walked pacily past, he shouted ‘you a fruitcake are you?’ right up in my face, well into my personal zone.”
“How pleasant,” she said.
“Yes,” he replied. “Sometimes it’s are hard to tell if they are a random occurrence, or those science-theorists fucking with you, they love shit like that.”
“They do so,” she agreed.
“I guess it’s not always that simple,” he sighed. “Another time I’m walking up a hill and a large couple walk past. I’m thinking fair enough, they enjoy their food, I have certainly been known to indulge in my addictions of choice. Then suddenly, the guy looks at me in disgust, and says ‘Look at him, he must be all of sixty-three pounds.’”
“Well, you could perhaps do with eating more properly, honey,” she said.
“Yes,” he agreed. “But the fact that he was reacting to something he assumed I was thinking, did pop a mild pang of gentle annoyance.”
“Fair enough,” she said.
“And then it’s easy to see how things can go all wrong,” he said. “Sometimes people are popping their own
paranoias in response to what you are saying in innocence. You even reach the stage where you can see that their
paranoia’s are being triggered and try to avoid those subjects, and then they get some bad advice, based on another
chain bad reaction to their own paranoia’s, and then suddenly they’re giving you a taste of their own medicine, and
you’re faced with the wrath of the torrents of the venting of their ego.”

“Sometimes ego-reactionary instant karma can turn into justititia ex tempore,” she said.

“And of course,” he said. “The really fucked up thing about it all, is that during one of the early indoctrinations, I’m
not sure if part of the point was to program me to one day write a book about it all, and so inadvertently promote and
provide extra proof to the very things and theories I didn’t subscribe to. Although sometimes it’s hard to remember
which was the brainwashing, and which was stuff you merely said you were going to do.”

“That is fucked up,” she laughed.

“Which is a shame,” he said. “Not like there was ever going to be a cash reward or anything for it all. Especially as a
lot of people would see it all as just another excuse to vent their egos on me.”

“Poor baby you,” she laughed.

“Hympt,” he murmured. “Easy to see why Einstein ended up there, left to think about things it’s only natural to turn
that focus toward the nature of God.”

“Sure...” she said.

“But I know the world isn’t all bad. Other times the world can say back nice things. I remember a time I walked past
two obviously nice girls, and they must have noticed I betrayed a slight interest in between my starlings down at the
floor. They kindly whispered ‘He could do well if he had a bit of confidence.’”

“Sweet of them,” she smiled. “Shame you were always either too wasted to notice girls, or too shot to pieces from
the after effects.”

“Maybe 1...” he said, drawing back the end of his sentence. As her fingers tickled his back, he wondered how keen and
in what direction her anticipatory skills were firing.

“Missed out...” she said with no tone of jealousy, returning her fingers which momentarily teased in a pincer like
massage to a more relaxing motion.

“No regrets,” he said. “So, anyway. Problems can arise if you’re living in a very cosmopolitan city with a lot of
sketchy groups about, or you come across a very stubborn construct. It can end up with multiple agencies, all trying to
unprove a proof which you never relied on for proof. So in effect, trying to disprove their own interpretations of a proof
to you. Very odd.”

“I’m sure that makes sense to you,” she said.

“Some brain washings can be beneficial,” he continued. “And free up the clog of crap in your brain for you to carry
on refreshed. Others can exhibit traces of methods used by masonic-judaic agent provocateurs, and then things can get
heavy.”

“Many sides use such techniques,” she said.

“Yup,” he signed. “Then you’re left trying to kepler schisms within agencies themselves, as well as the general
conflicts of interests between them.”

“And then would come the snap,” she said.

“Yes,” he said. “The re-creation was quite tame, so I managed to avoid any real sketchiness there. Apart from the
general I guess.”

“Any further conclusions?” she asked.

“Well, as for the page numberings, most worked out ok. There’s also the fact that on the original ad run a year or so
ago, I listed preferable page numbers. So maybe it was like that careers software at the secondary cybertechnic. I
answered the questions in such a way to pick out the career I wanted. So in the end, maybe I was just running my own
program.”

“Sometimes a bit of reflection and contemplation can add a bit of understanding,” she said.

“Sure,” he said. “But the problem I get left with after all the indoctrination routines is the same. You know from the
taste of it that it’s going to make you wrench. The same ingredients, just a different colour. All just ends up being red
mayo.”

“You and your aversion to mayo, you’d think it was genetic or something,” she said.

“Maybe,” he laughed. “So I’m just settling down a few days later, and I have a quick search scan of the
internetwork. Focusing on the phrase ‘epoch dawn’, through the results, and I take another look at a nasa page. The nasa
page has an ‘epoch. Dawn’ match in it, it was funny to see it first time after the name had already been chosen. So,
looking at the page I notice the launch was delayed by an error in a base station tracking array. I didn’t even know it
was due to go up.”

“Sketchy stuff,” she said.

“So I’m wondering how much vodka I really did have, and I can imagine hearing the laughter of the members at
another glorious hack.”

“By now they must be thinking you’re getting really bored,” she said. “If you’re hacking nasa.”

“Yes,” he said. “Maybe I should have had a go, pity I didn’t think of it at the time. The sketchy-factor certainly
spiked up momentarily, it was almost like that time we had to have that short period of separate hiding when the mites
tracked that supply of atropine for the retinal rescan mask.”

“Yes,” she smiled. “All those trumpet hacks in ack on those pre-arranged dates, and those fun soirées celebrated
together yet apart.”

“Yes,” he smiled. “Anyway, the re-arranged launch went ok, so that’s good. And I did wish NASA best wishes on their journey in the next ad, so I’m okay there, although that in itself did trigger up a few memories, and no doubt led to some dubious ego-vent conclusions from some quarters, but hey.”

“Well, my dear,” she laughed. “When you do things, some people will say ‘who is this guy’, others will say ‘who the fuck does this guy think he is’.”

“Yes,” he smiled. “But hey, I’ve waffled enough.”

“Yes you have,” she laughed.

“Yes,” he smiled.

“Goodnight my sweet,” she said, nuzzling into shoulder and pillow. “Remember to be a genius in your own lifetime. Don’t do a goghy.”

“Goodnight, my truth,” he whispered softly, gently kissing her forehead, and tucking the duvet snugly around her shoulder.

Chapter Three – ice

She knew that really the complete environ suit should have been worn, but the full headgear was so clumsy, and those extra minutes of dressing just didn’t seem worth the effort. Besides, it was only a short trek in between the two geocids, and the gentle swirl of the breeze feathered the furry piping of her hood in accompaniment to the satisfying crunch of boots against powdered snow, cascading and echoing up in such a way that the walk seemed more like a playful dance than a trudge.

Nudging elbow against the door push-panel, gaze momentarily transfixed in fascination by the satisfying lime-green glow of the button that acknowledged the status of the door seal warmers which had fired into activity. A silent soft breeze billowing and blowing the fluffs of snow about her as it dried-out her warm lips, as though she stood shrunken inside tufty smoke clouds of insulation wool. The bulkhead unclicked, jolting the door out from its stasis, the warmer inside air sighing out as if held restrained in breath. As it slid across in its automation, she darted inside in a swirl, bringing the controlled force of another elbow sweep into a kiss of contact against the reciprocal internal switch.

She pushed back the hood with her gloved hand, and shook the life back into her hair as she shook the environ suit from her garb. He had managed to turn and smile at her upon her entrance, but as she skipped across to him, she knew she’d have to have a few seconds fidgety patience until he came back out of his geekboy mode.

“It’s jammed again,” said Adam.

“I believe the correct terminology is frozen, or locked,” kissed Eve.

“Well, I could creep in at night and spread a few spoons of wildjuice preserve amongst the wirings,” kissed back Adam. “But I think you’re probably right.”

“Usually,” said Eve. “So what’s so important today?”

“I think I’m finally starting to get to grips with things,” said Adam. “The pieces are slowly starting to fit.”

“Without cheating, I hope.”

“The clip I’ve been researching is called ‘isotech manual’,” continued Adam, regardless. “It’s a descriptive analysis of the isoteric mapping systems we found whilst trying to repair the outer reporting station.”

“Sounds interesting,” said Eve. “Here’s lunch.”

“I’m guessing I don’t have to check for...”

“No,” said Eve, handing him the polycosmetic packet from her larger backage. “I know what you’re like. I always make sure that doesn’t go into it.”

“Good to me, you are,” said Adam. “Some of the constructs are a bit terse, although I think he’s trying to teach a different type of translicing method in the process. Seems to switch in length and pace in variable frequencies.”

“Maybe he was just inputting quick,” said Eve.

“Yes, overcoming the interface timelag,” said Adam. “Direct keplaring.”

“And you think that’ll be enough to rig-up the hack?” said Eve.

“Yes,” said Adam. “I’m sure of it. I think the guarding internetwork cryptography extensions are slightly different to our regular slacks.”

“I see,” said Eve.

“It’s similar techniques, but they’re not as highly abstracted as our newer evolved systems.”

“Makes sense,” said Eve.

“So if we examine the weaved structures more closely, I think we’ll be on a winner.”

“Great,” said Eve.

“Although I have to be a bit careful,” sighed Adam. “With the historical precedent of weighting the authenticity of information in respect to chronology, it’s sometimes difficult to remember that an earlier version isn’t necessarily more accurate, sometimes the differences to a previous version are clarifications and corrections of mistakes, rather than mistranslations or misinterpretations.”

“Sounds fun,” sighed Eve.

“So what have you been looking at this morning, sweetie?” said Adam.

“Oh, you know,” said Eve. “Proper stuff.”
No doubt,” laughed Adam.  
“I think I may have solved our other problem,” said Eve.
“Ah, such team work!” kissed Adam.
“Yes,” kissed back Eve. “We may not have to worry so much soon about our dwindling supplies of reality suppressant. I’ve been doing a bit of research of my own, and my mining is leading to a possible source of synthesis.”
“Fantastic,” said Adam. “We can wipe the rationing records and go for some proper keplar firings.”
“Sounds good,” said Eve. “But don’t do a stag-night on it, don’t want to overload and have to spend a few days in recovery.”
“True,” sighed Adam.
“Well, unless we’re going for it one weekend,” smiled Eve.
“Well, you need someone keeping on eye on you, to keep your keplar in check,” said Eve.
“Behind every great man, there’s a great woman, they say,” said Adam.
“Of course,” laughed Eve.
“Nagging him and kicking his arse out of bed,” whispered Adam.

The ham did taste a bit funny, which was a pity. It seemed honey-fied, or smoked, or something. Maybe just different than normal, pumped full of more water, or maybe it was the long periods spent in the rig that had dulled his senses. Maybe the environ transitions from hot to cold just made the air taste different. With left-hand holding the feast in near proximity for a reload, Adam munched away on his mouth’s starch mountain, and fiddled with the visual relays with his right.

Tap, tapping on the rig, a white mist of data static breathing into existence from the blackness in his mind’s creation of vision. The hum of hearing fading into a silent deafness. The particles of the black and white clouds raising in their excitatory states of vibration, left-arm lowering with the relaxing of its muscles, the star bursts glowing through shades of grey to an infrared, until finally the sandwich tumbled onto the workspace as his wrist hit, opening his palm like a

flower in bud, and the information exploded into his synapses in an ultraviolet shockwave of rainbowing transcendences.

Within the full immersion of the constructed realities of the clip, The Captain’s recordings unfolded their realms of understanding.

“Isoteric washings of the brain can mess with your head,” said The Captain. “But incorrect execution of the brainwashing, or a flawed technique, can really fuck you up. Someone with a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. Then you’re distracted with the processing of another’s misunderstandings and ego problems, rather than keplaring your own. Especially if their own programming has provoked negative reactionary constructs, as the weighting from them is disproval of their own rejected proofs. Perhaps every action has an equal and opposite reaction, but some processes are equationally equivalent, and symbiotic altruism can be observed. And of course, we can all understand the problems that can arise from an incorrect signpost, or a mis-informed guide.”

The visuals flickered with the synapse-pulse of understanding.

“That’s not to say that you need to go around burning signposts and sacking guides,” said The Captain. “Often from the perspective of the signpost, it’s impossible to tell that the angles are all wrong. It’s like when you pass someone in the street who has spots, it’s easy to think ‘yuk, look at those spots’; it’s much better to think ‘I hope those spots clear up.’”

“Along with others, though us all in separation, I spent several years tracing causations after things had settled down to a more peaceful tranquility. Formal education had been outlawed to the general populous by the dictates of the new overseers. In the underground universities which were established in secret, there were unfortunately plenty of recipients from which to try and usurp a cuckoo harvest. Groups of individuals thirsting for knowledge, whose self-esteem had been perfectly lowered by the believe instilled by their governors that they were not even worthy of being educated.”

Whilst some of the relayers were directly using the techniques to gain power and control, and in the worst cases destruction, some were blissfully unaware of the seeds they were giving out to others, merely sowing what had been reaped to them, captivated by the transcendental temptation of believing they were actually helping people. Some necessitated a slight realignment, others it was a matter of advising them to stop selling tainted rye.”

The bargraph timeout was indicating that the immersion clip was coming to an end, and the burn of the rig would soon be replaced by the reflection of reality.

“As for the inductees,” said The Captain. “The experience was harsh on some. Those who had developed impeccable memory could become lost in total internal fractalisation as their minds attempted first to understand every word the inductor had ever uttered, which could lead to problems of their own, to an attempt at matching everything ever experienced in consciousness. Some search for proof, some search for blame. For those undergoing a faith-linked isoteric, an attempted unproof of a proof that wasn’t held as a personal construct could cause reverberations of confusion. Some blame themselves, when a shared link of equal innocence would be a more solid conclusion. For those whose purity does not even permit the blaming of enemies, the quest for reason could traverse their consciousness back to the very formation of time and existence itself. After which, these subjects exhibited immense capacity for indirect empathic keplarisation.”
Chapter Four – Kepler’s organic transistor

The railed transport glided through the rainbowing blur as it sped towards the centre of population. The low hum rose slightly, then faded to silence as the fields of currents switched their focus, and brang the passengers to a gentle halt. Stepping out hand-in-hand to the levelled platform, she took lead, pulling him along in her keenness.

He never could quite get over how clean the place was. All tidy, neat and fresh. That was nice, but sometimes he missed the tactile feedback of a more reactive environment, it did seem as though he was walking on sheets of glass or ice wearing soft sponge shoes.

“I just need to pop into the two-four-sevens for a few supplies,” she said.
“Topping up your survival bag, huh,” he said.

“Oh really,” he laughed. “Which one?”
“Don’t worry,” she kissed. “I’m not going to drag you around them all again this year.”

“Thankfully. Did feel a bit like spinning round in circles. Must be my lucky day,” he kissed back.

“As ever. And besides, no need to visit them all, I’m already living my wishes from the tanabata,” she kissed, swinging her hand and arm, making his sway like the motion of a swing that had been gently pushed.

“There’s only one princess for me,” he kissed gently, amidst their smiles. “You’re my guiding star.”

“And you are mine. Together all year eternally,” she kissed. Her walking slowed slightly in relaxation, and in a slow soft lullaby, her heart sang out the traditional Tanabata song into his eyes:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Sasa no ha sara-sara (笹の葉 さらさら)} & \text{The bamboo leaves rustle, rustle,} \\
&\text{Nokiba ni yureru (軒端にゆれる)} & \text{shaking away in the eaves.} \\
&\text{Ohoshi-sama kira-kira (お星様 キラキラ)} & \text{The stars go twinkle, twinkle;} \\
&\text{Kingin sunago (金銀砂子)} & \text{Gold and silver grains of sand.}
\end{align*}
\]

“In all our love I sang wisdom continue forever ever reaching end never yet always endeavour in reach to each star.”

“So which parade are we going to tonight?” he said.

“Ah, well,” she said, letting loose her grip of his hand, and pointing to the collection of tables and chairs outside the lines of shops. “That’ll be a surprise for you later.”

He breathed her beauty as she darted into the entrance, the silk of her strands of hair, and that cheeky smirk she gave as she turned her head in a flash and looked back just before she disappeared into the boutique. He sat at the tables, felt the aftershock buzz of that smile as it warmed through him, and rolled a cigarette to entertain his time in wait.

“Well done,” he smiled, as she gracefully arced the table and sat into the chair beside him.

“Ok, then,” she winked, placing her hand on his thigh. “It’s hacktime. I make it way loads of clicks since we did a little skip and jump.”

“My love,” he smiled, as she tried to contain her hack addiction in fidgeting. “Something small, or something big?”
“Just a quickie is fine, my dear,” she laughed. “I was hoping for a little rig-time at the cybertechnic before this evening, so just something little to keep us in the zone.”

“Anytime, anywhere, anywhere,” he smiled, as he rolled his cigarette over its receptical. “Anything in mind?”
“Just a quickie is fine, my dear,” she laughed. “That credit strip terminal.”
“Oh yes,” he winced.

“It did kind of,” she laughed. “Well, beep at me funny.”
“The manners of some of these machines,” he laughed.

“Yes,” she laughed.

“Well,” he sighed. “As everyone knows, the ic algorithms are flawed, so we could do a quick cut and reburn to jolt the system into running an internal check. We can fool the reconfiguration into requesting the input digits three times, and with a repeating set of numbers we can recode a hiccup.”

“Sounds a bit elegant for the weighting of the mission,” she smiled.

“You’re as efficient as ever, my darling,” he said.

“As you are resourceful,” she smiled.

“There is an quicker, more dirtier way,” he said, extinguishing his cigarette, and gathering his trappings from the tabletop. “But I guess it’ll do.”

“Lay it on me, baby,” she said, transfixed.

His hands rose as he stood, and he gave a tap, tap to the credit strip he had picked off the table.

“Ash.”

They laughed as they hopped up the steps of the transport, to the chorusing of tunes rushed-out by the terminals in cover of their momentary lapse of function.

“My dragon,” she kissed.

“My phoenix,” he kissed.
Not bad, got a response from about an eighth of the street. Causing other’s delays in queues was perhaps a little cheeky, but most took it in good humour. And hey, they’d all enjoy the free rig-credits given out by the corps in embarrassment that a glitch had occurred, and as they were like the bandwidth lines, there regardless whether they were being used or not, no one lost out, and it didn’t drain any real resources.

Clambering onto another transport. His friend who he had shared a housing block with at the cybertechnic, and whom he considered as a sister, was taking them to one of the local markets, to purchase some fresh supplies to munch during the later festivities. The weather in the market ward had changed slightly, and as they stepped down again, he pulled his duffelcoat hood over his head to shield from the misting rain, in unison with the casting up of the furry hoods belonging to his companions, the timing of display seeming as though it had all been pre-arranged.

Walking along, the high wooden wall of the market led through a gate into the stalls on display, which seemed greyed and washed-out along with the tarmac and gravelled floor. An earlier shower had been sudden, or the ground had simply become wet through duration. She stood bargaining with the stall owner over a selection of the finest Takoyaki, whilst he and his sister stood by in patient observation.

“Hold the mayo on mine, remember,” he said.

“As if you’d let me forget,” she said.

In the near distance, a group of sullenly clad figures flittered between the stalls as they drew near to closing for the day. He and his sister watched as they examined the stalls and took their pick.

“What are they doing,” said his sister.

“Erm,” he said.

“They seem to be collecting stuff that the stalls are throwing out,” said his sister.

“Oh, yes,” he said. “Erm, guess it’s like the hypermart sell by dates. They throw them out even though they are okay.”

“Aren’t some of them rotten?” questioned his sister.

“Erm. Bits of the fruit maybe rotten on the edges,” he said. “But cut that out and you’re left with fine healthy fruit. Erm, I guess some bits are rotten because they’ve been next to rotten fruit.”

One of the shadowy figures walked past, his face invisible underneath the hood of his own.

“You’ll go far my lad,” he uttered in a low breath, before walking off into the rainy mist.

She completed her bartering with the stall owner, and handed him some packets to carry to lighten her burden.

“Thank you,” he said.

Climbing back onto the transport, the whirling engine and wheels took them on their journey to the bright town lights of Kitakyūshū cybertechnic.

They chased each other in play as they danced up the stone dais, through the auto-entrance doors, their pausing in wait for the elevator interspersed with tussles of squeezes and kisses. Offsetting the frustrating slow-down in pace of their sprint up to the rig labs with sighing snogs, they buzzed on the thrills of electricity in their lips coupled with the g-forces of the rising motion.

Swooping through the narrow cutting that the concertinaing doors left in opening, their hand-holding took turns in lead as they ran down the corridor in amorist rush. Halt to a walking pace. There was no room for foolery in the rig laboratory.

Nestling into rigs next to each other, they placed their palms face-down in front of them onto the rig surface, and the system initis greeted back with the tickling of warm breath. With wrists and thumbs resting stationary, they tap, tapped a language written in the binary code of the combinations in their touching fingers. Increasing in immersion, they spoke to the computer, the gestures of their fingers tracing effortlessly across the smooth inputboard, playing precise positionings like the fret dancing of a nimble guitarist, translacing their thoughts into the meld. They tapped.

Kepler’s organic transistor. As the learning centres developed, the vast amount of knowledge they had accumulated became such that the swirling whole branched out into specialisations and divisions of schools. As each group focused within their expertise, the arts and sciences became fragmented, and each grew to individualise itself in further branches of investigation and expression. Learned men and women became artists or scientists, painters or playwrites, physicists or biologists.

Unwittingly, the production lines led to individuals being wired to one type of construct only, and the angle from which they viewed and interpreted an instance could become determined by the psychology of their physiology. Through years of learning and experience of one subject only, the thought patterns had hardwired a path of narrow tunnelling, the structures forming cellular paths that were dedicated to one type of processing only. Thus when another type of processing was encountered, it was often the differences in conceptualisation that caused confusion and conflict, miscommunication and misinterpretation, leading to misunderstanding. The polymath discipline had been lost.
producing utilisation and efficiency of 100%. The generic blueprint for the self-configuring units was dubbed Keplar’s organic transistor.

It was evening, and she was dragging him around the carnivals of streets in an excited dance of bewilderment and mystery. Flittering in swaves between fun-stalls and colourful performances, and adverts for Moji Mitsui Club.

“I’m bestist,” she said.
“You wish,” he joked.
“Better things to wish for,” she winked. “But I’m better here, this, see.”
She tossed the tokens towards the target that hung on the stall wall.
“Yay!” she laughed, and claimed her prize.
“Well, I don’t get the game,” he said. “What on earth relevance has it to modern life.”
“Stop whining. Just because you don’t know the rules,” she said. “Doesn’t mean that you can’t try. Just take your throw and see what happens.”
He took his throw.
“And besides,” she said. “Given you, it’s probably best not to tell you the rules, as you’d just try and break them.”
He missed, and sighed, and sat on the wall.
“Don’t worry,” she sighed in laughter. “Share with me.”
“Always,” he kissed.
“Taxi time,” she said, opening the door and handing the driver the note that held the secret of their destination.
“Sort of have this mixture of excitement and dread,” he said.
“Lane for you, rig-burn boy,” she kissed.

The taxi meandered through the wards of Kitakyūshū, up and down, weaving and waving through the glorious colours of the pageantry, the processions from the different towns visible in various viewpoints around the streets and hill-tops.

She had dressed him in a blindfold a short time from their destination, and as she unwrapped it graciously, she accompanied the sights with a kiss.

“My darling, my favourite,” he said.
“But don’t scratch,” she said. “People like their own things,” she said. “They stepped out, and smiled in the glory of the views of the matsuri. ‘Thanks for the lift.”
“I’m happy for all of them,” he said. “Guess I’m just itching to run off and make my own.”
“Triangle-based, no doubt,” she smiled. “As long as you share the beautiful things that you see with us all, rather than worshipping your self.”
“’M happy to observe different viewpoints,” he said. “As long as they don’t try and set fire to my float.”
“I suppose you, not being from any of the townships,” she said. “You can get on with them all.”
“As you know, honey,” he said. “Sometimes groups waste time prospecting for fool’s gold, other times they hear about a good source, and suddenly there’s a gold rush.”

Hugging and smiling, they watched the huge Yamagasa drift past, each marshalled in progress by cries of ‘Yoitos, yoitos!’ from its 100 bearers, the ten-metre high pyramids of light each holding aloft 12 stepped layers of 309 lanterns.

Walking along with the crowds, they traversed the route which brought all the separate parades together at Kokura castle. The members of the different teams shook hands, some hugged, and they opinionated between themselves in playful banter.

“Thank you for your help in constructing our float this year,” said the teamster from one town. “How much is due?”
“No payment,” said the teamster from the different town. “I’d only have to pay taxes. I helped as you needed assistance. Maybe just remember me on my birthday. Oh, and love your neighbour.”

Chapter Five – Red mayo

In the inner of the real of unreal, the collection of consciousnesses spiralled out from the libraries of The Captain. Adam synthesised as he experienced the recordings of keplarisation amongst The Captain and his colleagues.

“It was amongst my early years in the less popular streets,” said The Captain. “I was suddenly set upon by a group of lads with sticks, and my pale skin was punched and kicked from a pale skin to a black and blue. The bruises disappeared, but the knowledge of the manner in which they were inflicted remained. Confused by the experience, I pondering on things. I never sought revenge, merely understanding.”

“In my secondary cybertechnic,” he said to The Captain. “Every time we queued in wait for the biotech lab to open, this guy would stroll up to me, and promptly punch me, before walking off.”
“One such day,” he continued. “I was in the small corridor that led to the overseer areas. Completed assignments would be left in the appropriate pigeon hole. I was there as the worksheets had already been collected up, and mine was late, as usual. Peering in, the aforementioned fellow spied me, and sure enough, strolled in, and gave me the expected punch. Being frustrated, not by anger, but more by the boredom of being distracted each time, and to exercise a little control over the situation, I grappled the guy and pushed him up against the walls of pigeon holes. Looking slightly shocked, the guy muttered nervously ‘Watch out, the books will fall off the shelves’. From then on, when we saw each other he would simply say ‘hello’, and sort of avoid me.”
“I once found a lad in my garden,” said The Captain. “He was looking under the large heavy stones. Upon
questioning his actions, he replied he was looking for slow worms, as a friend had told him some could be found there, where the land was damp and there were rocks. The lad admitted that he didn’t actually know what a slow-worm looked like, or indeed a rattlesnake. I reminded him that while not all snakes are poisonous, and some have no venom, some require handling with gloves and a stick. Some learn to control their instinct to lash and bite, but it helps to know which is which before you pick one up.

“In my early years,” he said. “A friend had heard on the news that the panda’s in a zoo somewhere hadn’t much food. He asked me what panda’s ate, and I obviously replied ‘bamboo’. He then told me that he knew where there were some bamboo growing, and that we should go there and fetch some. Travelling through the woods, sure enough, we came upon some bamboo’s racked up vertically, tied in some sort of gardening support structure. We had started to break some off, when a figure approached us and enquired upon our motivation. Unknown to me, and most likely my friend, it was his garden they were growing in. Luckily, upon explaining that they were intended to feed the starving panda’s, the figure merely described to us that it was the shoot of the bamboo that the panda was fond of, before letting us on our way.”

“Way back years,” said The Captain. “As a student of one of the underground universities in the land of Poland, a tutor, who referred to himself as a physicist, showed us a series of experiments. Amongst my favourite were the demonstrations of the physical properties of light. Showing how the pure white light could be split into its component colours, he explained that objects appeared in the human perception of sight based on the mind’s association with a particular wavelength of light. Thus, colour in itself didn’t exist, but was an illusion created by the human mind so that it could distinguish between different objects.”

“I remember similar experiments,” he said. “And how the physics tutor explained that objects were seen not as the colour that they were, but the colour of the light that they reflected, and absorbs light wavelengths of the other colours in varying degrees depending on their physical structure. Thus an object that appeared green in human vision does so as it is reflecting the green wavelength. Objects that looked white reflected all the colours of the spectrum, and objects that looked black absorbed all of the colours and reflected back nothing.”

“When things were particularly harsh,” said The Captain. “In the land of Poland. The conflicts were bringing with them the pestilence of famine, and the hope of the nation was crumbling. Sometimes survival is ensuring you have enough food to eat. Sometimes survival is avoiding the explosions around you. Sometimes survival is summoning the courage to face another dawn, to warily battle through the darkness of the day, the only respite being a brief lull at dusk, where the short stolen moments of reflection allow enough time for the crying into sleep, only for another day to come too soon, with no peace gleaned in the nightmares of restlessness.”

“In the playground of my primary cybernetic,” he said. “I was told that there was going to be a fight between me and another pupil who I didn’t know very well. Sure enough, before I had chance to consider the carnival around me, the crowds of pupils had gathered and were shouting ‘there’s a fight, there’s a fight!’. My opponent was pushed towards me in the circle that our friends had formed around us. Not knowing quite what to do, we raised our arms in boxing guards, and sort of jabbed each other a little, figuring that was the least the spectators expected. Luckily, before we reached actual blows, a tutor appeared and the crowds dispersed, shielding our retreat down the bank behind the playground, the fighters becoming lost to punishment in the anonymity of the masses.”

“I remember similar experiences from my youth,” said The Captain.

“Although unfortunately,” he said. “Another time, at secondary cybernetic, another guy told me that a guy who I knew equally as well as I did the guy from primary, really wanted to have a fight with me. Bustled off down the corridors, confronting my opponent who I had been told was revved up in aggression against me, I hit him. The guy just sort of looked back at me. The instigator of the fight bustled me away telling me I was much harder, and relayed this tale to the loiterers in the corridor as I tried to desperately counter his shouts of glory with my own cries of ‘Neither of us wanted to fight’. Another time in that cybernetic I watched as two lads really did have a full on fight, leaving blood literally over the walls. I wondered then what their reasons were, or whether it had been just another battle of antlers instigated by a thirsty crowd.”

“I once observed a fellow pilot draw a circle on a white sheet of paper in moment of idleness during a briefing,” said The Captain. “I remember thinking how the black line of his circle constrained the white section inside of it, and prevented it from being with the rest of the page, separated from reaching the four corners of the paper.”

“While spending time with a child from a foreign land,” he said. “The child was colouring a picture with felt-tips. I observed that he should take care and keep his coloring within the outlines, and with only a little persuasion, he practiced the technique. A woman observer remarked how I was good with the child. I replied that it was ok, I had patience. A little later when the child had finished colouring in the section, I said ‘Now, perhaps try a different colour’. The woman observer remarked ‘My, you have the patience of Job’.”

“I read the phrase ‘god is a paranoid schizophrenic’ on the wall of a bus shelter once,” he said. “At the time I dismissed it, thinking, well, god isn’t a madman. Later, when I described having a god-like experience to people, they dismissed me as being slightly insane.”

“Sometimes the meaning is lost in misunderstanding,” said The Captain. “One man’s genius can seem another man’s madness.”

“It was only later,” he said. “That I thought back to the phrase and had a different interpretation to the artist’s graffiti. To an outside observer, the totally of God can appear as like a paranoid schizophrenic, the different aspects of personality striving to individualise against each other, and thus causing conflict between themselves in their decisions of divisions. An insightful man may consider that whilst all points of view have a part in the personality, it is the
perspective of the whole that enables understanding of the chaos within.”

“Although sometimes, even you can be a little too paranoid,” laughed The Captain. “But don’t blame yourself for that.”

“Perhaps,” he chuckled. “Like when you turn up to a rave car-sick from whiskey and winding lanes, and everything starts to seem strangely familiar. Faces you recognise are popping up everywhere, and people are looking at you funnily and asking who you are. Just as the rush of the tunes is kicking in, the girl from the local shopping market turns up, and you flip into everything being a conspiracy of coincidences. Then you settle into the rhythm of the vibration and realise that everybody looks familiar as you know them, you’ve seen them before around town.”

“It can be difficult enough dealing with even your own paranoias sometimes,” said The Captain.

“Yes,” he said. “A very slippery slope. First paranoia, cross-paranoia, and then you’re into the tricky realms of anticipatory paranoia. Starts off you’re paranoid about what someone else is saying, then you’re paranoid about what you’re saying, and then you can become tied-up in combinations of anticipatory interpretations, desperately trying to anticipate what is making the person paranoid and trying to avoid it.”

“Indeed,” said The Captain.

“I remember an old friend who I used to have lots of discussions with,” he said. “Given our inquisitive natures, we’d talk and discuss various deep subjects. One day I realised things weren’t quite right, everything I was saying was seeming to make him nervous, and I was desperately trying to avoid saying anything that would make him paranoid, even though he kept asking me questions. I was trying to give gentle jolly answers, but as hard as I tried I could see some of them were not helping.”

“Quite a quicksand,” said The Captain.

“We seemed to talk less and less,” he continued. “Less of our time together was spent in conversation, whilst our minds drifted out into their inner realms. Over the months the friend started to utter odd phrases to break the still silence, which seemed out of place, or were loaded with meaning which sparked investigation, or were strangely vague to provoke many combinations of interpretations. I was not completely sure if there was any meaning to the stuff he was saying, or whether he was just repeating stuff that he’d heard or things which had been said and done to him.”

“Go on,” said The Captain.

“Eventually I grew used to things being that way,” he said. “And I adopted a much more passive position. I remained mostly silent while more and more phrases were spoken out of the silence. The incidence of confusing phrases increased, but as I had developed an environmental response to simply sit and listen, I didn’t raise any questions, and the thoughts were left to spiral away in my mind.”

“Non-completed keplaring,” said The Captain.

“Then one long weekend in spring,” he said. “We met with another old friend of mine, and I realised that they were both displaying the repeated confusing phrase phenomenon. At times I was silent and they were both repeating phrases, usually not in sentences but in strange snippets of information. In addition, they seemed to occasionally brake the silence with roars of laughter which they timed in unison, both starting their cheers of amusement in unison and finishing so.”

“Interesting,” said The Captain.

“We ended the meet-up, and I returned home,” he said. “Later that day I found myself stood over the sink throwing-up a piece of string, my mind fractalling internally in attempts of understanding.”

“In the week of days and nights that followed, my mind meandered off trying to understand the complexity of everything. Obviously I couldn’t, and in my mind’s spiralling back through the flashes of my life, I was left with the fact that my reality was completely wrong because I destroyed my own could-have-been second chance at a loving relationship. Lost what I had wanted. The blame of my self cascaded into blame for all the wrongs in the world. First I blamed my actions for all the wrongs in the world, then I blamed my thoughts for all the wrongs in the world. And then I blamed even my existence itself for all the wrongs in the world, in what seemed an eternal epitaph of mockery played out over the eternities. After that week of utter terror, I got into bed and waited for the end to come.”

“I’m guessing it didn’t,” said The Captain.

“That’s right,” he said. “My survival instincts don’t let me just lay down and die. I felt like I had been brainwashed and hypnotised, and I wanted to find the truth behind the myriads of conspiracies that were reverberating through my mind. So it was defcon zero, day zero of my life, epoch dawn, I knew nothing, and had no reference point from which to start any understanding. I knew something was up, and the paranoid conspiracies abounded. I sought comfort in what I knew, and tried to restock on reality suppressant. None was forthcoming.”

“Spinning out in various realms of processing and theorems, my mind popped and overloaded with the quantities of uninterpretable data. I remembered seeing a vidclip earlier in that week, which I saw around four years earlier, when I had taken lsd and this same friend had been there.”

“The vidclip was something about scorpions and hiv. Probably having watched the incredibly terrifying, but incredibly uninformative, government information vidclip on hiv while growing-up added to the mix, and so when I started remembering the hallucinations of the scorpions on my legs, my mind responded to the trigger and decided that going to the clinic and having a hiv test was a good idea.”

“The phrase ‘it’s one thing when they are crawling up the walls, it’s when they’re crawling up your legs that you have to worry’ had just been uttered, and then the image of the scorpion had appeared on my leg. Whilst I was aware that the sight was only in a single colour, and a silhouette rather than fully-rendered detail, my mind was also simultaneously aware of the interpreted image of it being a real scorpion.”
“Could have been worse,” said The Captain.

“Indeed,” he said. “After the embarrassment of the questionings and examinations, there was some guy pointing at the number 666 and saying ‘there’s the number you are looking for’. In isolation this might not have been so bad, but because a lot of the brainwashing phrases seemed to be anti-faith hacks and I am a natural christian, things went pretty sour. Coupled with a few more weeks of god-like experiences from the feedback that the ego of the world seemed to chuck-out everywhere, the awareness that some sort of brainwashing had been performed, and the fact that it seemed over the years many negative phrases may have been shouted out deliberately in what was more than just banter.”

“Later, the friend, who I feel must have known that I was having difficulty, was working pre-set phrases back-out of me during telephone conversations and was saying things like ‘If they knew you knew they’d want to kill you’, which obviously sent the fear and paranoia counters pretty high.”

“These keyphrases triggered a certain type of experience,” he said. “And whilst I was conscious that something had happened, and was causing what was happening, in fact, almost everything being played out as it had been said, I didn’t know why. I merely sought understanding.”

“I remembered that these phrases and charades had been played out over a considerable period of time. An old man would sometimes talk to both my friend and I, and other times it was as though my friend was discussing with me what he had been told by the old man. I didn’t have any individual conversations with the old man myself. Thus when fractalling occurred, I had to battle with the interpretations that my friend had made and told me of, as well as the interpretations that I made of my own. I had undergone several other indoctrination methods at this time, and so the residues of those added to the mix also.”

“Years later I developed the rig recording methods in order to playback my own experiences.”

Chapter Six – Suppressant synthesis

Adam stood in the ice outside of the geocidic domes which sheltered them from the harsh climate of the extraterrestrial planet. As the door activators triggered the warming of steel enough for it to be unfrozen from its slumber, he stood motionlessly, eyes glazing with the memory of the warmth of her smile that lay waiting within.

With the breath of their opening, he turreted his upper body by the shoulders, and swaved through.

“Lunch time,” said Adam, trotting over after removing the external environ suit.

“Oh, sweet,” kissed Eve.

“As you,” kissed Adam.

“So how’s it going,” asked Adam.

“Good,” said Eve. “Although, I know you’re keen to get the preparations done for the hack, but you know these first stages aren’t exactly going to be pleasant.”

“I know,” said Adam. “So how much more to do?”

“Almost there,” she said, fiddling with some bizarre rig equipment. “Here it is then!”

“Oh, erm, yes,” he said. “Erm, well done, my dear.”

“What’s up,” she said.

“Well, it isn’t quite like what I imagined,” he said, looking down at the whitish-grey slush atop the clear plastic slide. “It doesn’t exactly look like candy, does it.”

“I know, sweetie,” she said. “But hey, hack is as hack does.”

“Indeed,” he said. “So what exactly are we supposed to do with it?”

“I’m not so sure,” she said. “The instructions did get a big vague at that point, the data is pretty old you know.”

“I know,” he said. “That’s ok. So do we eat it?”

“Erm, I’m not sure how it’ll taste,” she sighed, penduluming the sample in her fingers.

“Oh. Smoke it then!” he laughed.

“Well,” she said. “I’m not sure it’ll burn.”

“Nice,” he laughed. “It’s looking like the traditional dab and swirl then. Like we do when the jalapeños are too juicy. You know, the fresh ones, not the tinned ones.”

“Now how could I forget,” she smiled. “I’d prefer if we mixed it with some strawberry jam, but I guess that would be pushing it.”

“Yes, siree,” he said. “You always were a bit of a jam tart.”

“Jammy dodger actually,” she kissed. “Fizzy pop it is then.”

They dabbed, swigged, yukked, and belched. Placing their palms with each other, they fell into the collapsed consciousness of the rig.

The Captain awoke to the scent of fear. The chill of the dawn brought an iced pain to his lungs as they clawed for the taste of clean air. The aches of hunger slowed his rising to a low stooped posture, and he shuffled toward the dim silhouette of ragged colleagues, preparing what passed for a morning brew. Before his eyes had blinked away the memories of home, the cold mist of their whistling breath turned to a fiery smoke, and the pain broke the strength in his legs as he fell downwards in a deafened silence. The Captain tapped. “You did the right thing,” said the glowing faces of The Captain’s friends, as they stood sipping whiskey by the grand piano. “None of us know the reason or the why, but you did what we would have wanted you to do. Having a long and happy life, experiencing joy each day with the
Chapter Seven – Activation potential

The eye lightening faded out as the reality suppressants began to reform. An aching ear abdominal descending bass reverb, the taste of dry saliva, unprogressive wrenching with its mild burn companion. Heart-depth sigh, astonished panic like falling in love.

The isoterics were highly advanced. There were no low-level routines, no chance to warm up with a bit of hacker punch and kick. It was straight to business. With no conception of compassion or mercy, the spikes of data pain focused on his weakness, making an immediate all-out strike with the summonation of the totally of their venom. In the immersed presentation of reality in his mind’s creation of vision, the isoterics crafted their three-dimensional probes, and vomited into his consciousness.

Adam tapped. He woke up into the inner. It was a warm day and he got out of bed and dressed. Bit of a tricky one today, didn’t exactly feel like a great day. Not sure what to do, milling about for a few hours, then the inevitable decision of going out for something to eat. A warm day, so really it necessitated a t-shirt. He wasn’t having a great day, so something long-sleeved would have been preferable, but he hadn’t got round to putting the washing machine on. Okay, t-shirt on, expedite.

Outside the whitebox construction of data, down the steps and into the warmth of the glow of recorded reality.

“Eeuw!” shrilled the fashion make-up girl. “He needs a bit of sun.”

Yes, he thought, a long-sleeved option would have been much better. But hey, he was used to the lashings of ego. Having grown up with the cutting comments and insults thrown at him when his excema had displayed itself in flakes or scabs, he was used to it. Not that it still didn’t cut, but he had learnt more not to react badly to the situation. After all, that only made him itch. Years of lashings did bring about a certain amount of understanding though. Like the make-up girl, probably having a bad day, and maybe reacting to an environment which had thrown out comments of ‘nice tits’ for years, and having had to stand amongst swirling packs of drunken would-be suitors.

The memories in the stored collections of The Captain reminded him how at times he wore bandages to his primary cybertechnictic in order to mask his scratchings. Whilst that may also of course been an attempt at gathering sympathy, he remembered the girl who had shown him her hands of excema, and he never forgot that subtle display of empathy and understanding.

The simulations of the rig spiralled Adam’s consciousness along the street. The looks of strangers making his eyes fall from their contact. The self-consciousness and vulnerability cascading his chin to the floor. The wearing of sunglasses to avoid penetrating gazes, and to mask any darkness inadvertently betrayed by his own retina. The insecurity of feeling the dropping of eyes being mistaken for an eyeing of a body, and the doubling up of the fear from the mistaken perspective of eyes so frail dropping to the floor even when shielded by the uv lenses.

The isoterics span out their wrath. In the street, so conscious as to desperately be trying to walk in a manner that didn’t raise any difference from the norm of society. The panic that a mis-placed step or turning of shoulder could betray how vulnerable and how lost the relayer had become.

A scowling woman walked past him, and as she did so his left eye suddenly closed in irritation. In a timeless processing of comprehension, he felt it was as though she had poked him in the eye.

‘Thank you,’ he thought.

The simulations melted in their autocompletions as the isoteric constructions melted away, to be replaced by the knowledgeable presence of The Captain.
“So you see,” leaned in The Captain. “Sometimes the isoterics attack at the moment they anticipate you will be at your most vulnerable, where in fact, it is the moment at which you tap your greatest strength, and you remember what it is you are battling for. Do the hard thing first and everything else is easy. Understanding a problem does not mean you have to become it.”

“Sometimes no negative reactionary is best as none know what another faces at the dawn or at the dusk of day. Even the one who appears to have no problems, as they maybe the one helps bear them. Sometimes it is a case of you reap what you sow, other times it is a case of you sow what you reap. Like with dominoes, each falls as it’s pushed over by the one behind. If a domino manages to stand-up and not fall over from the accidental push it has been given, it might be possible to stop the others falling over, and even those who have fallen over be helped up by those who haven’t.”

“Or who have been helped up themselves,” he said.

“Indeed,” said The Captain. “Although if people keep accidentally hitting you, sometimes it’s better to move out the way rather than just stand there and take it indefinitely.”

“Wise words as ever, Sir,” he said.

“Hmm,” said The Captain. “And there’s also the fact that sometimes the context is dependant on the interpretation or misinterpretation or an event.”

“Like an old friend,” he said. “Who ended up uttering the phrases of ‘if they knew you knew they’d want to kill you’. Could be interpreted as an attempt to induce paranoia in order to bring about an event to get me to sort my life out, a deliberate attempt at a total head-fuck, or just a bad-reactionary from a paranoia of his own. I remember us going out drinking. I had a liking of the terminator films, so occasionally would say ‘Oh look, there’s a terminator’. Maybe a bit of misplaced paranoia got thrown up, and he never saw I was just playfully pointing them out innocently, like people do in conversion, and the fact the terminator2 helped and protected may have been forgotten.”

“Mind you,” he continued. “Some of them might have remembered the terminator films, as I remember a time when we were all tripping, and everyone else except me suddenly put on sunglasses. Which was weird. As we were indoors. And it was night.”

The Captain let out a laugh, as if from amongst the banterings of the mess hall.

“Whether it was a direct correlation,” he said. “Or just my own link to the films, what really made me uncomfortable was the fact that I didn’t have a pair of sunglasses, rather than that they looked menacing. Although that is perhaps a little saddo of me in itself.”

“Yes,” roared The Captain.

“But hey,” he smiled. “All said and done, I guess reality suppressant is as reality suppressant does. The sunglasses thing is quite funny, looking back at it.”

“I find it so,” laughed The Captain.

“In the waveforms of life everyone just gets all tangled up in the great interplay of everything,” he continued. “Most trips are fun, but some of the heavier indoctrination groups I’ve come across can be a bit scary. And of course, sometimes your interpretation of things can be limited to how you feel at the time. Sometimes when you are so terrified it’s hard to realise that what is happening has a beneficial meaning. Like the dream I had about the woman who showed me her son saying ‘this is the son we shall never have’. At first I viewed it as a very bad nightmare, as if I had lost out and that I’d never have a son with her. When I was in a happier frame of mind, I was able to see the truer, more positive message, in that the woman showed me the son she would have with another man, and they just popped into my dreams to say thank you and best wishes. Which was nice of them.”

“Very,” said The Captain. “Sometimes after too long on the playfield of the mysteries in the mind, it’s better to take a bit of rest.”

“Very true,” he said. “But in our case, here in the stories of the rig, the mission isn’t quite complete. Now for the big one. Time for the final hacktest to unlock the shielding and release the self-healing codes. I’m sorry the constructs were so heavy, but obviously in design we wanted to make them as secure as possible. You are on your own for this one, but we’ll be thinking of you. Stay safe.”

The simulations reconstructed their weavings of code, and Adam fell back into the reality of the street. Dodging rushers with no time to spare, odd pushes at bars, the snapping of the bustle of the street.

He paused in the traffic to let a pedestrian through. The pedestrian turned and smiled.

“Thank you,” said the pedestrian.

Adam and Eve tapped. The Sierpinski pyramids unlocked their innocent mysteries, and in a cool blast of ultraviolet white light, the acknowledgment transmission signal shone its beam back to Earth.

Adam and Eve tapped. Tap, tap. Their tears streamed down their faces and fell with their distinctive tapping noise on the surface of the rig. She would still sometimes find him there even years later. The tears gushing down his face. Sometimes he would be leant over, and it would take two or three decent wipes with a cloth to mop up the pools. It wasn’t real crying. It wasn’t heart-felt loss, the sobbing of depression, or the hysterics of blind panic. The sadness and disappointment at something going wrong, or the pitiful weeping of hopelessness. They were simply sheets of water, running off his face like rain along a street. The miscues and false firings at the rawity of emotion. The after effects of long periods of time spent in vr, and the residues of the reality suppressants still stuck in his neural pathways.

It was their tears which formed the reality suppressant that provided the third input to Kepler’s organic transistor, the firing of emotions amplifying the processing. Sometimes the pearls of tears form from the pain of terrors that lie within, others times they weep out with the beauty of their selves.

The scopes automatically cut out, shielding the secret that they kept between themselves. Hacking hurts.
“Ladies & Gentlemen, may I have your attention please,” said The Captain. “Thank you all for being here, and may I wish you all a very good evening.”

The crowd stood transfixed in rapture around the delicate structure of Korura Castle, the roofs suspended in balance like resting leaves, the strong unfortified walls mounted on the solid plateau.

“I’m sure you all have enjoyed the festivals and celebrations this year,” continued The Captain, in his grand auditory tone. “I know I have, although I’m rather pleased I don’t have to do all of the tidying up. The processions were splendid this year, the ladies all beautiful, and the gentlemen all showing gracious respect. I look forward to seeing you all again next year, may you all have a happy year loving your neighbours, forgiving each other, and forgiving your selves.”

The ornamental brass band sprang into full hacker tune, and the crowds applauded with smiles and vivacious clapping of hands.

“So what time is it then, sweet thing,” she said.
“8:04pm,” he said.
“This isn’t working,” she said.
“Which credit strip are you using?” he said, looking up for a brief instant in between his playing of a hackgame on his handset.
“The mastercard one,” she said.
“Here, let me give you another card,” he said, searching in his pockets and backage. “Bear with me, I’m a little disorganised.”

She waited and pondered.
“Here it is,” he said. “Now.”
“What type of card is it?” she asked.
“It’s a maestrocard,” he said, handing her the credit strip with it’s ics of numerical data.
“Oh,” she said, laughing. “I guess I’ll get notes back rather than coins then!”
“Yes,” he laughed. “Very good.”
“So what were we saying?” she laughed, organising the goings on into her neat polycottoncomposite bag.
“Well yes,” he said. “I guess it’s a matter of how big you let the conspiracies get.”
“Oh yes,” she laughed.
“Which is always a bit tricky.”
“Especially for someone with your skills, I suppose,” she laughed, then gave him that look that he never knew how quite to interpret as praise, criticism, or disbelief. Maybe it just meant ‘you sketchy twat’, and she had perfected the art.

“So with the gentlemen tapping with their walking sticks on bollards,” he continued. “The harry potter fans blowing wind at you to power your seaside windmill, various colours of magick decks being played in games, the strange arranged circumstances as like descriptions from the past, the gentlemen of the street hack whispering secrets, the guy in the burger bar laughing as he stirs up the big pot of mayo, the internationals pinging you with access codes to their codestores, the appearance of the three-door monty hall puzzle conundrum and, well, you know how it gets.”

“Well, so you tell me,” she said.
“I know,” he said. “It can be tricky, when indoctrination has been attempted by all those religious groups, those anti-religious groups, and even those secret groups. And you know a lot of people with a lot of money in high and low places, and you’ve had a bit of a colourful life with lots of the shapes in the waveform of life.”

“Well, if you’re going to loiter about with these sketchy groups,” she said “Then you should know that some are going to make a response.”

“Hack is as hack does, baby,” he said. “Some groups you tickle and they laugh, other groups you tickle and they give you a slap.”

“You do like your mischief,” she smiled.
“Yes,” he said. “The really odd one is when two groups with the same beliefs but working in isolation are trying to run you. Gets sketchy, confusing levels of cross-matching.”

“Must do,” she laughed.
“Well, I just needed to remember which groups had done what to me, and maybe tell some of them to stop trying to recruit me. Some want your money-power or to manipulate you as a pawn, some want you to marry the bride they have chosen, some want to break love so their can control other types of faith, some want you to bond earth and heaven by marrying you off with ancestral spiritual brides or even spirits of nature, some just want to play you for entertainment. Some brain wash you, some hypnotise you, some drug you. Some all three. Some even drug you and tell you they’ve hypnotised you, even though they haven’t, just to spin you out.”

“All systems of power and control I guess,” she sighed.

“Quite a head-fuck that one,” she said.
“Guess when you’re into suppressants, you get access to suppressants. If you’re entertainment, people start giving you them to watch what you’ll do. If you’re really entertaining, people start feeding you them when you don’t even realise it, and playing hypnotism and jester charades with you, without you even knowing.”

“All systems of power and control I guess,” she sighed.

“Yes,” he sighed. “Only problem that in the quest to find some sort of understanding, all they’ve really left you with is trying to understand their point of view, without actually making any effort to solve the roots of the problems.”
“Bit of a distraction,” she said.
“Yes,” he said. “Especially if it takes a few years just to understand what was done to you. Time wasted on the heavier types of indoctrination, and the needing to counter all the mess left by all the conflicting groups.”
“Having to solve the problems caused by the want-to-be problem solvers,” she said. “Must leave you kind of sad.”
“Indeed,” he said. “But in the end, I guess you just have to forgive and move on. At least it created a bit of entertainment.”
“Yes,” she smiled.
“And then one day, you walk into the 24/7 store, and the guy behind the counter remarks how the other guy just got out of a sports car which was your favourite from top-trumps.”
“Oh yes,” she laughed.
“Yes,” he laughed. “So you walk around the shelves, gathering up your supplies, and the guy from behind the counter comes across and assists the suited guy with a non-local accent when he queries about big-bags of chocolate.”
“Some munch attack that one then,” she laughed.
“Yes, indeed,” he smiled. “So then I’m standing about, picking out which bars of chocolate to have, and they sort of shuffle over, and stand next to me, so I can sort of deliberately overhear the conversation. The suited guy is asking how his boy is doing, and the shop assistant replies that he is ok, and is enjoying himself. The accented suit guy seems pleased that it’s all ok, as long as his boy is enjoying himself.”
“You ear-wigger,” she said.
“Not me,” he said. “And then, you stroll up to the credit strip terminal, and the guy goes back behind the counter and says that strip terminal isn’t for you, and takes you to another. He adds up the goods, which doesn’t seem to tally with the total shown on the display.”
“It’s so hard to get the stuff these days,” she laughed.
“Then the counter guy is making a big thing about the packet of golden virginia and the pack of blue rizlas, starting out with one in each hand far apart, and then bringing them together in a swooping motion and saying ‘these are the two that go together are they?’”
“Good question,” she said.
“So you stand there wondering whether it’s the lord of the rings game, harry potter spellers, house colours, additive or subtractive colour systems, mana decks from magick, or just the ‘blue and the green game’, that clip they showed in primary cybertechnic, where the kids eventually realise they are just set against each other by some higher power. Bit like the blue eyes and brown eyes game I suppose.”
“You suppose,” she laughed.
“Yes,” he said. “And you’re so spun-out in keplarisation and pattern match autocompletion, that you just laugh and manage a non-descript ‘yeah that’s right’.”
“Good job it wasn’t the million-dollar question,” she said. “Maybe you should have paid a bit more attention.”
“Maybe,” he laughed. “And then after they’ve swaved off in their sports cars and helicopters, you’re left wondering what it’s all about.”
“And what would be the correct codex for that one, my love,” she said.
“Well,” he said. “What can one do. Smile and say thank you, and walk along.”
“Smiling is often best,” she said.
“Hopefully all the groups have realised I really don’t want to have to do anything with any of them, so they may stop playing node draughts with me.”
“Very probably,” she said. “Certainly seems a long game,” she said. “Over a fair span of years.”
“Well, maybe they keep coming back as I’m such a good player to watch,” he said.
“They certainly do like to see you squirm,” she said.
“Still, quieter, but fun, times ahead,” he said.
“Let’s hope so,” she said.
“Although,” he sighed. “Kind of leaves you wondering which group was responsible for all the sketch factor. The secret societies, the not-so-secret secret societies, the betting stockbrokers, the girl who remembered you, the friends from dance parties from the past, or the, well, you know.”
“Yes, my dear,” she laughed. That expression again.
“Yes,” he laughed. “Although most of the hackgames all end up like from the film wargames, where it doesn’t matter who has the first move, best option is to play for a draw, still get to enjoy the playing and fun of the game.”
“A win-win,” she said. “I wonder which board room game they’ll be playing next. Can’t be many left, they might have to move on to films.”
“Maybe,” he said. “Even the guys in the street were playing push-penny, so maybe they’re done.”
“So what film would it be then, boy,” she said.
“Oh, I dunno,” he said. “Probably write one of my own.”
“Sounds about right,” she laughed. “No doubt you’ll do it your way, as per fucking usual.”
With the lunch they had prepared earlier between them, they up strolled up towards the seafront. He took a small bite from the Takoyaki seafood that had been fried in the heat of the pan, and then a munch on his potato fries sprinkled with salts.
“Here,” she said. “Try a bit of this.”
“What is it?” he said. “It’s not mayo, is it?”
“No, it’s not mayo,” she said.
“I don’t like mayo,” he said.
“I think we figured that one out by now, my darling,” she said.
“I don’t mind if you like mayo,” he said. “I just don’t want any of it myself.”
“Relax, rig-burn boy,” she kissed. “It’s not mayo. It’s my new cake.”
“Oh, yes?” he kissed back in trust.
“Yes,” she said in reassurance. “Haven’t used quite as much saffron. I’m sure you’ll like the taste. It’s blended up a bit better than the last one. No one thing is too strong a flavour.”
“As organised as ever,” he smiled.
“As sketchy as ever,” she kissed softly.
“You colour me in,” he smiled.
“So what do you want to do now then, honey,” she said.
“Well, I’m not sure,” he said. “But I figure we can do some good enjoyable things between ourselves.”
“Yes,” she smiled. “Mutual.”
“I might do a little bit of programming later in the week,” he said. “You know, spotting errors and correcting mistakes in the codes.”
“Sure,” she said. “We could have some fun there.”
“I reckon so,” he smiled.
“I love you,” she kissed.
“I love you,” he kissed.
“Thank you,” they said to each other.

And they all lived happily ever after.
BOOK VI

NAUTICAL DAWN

6.5 Six lights at sea
They were running. The pace was fast. Fast enough to stay ahead of the hidden pursuers, but not as fast so as to tire easily. They knew the run would be long in its task, more of a marathon than a sprint, but a sprinting marathon was how it felt, for whilst restrictions were in place, the situation had no time for the pains of exhaustion. Dodging and weaving through the darkened forest, the bare of their hardened feet flattening and spreading its toes in grip to the dampness of the natured carpet. Ignoring thorns from the weaves of those flora whose environmental exposure had developed into a more reactive response.

Their faces fired smiles into each other’s souls, not in ignorance of the chasing hounders, but in defiance of them. Though the instincts of fear had set their adrenaline rushes in full-flow, the warmth of their hand-holding spiralled the tapping into a euphoric buzz of excited play. Taking turns in lead, their game turned into a lover’s chase of each other, rather than a desperate journey of escape.

Awake. He awoke as the sister opened the door to his room, and he pushed back the corner of the duvet cover, peaking out to view the proceedings from his warm slumber.

“Time to get up,” said the sister.

He awoke out of dreamstate a second time. He heard the sound of his room door being opened, so he used his arm to flap-back the covers. He saw his sister standing just inside the doorway.

“Time to get up,” said his sister, who then tutted, turned, and left.

Casting back the covers fully, he stretched out of bed, raising into a relaxed stance of prayer and training. Deepening his breathing, sighs of the memories of pains undulated to a restful acceptance and the firmness of resolvement.

“You’re late,” said the sister, whose turn it was to lead the training on this particular day. He stood in relaxed silence, limited to motionlessness by etiquette and obedience, the only means of defence being to stare back with love into the eyes of impending judgment.

“Yet again,” continued the sister, as the pain of justitia ex tempore hit his face.

The inductees gathered to their starting positions, some failing to hide their smirks directed at his receiving of chastisement. Then, the lessons began at their predetermined time, the only indication of starting being the shared knowledge that the moment to commence had arrived. Dancing in their martial swavings, the tutors cleanly showed how much was still to learn, accompanying with the occasional unleaseings of laughter which their positions of honour bestowed.

Although there was only a year of training between tutor and apprentice, any of the boys who dared to show a moment of self-perceived glory were quickly dispatched to the flooring, the unmatchable skill of their sisters only needing to effervesce for an instant, and even then not really bringing any relief to their boredom. For the apprentices it was training. For the tutors, the honour of the task was ironically given as punishment, its tediousness lengthened by the knowledge that the ease of teaching would not be allowed to distract from their own practices, and their own days would be extended to accommodate.

Each day held many lessons. As he fell backwards to the flooring, he allowed his mind to become distracted by the thoughts of the world. Spiralling out in the lapse of concentration, he remembered the current tallies held in the hidden ledger in the common room. The members were running a book on the number of times they had each been rendered down by their tutors, in some sort of antler ranking of bravado. In his motioning up from the ground, he compounded the mistake of his mind’s meanderings. The tutors dealt out their training in perfection, not only in the beauty of their finely-crafted skill, but also in the excellence of their appearance. His sparring sister easily caught the glancing sweeps of his moment of animal attraction, his eyes dwelling in their scanning of the slender and smooth legs.

Timing had been lost. When the cycles had passed and his eyes had lifted up into contact with his tutor once more, his look was reflected by a face which held a smile of inner pleasing. Of course the sister was flattered by the compliment, but the smile also shone with that element of knowledgeable smugness that the right had now been granted.

“Never allow yourself to become distracted,” said the sister. “Especially not by the illusions of innocent beauty.”

The elder sister, who had been overseeing all the duets, clapped her hands, and the noises of contact ceased instantaneously, each participant withdrawing to a stance of respect and thanks. He could almost hear the voices of his fellows that would greet him later that day, the cheers of ‘Hmm, unlucky, unlucky, another knock-down and you’d have been equal top.’

The standard codex for the situation he had led himself into would have probably only left a bruise at worst. During mere training, the manners of tutoring meant that it was frowned upon to actually knock-out an apprentice. It happened of course, but it was frowned upon, if only by the peerage of fellow tutors, it almost seeming rather vulgar compared to more gracious tapestries.

The smirk of the sister widened with this shared knowledge. The right was now hers, and the lesson could be shown in its full extent. He smiled in acknowledgment of the impeding skill of the blow, the subtle spiralling of her kick kissing him into unconsciousness, and barely noticeable from the natural flow of her stepping away to where her next duty lay.

Learned instinct jerked his body upward in return to awareness, and his eyes reopened to the silhouette of the elder sister against the sky.
“If you’re not careful,” she smiled. “You’ll be late.”

Chapter Two – Metareferencing

He was standing somewhere. To his right was a small crowd of his peers, who stood staring smugly at him, with smiles of the anticipation of a forth-coming act of ridicule. To his left stood a figure, a book in his hand.

“This is Epoch Dawn Book Eight,” roared the figure in mockery. The crowd of his peers joined in the vicious laughter, all geering and gesticulating at him.

“But you would have it,” he said. “I sent you an email detailing an abstracted summary before I even wrote book one.”

He awoke.

So there was one thing he wasn’t very good at. Well, obviously more than one thing, but another skill could usually cover those out. He was just rubbish at sleeping. The two time-shifted periods of four-hour rests would sometimes fade anyway into a more two-hour stint, or just a solid hour of cold unconsciousness if the weariness had built-up over a few days of awakeness.

Some would vent back with tales of physical exhaustion if he bothered to air complaint at his predicaments, others sneer back with mutterings of a guilty conscience being to blame. But the truth was neither. It wasn’t so much a route in to sleep, but a means of staying there. Not that they were like real dreams, his mind was far too exhausted to experience the memories of those. When he did dream, they were more glowing, the edges of objects and characters lasering against a background of pinging silence. He had practiced so that on the whole he could lucid dream his way out of the first two states of nightmarng unconsciousness, but the wave cycles of time and thought pattern limited the extent of its overall duration.

The third nightmare wouldn’t manifest itself as an abstracted visualisation, it would be composed of a raw sensation of the absoluteness of terror, and his body would vomit his mind back into the conception of consciousness pretty much instantly.

The abstractions were just attempts at externalising that which lay deep within. The sadness that haunted. This moment’s waking wasn’t so bad as it could be at its worse, the tears of crying in his dreams were merely remembered, and lay cascading down his face as his eyes blurred blinking into the day. He brushed away the tears with the fingers and palm of his right hand. At least he hadn’t woken up screaming, that really sucked. He was never fooled by its illusion, just darkened by its occurence.

“This one hasn’t so much metareferencing in it, I notice,” she said.

“Yes,” he nodded. “I’m not so sure its usage was understood, so maybe I shayed away from it.”

“But didn’t you describe it on page two?”

“Well, yes,” he said. “Maybe I should have been less subtle.”

“Hmm, it could be easily missed, most people start the readinput of a clip pretty keenly,” she said.

“Maybe,” he said.

“I like the way you use it to promote that conception of flashback,” she continued. “A keyphrase causing a meander out to another thought-stream in linking, but in places you do get a bit iterative. You geeks do so love your recursion.”

“Well, honey,” he smiled. “The other day, you did spend fucking ages working on that tiny piece of detail.”

“Hmm,” she kissed. “Maybe we’re just working to create the same fractal.”

“Sweet as,” he kissed back. “I guess it can all get a bit confusing though, even for me.”

“Yes, Mr Instantaneous Time Boy,” she laughed.

“Feel free to rearrange as you like,” he smiled. “Should work okay in any order, given that your realm of abstraction is one spherical orbit out from it.”

“Really,” she laughed at him.

“The main aim of metareferencing,” he continued. “Is really to cover a whole knowledge area with just a keyphrase that links it, that way you don’t have to waste words repeating it.”

“I see that,” she said.

“It can also be a reference in deference, a nod in tribute to a hero,” he said. “Or a reference to the backers of that particular work. In other cases, sometimes a bit of sketchy-factor creeps in.”

“I bet,” she said.

“A bit like the time from secondary cybertechnic,” he continued. “I had been working on a piece of coursework with a friend. He was well into amiga’s. I remember this game he had, sort of like supersprint, a one-screen racing game. When things got really revved up, the joystick clicks of driving would go from a few seconds in interval, to a near constant click. Required almost a transcended zen-state to whizz round the track.”

“Erm, babes,” she said.

“Yes,” he said. “Anyway, after we had discussed the coursework, we each went back to our lodgings to write-up our reports. Now, we had both taken notes, and both were aware that we had worked together and taken similar notes. Therefore, as we were typing up, we both changed a lot of the sentence structures and words so as to give individuality.”

“I see,” she said.

“The bizarre thing was,” he smiled. “Is that we both changed our sentences and words in the exact same way, so our
reports were still almost identical."

“You geeks, zoning-out,” she laughed.

“Which made things particularly bizarre on some of the clips,” he said. “Especially as they are pretty much wholly based on actual personal experiences.”

“We can tell that,” she smiled. “As you made so many fucking mistakes. And I don’t mean the proof reading. But maybe I’ll help you with that on the next one.”

“Thank you,” he laughed in a sigh.

“And remember to add those comma’s in punctuation,” she said. “Not everyone reads a whole paragraph in one scan without pausing their mind.”

“Oh, you’re right,” he smiled. “I’ll try and remember that. Anyways, I’ve only actually heard one person mutter ‘david ike’ as I walked past, but I was surprised at the number of strangers who vented a ‘he thinks he’s james, bond he does’ in response to the ‘avoiding agency recruitment’ tag covering clip-four. I obviously actually meant generic indoctrination by sketchy groups, whether they be religious, quasi-religious, pyramid business schemes, or just plan mercenary recruitment. Started off being a little irksome, but pretty soon it just became really amusing, and I was itching to blurt out ‘Ah, mister bond, we’ve been expecting you’, but they’d probably have thought I was being even more sketchy.”

“Quite,” she said.

“But then again,” he laughed. “A bit of a performance can sometimes be funny. Like when a bunch of teenage kids were loitering outside a shop, and they chuckled out ‘oh, look, here’s mr bean’. I found it really funny, and just played up an odd walk and muttered the voice in a ‘mooi, muoi, muw’ kind of way. Made ‘em laugh.”

“At you,” she laughed.

“I’d like to think at, then with,” he smiled. “But hey, sometimes I probably just do look a bit of a sketchy twat.”

“I don’t think there’s many that would doubt your credentials on that one, my dear,” she said.

“Nicer things get said though,” he said. “Like once I heard a ‘there he is, sort of has a glow of niceness about him’. Which was nice. Weird thing was, when the lady said it, it gave my face a little cheeky innocent smile, and probably did make me laugh a bit, maybe even glow.”

“How nice of her,” she smiled. “She’s obviously a good girl.”

“That ‘glow of niceness’ line,” he said. “From one of my clip’s. Can’t remember which one.”

“Me neither,” she said.

“Gets like that I guess,” he said. “Like when you’re slumped sitting drunk in some late-night bar, and someone has been leading into a deep discussion, and then suddenly you realise they’re arguing the viewpoints of one of the characters from a clip. Only you can’t remember which clip or character, or what was said, and you’re desperately trying to remember in order to understand what the fuck it is they’re going on about.”

“It’s good to be able to see things from another’s point of view,” she said.

“You’re right,” he said. “Like me and you, we bounce off each other in our socratic dialogue. Or is it platonic?”

“It definitely isn’t platonic,” she laughed.

“Indeed,” he smiled. “Then it ends up like a big game of hack whispers.”

“That game always did seem a bit paranoid to me, you know,” she said.

“Can work like that,” he said. “Only more in reverse. In that you can link where people’s opinions, and even words, are coming from when they chat to you.”

“Guess it can be like that in small groups,” she said. “Sometimes it’s as though someone is repeating back your opinion or story a couple of weeks later, but really they’re just describing their own experience, they had one similar, or they are repeating the viewpoint as it was already their own and they’re repeating it in agreement with you.”

“Sometimes it’s shared similar experiences of life,” he continued. “Other times it’s the feeding from the same sources. Like the piece of paper in the book thing, the words of love written on the slip between pages 380 and 381. Obviously that happened to me, but bizarrely a friend of mine said the same thing had happened to him. I even had to show him the book and the note as I felt so sketchy about it. Then it struck me, maybe the two girls had read the same thing in a book somewhere, repeated in it their own experience, and then there’s me writing about it again. All in one big cycle.”

“That’s hilarious!” she laughed.

“Very,” he said. “Not as bad as the master/maestro card thing though. I based that on when I booked one of the ads, the mastercard didn’t work, so after a slight pause, during which I told the girl I was a bit disorganised, and would give her another card, I was about the read out the card number, when she asked what type of card it was. It was a maestrocard instead of the mastercard. Though the problem with giving out your phone number, is that people phone you unexpectedly when you’re in a sleepy or sketchy phase. Thus after the call, I span out a bit in keplarisation, and flickered back to some tarot croupier dealing out another card.”

“Oh really,” she said.

“Of course,” he agreed. “But then later I flip back to a friend very briefly mentioning something about a master/maestro card thing in a book he had read.”

“Sketchy,” she said.

“Yeah,” he said. “What was worse was that later, when my creditstrips were playing up, I went to a cashpoint, where a guy let me go first, and watched flicking the ash from his cigarette, as my mastercard failed, and then I successfully retrieved out cash with the maestro one.”
“Nice,” she laughed.

“Thing was,” he continued. “When I had said that I was in no rush, and he could go first anyway, he said that it was okay as he had a bit of business to attend to, thumbing his wallet and maybe an envelope. Which reminded me of an evening a week or so before, when I had walked along the same street, only across the road, and a woman had returned my look and smiled. I obviously smiled back and said hello as I passed, and then she shouted ‘For business, love?’”

“This seems to have been a regular occurrence with you, my darling,” she laughed. “You really must have been starting to look obviously desperate.”

“I was just being nice, my sweet,” he smiled.

“Quite,” she said.

“So anyway, with my keplar in full-spin, the fact that they both used the phrase ‘business’ is really putting me off using that card again, or at least making me think I need to be a bit more organised, or try and remember at least one multi-digit input system code.”

“You sketchy twat,” she laughed.

“And to make matters worse,” he said. “Later, I realise that the card was actually a solo card not a maestro card, so my mind starts keplaring out to have progressed in skill from being a maestro to a soloist, such is my performance.”

“The problem with saying things like that though, honey,” she said. “Is that people will think you’re an arrogant cunt.”

“Quite,” he said. “During those rare moments at which I have a bit of confidence and whisper about my skill, someone always seems to be standing close-by to shout me down.”

“It’s usually me,” she laughed.

“Funny thing was, when I looked up, there was a whole line of people watching the performance, so I can’t but have a little laugh to myself at that particular analogy.”

“I’ll allow you a little fun, my dear,” she smiled. “But did any of them clap?”

“Actually, no,” he said. “But they were holding wallets, purses and bags and stuff.”

“No doubt,” she said.

“But then I do get a bit worried,” he continued. “That the card corps will get sketchy because I referenced them.”

“Well say something nice about them then,” she said.

“Would be nice,” he laughed. “There’s probably more cards, but I can’t remember.”

“Everyone’s got one these days,” she said. “Nice work that, just creaming off a fee when anyone spends money.”

“Yes,” he said. “Almost the perfect product.”

“Almost,” she said. “But I’ve heard of others. Like books arguing against the existence of God, a true marketing winner surely. The very people who are going to be spending money are those who are looking to find some reward, so therefore, writing a book that justifies their viewpoint, and makes them feel better about themselves, could be seen as the perfect consumer product.”

“Fantastic,” he said. “A very good observation, darling.”

“Thank you,” she smiled.

“And then sometimes you just tut at yourself,” he said. “As you replaced a perfectly good line of your own with one which is even more similar to a line someone remembers, because you thought the line maybe glowed a bit with writer’s amnesia, even though it didn’t. And as for that drake thing in the user contributed notes, it was a record of some stories you had used in banter between friends, I whacked it in to hopefully cover any bad vibes arising from saying drake was pissed the night before the armada. But then later I remember a guy saying something about the same thing, and even saying he had read it in the last page of a book of something. So in all, a rather sketchy materialisation of crosslinks which I hadn’t seen or read.”

“Hmm,” she said.

“So with the opinion transfersal,” he continued. “Source prediction, the belittling of similar unique ideas to those of note, it gets confusing which is the generic indoctrination, and which is just general folklore myth and old wife’s tales.”

“I guess sometimes,” she smiled. “There’s only one way to write 10 print 'hello', 20 goto 10, especially if all you’ve got are the odd appearances of girls pyramiding with their fingers, and you start generating conclusional confusion over dipyramids or some sketchy illuminated student society. Although it did look as though they were square-based pyramids though.”

“Did they walk like an egyptian?” she laughed.

“Very funny,” he said.

“Or were they just looking at their nails!” she laughed.

“Some smile, some just keep poking you in the eye.”

“Wear sunglasses or something,” she joked. “Stop their fingers getting in.”

“Quite,” he said. “Although sometimes like I say, it’s hard to know which groups want to give you a smile or just poke you in the eye. Although I do perhaps feel sorry for referencing that poor assistant, hopefully just brought some popular attention rather than trouble. It’s nice to get that customer service smile rather than a snarl. A little help from a
Yet relentlessly granted by the marching forward of dawn. A semi-circled backdrop of woodland edge. The peaceful casting lines of shadows to their faces, and spinning the jigs of formless silhouettes into their minds towards the light approached in vigour. The smoky fog of the first rays of light flickering through the thinning trees, the snap of a kiss at the pivot where pursuer became pursued, the lust of their love causing yelp and pant. Eyes when her head turned back to both encourage and tease. His chuckles of laughter tied to the increasing of his pace, popped-up did kind of leave me in terror for three or four days, but that was probably their objective.

Chapter Three – Assignment

Running again. The pulling of her hand as she took lead. The penduluming of her tied-back hair. The flash in her eyes when her head turned back to both encourage and tease. His chuckles of laughter tied to the increasing of his pace, the snap of a kiss at the pivot where pursuer became pursued, the lust of their love causing yelp and pant.

Leading in chase and chasing to lead. The dew of the coming dawn tickling onto their sweating bodies as the sprint towards the light approached in vigour. The smoky fog of the first rays of light flickering through the thinning trees, casting lines of shadows to their faces, and spinning the jigs of formless silhouettes into their mind’s creation of vision.

Out from the forest and onto a softer footing. Their casting glances surveying the lightening of the view, graciously yet relentlessly granted by the marching forward of dawn. A semi-circled backdrop of woodland edge. The peaceful...
lullaby’s of the waves as they caressed the sleeping shore. The spiralling and twisting of their dance around and intertwining with each other, the chills of night kissed away from the alternating facets of their sides to the sun, until the acceleration of their inevitable meeting cascaded through its activation threshold, and they pressed together as one.

He awoke into a reluctant consciousness, and the sounds of shuffling outside of his room door. The rap of a tap, tap.

“Time to get up,” said the sister, barely looking into the room as she flung open its door. “Today’s your big day then, lazy-boy.”

He slid out from the bed-covers easily, and flowed into his stance of training and prayer. A smooth transition, there wasn’t much sleep clouding to shake off, it had been another restless night, a fluctuating between fifteen-minute periods of awakening and lucid sleep.

“So how do you think you’ll fare today?” said the sister, pausing in her organisational rush for a moment to interrogate his back. Even though his multi-tasking duality of consciousness could both continue his prayer without interruption and also interpret his surrounding environment, she knew that he wasn’t going to answer. They never did.

“Oh, and happy birthday,” smiled the sister.

The final preparations of training and appearance had cycled the hour quickly, and another tap, tap raked the door. As he paused in his turn around, he gave his waist and wrist bands their last tugs of tidy secureness, and took a last glance into his dressing mirror. The reflection burned into his synapses, forming the memory of self-image that he would carry on journeys far and many, until the luxury of a moment of stillness to ponder on its sight rang home once more.

The wooden door vibrated as he shook it from closed to open, and he stepped out into the silent corridor. Without hesitating to return it shut or peer back into the memory of its safe-haven, he sighed silently and lowered his stance into a speedy stepping of determination.

Pushed into the hallroom, pinched and squeezed and spurred around by his expert tutors. Teasing laughter and playful allures of charms that would never be his. His nostrils flaring at the musky smell of their aroma as they slowed their spinning-top to a stillness firmly held, and masked his sight with the ceremonial blindfold.

With the darkness of its cover, the tutors withdrew, him left in a motionless stance of relaxed concentration, his mind translacing and his breathing deepening. Cycles passed, and with a last slight of lowering with the calm bending in his knees, he fired into the fractals of his mind, his shoulders sighing back into peaceful trained rest.

His ears felt the whirlwind spiralling of the tutoring dancers in the air once more. Distant at first, slowly winding into the tenderness of proximity with the timelessness of his breathing. Then in a sudden jolt of sensation, he felt the presence of their opened palms upon him, their fists opening in a snap to a sharp positioning separated by the narrowest meniscus of air, yet seeming to glance him with their touch.

In an ageless dance of palmistry, the tutors swaved their delicate contactless caress around their envelopment of his body, expanding the electricity of his consciousness into a dynamic aura of ultraviolet invisibility. A mere instant before the awareness of their purity of love burst his mind into insanity, the singing of their projected touch withdrew.

The passing of cycles of time had removed its knowledge of perception from his reasoning. To his current consciousness there was no comprehension of past, present, or future, they were as one continual moment, and without any moment at all, lost amidst an unrecorded pattern of static emptiness. In the silence, a single note vibrated the atmosphere in excitatory elation. It appeared to emanate not from a string or bell, nor fork nor drum, his mind’s creation of hearing unsure whether it had any perceptual noise at all.

As its volume rose, the learned use of his kepler organic transistor fired into its motioning, fractalling through the pattern matching of comparisons, his mind remembered the Cybertechnic lectures on chord theory. The diatonic and the chromatic scales, a faint synapse spark of the loss of a note in the translacing of the two.

The sound popped from his hearing. Silence. Then it returned in precise clarity, the pitch of its rendering finely tuned. In a gleaning of understanding, his mind and body gave its instinctively trained response to the environment, and he fell into kneeling, bowing his head, crossing his arms in front of him at the wrist, palms facing upward, as if displaying the fact that they hid no deception or secret, and as though they were positioned ready for binding.

The new poise gave rest to his body, but the spiralling in his mind defeated its stillness, and the cycles passed in the slowness of time without stimulation.

So glided-in the eight bare-footed female apprentices through a silent door. In carefully crafted motions, their performance encircled around him, the ropeline for new inductees to follow not present, their training inscribing the perfect cycle echoed by the curved walls of the hall, as though they traced memories of the overlappings of their own steps. After several laps of him, the apprentices ceased their circling, and delicately lowered themselves to their knees, gently bowed their heads, crossed their arms at the wrist, palms facing upward, as though ready for binding.

He could feel the presence of their existence around him, spaced out equidistantly like the numerals of a clock face. Sensing them without seeing, hearing them in their silence, the shimmering colours of their souls rainbowing throughout them, casting prismatic patterns in their Raman effect to within his mind’s creation of vision. The elder sister invisibly watched them dance their lighthouse beams amongst their selves.

The heartbeat of silence in his ears. The elder sister smiled as she saw the familiar sights. The twitchings of impatience, the fidgets of lust, the gentle hidden breathed sighs of hope. The gentle ebbs and undulations of nature’s currents.

As their translacings flickered, some became darker, drawing in more than they emanated out in flow. Some became
blinding and deafening to his mind, their torrents overwhelming his senses with out of balance tides.

Yet there was one whose currents didn’t conflict with the gentle pulsing of his. Their gentle waves meeting and dancing a crafted weave of ebbs and flows, combining and cartwheeling in their mix.

“Remove the blindfold,” said the voice of the elder sister. He removed the blindfold, to the sight and silence of an empty hall.

He rose and left towards the gates of the compound. The next eight-day week would bring his turn of reciprocal processions with his fellow apprentices, for the now he would not be allowed any return. He sighed silently into a tortuously earned rest. The cold cloth of the temporary tents was no match for his favoured comforts, but it condition bore no relevance to his state of total exhaustion. Sleep came easily.

“For once,” said the elder sister. “Don’t be late.”

He rose reluctantly into his stance of prayer and training, stretching and shaking the tranquilisers of sleep from his body.

“And well done,” said the elder sister. “You both chose each other.”

He gave himself a partial smile, restrained from fullness by the knowledge that the next task lay immediately ahead, but allowing its warmth to radiant through his length. Finishing and turning with grace, he stepped quickly into the vanishing point of the corridor, the distant chatterings gaining in their rarefactions as he approached the circular hall once more, although this time from a different direction, offset by ninety-degrees from his original entrance.

Emerging into the crowd of his gathered male elders and peers, they jovially slapped his back in banter, variously pranging the backs of his knees to test balance, and roared in cries of encouragement and whisperings of secret knowledge. Thrust to the front rank of the assembled rows, the facing began.

As the elder brother gave him a gentle stern shove that sped him a few steps out from his clan, his eyes lifted and gazed upon the magnificence of her beauty. She stood with her back to him, on the edge of the rows of female peers and elders, which seemed to fade into a blur around her in their comparison to her striking electrostatic illuminescence. A silken cloak covered her from view, but gave no shield to the form of her gracefulness. Two of the elder sisters chittered to her with final preparations, as though they were simultaneously ignoring and unaware of his presence. She twisted and turned in a single step so as to face him, and the crowds fell into a silent stillness.

Lowering her hood in revelation, his breathless groaning sigh of attraction was masked by the traditional gasps of gratuitous flattering from the ranks gathered in support behind him. Etiquette permitted them a few stolen moments in which to shine into each others faces, their views of each other allowed to burn their fusion into retina, mind, and heart.

He watched the cheeky joy in her face as she recalled her codices to him. There was something about the way her jaw moved as she spoke, a sweetness of speech. Although the moment dictated its tone of formality and precision, it was as though she laughed the words in song, the sternness of proceedings not allowed to hide her inner innocent play.

With the end of the cantations came the clapping of the elder sister, the uninitiated apprentices retreating quickly to a distance that ensured inaudibility. In the teasing of time-honored ritual, him and her stepped towards each other, until they stood a tantalising three-arms lengths apart.

“Your question,” she said in a smile, barely hiding the sadness that would accompany the forth-coming year during which they would be together only in their memories. “Why do you love me?”

He knew a thousand reasons, and scores of songs he could sing in answer, but he knew the ritual forbade any utterance or gesture. There was no escaping the ties of its passing, its occurrence eternal through the ages of time.

Softly squeezing her eyelids together, she dropped her eyes in defiance at the doubt which lay in her pre-assigned question, turned in a single step, and made for exit.

He breathed the timelessness of her beauty as he watched in stasis, his chin raised in a poise of strength and fortitude. When almost through the curtain of the door, she flicked her ponytail as she turned her head without pausing in pace, shining a piecing beam of love from her eyes into his, which would both heal and haunt him until they met again the designated year later.

The memory of beauty held its view of her in the darkness of the doorway, until its lightening at last faded from sight, and he made his own withdrawal from the hall in the opposite direction.

Chapter Four – Mayo factories

The Captain figured he was going to be late again, which was unlike him, unlike his true personality. It’s just that things could get that way when sleep was hard to come by. Physical rest, but no real falling into the deep dreamstates of unconsciousness. Made arranging tasks for set times difficult, as his sleep pattern drifted round the hours with no definite guarantee of any moment being destined to be marked as awake or asleep. With the variations in period could come the inevitable lapses into the cold emptiness of exhaustion, and sometimes they just occurred just at the moments of otherwise convenience. Often worsened by the want and expectation to make a punctual rendezvous, the concern of the awareness of sleep-states sometimes meaning none would be gained in the build-up of days before.

The Captain had requisitioned a hotel room near the centre of town. The location was convenient for his needs, and in the illusion of the security of the city, most of the alleyways were lit. The discussion of how the overseers were permitted to construct towers and warehouses there would often be bantered around the local public inns, its occupancy
denied when requested by the free man. In a similar manner, the new plans put forth for an out of town transport interchange had been discarded, the aerodrome spaces left empty until the land cost had risen, and then suddenly the go-ahead had been given for construction on the now more profitable land. That was the other reasoning for his choice of current residence, the opposition may have been within, but so would be the guardians of the truth. Living amongst them, in the midst of their heart, hiding in full view.

He set-off in the clothes he had slept-in, not that he had any newer or cleaner, but really it was just because the sleep periods had been so slim, it wasn’t really worth the effort of undressing and dressing again. Although he was running late, there was no real rush, as the meeting to take place was pretty informal in itself. A general rendezvous at a meandering window, a variance of an hour or so either way would be of no difference.

The winter snapped in its chill, The Captain oblivious to its bites through hardened exposure, the feelings of gentle warm touch withdrawing from his hands and limbs as his training honed his body into a state of expectant readiness for another mission.

As the resilience of his boots crushed the snow in his last steps before reaching the meeting house, he pondered upon the memories of indoctrination techniques received before. He wondered which particular routes this group might take, how many of the classic milestones they would exhibit, and what new variations and mutations of existing branched branches he would uncover.

A transaction start wouldn’t usually require too much of an effort to get going, the network would alert the members to a possible source of occurrence, and then it just usually became a matter of hiding in full view. Whilst in his early years The Captain had learned not to shine too much, it seemed to bring too much unwanted attention and additional tasks, so he had preferred to hide away in the realms of averageness, although sometimes his skill was honed so much it was noticed by knowing overseers, but in general it meant a quieter life. But that was way back then, the situations here called for no such innocent shyness or modesty, an invariable pattern in recruitment was that they couldn’t resist the shininess of a potential star. Whilst they always were keen for numbers, the most effort would be expended on those whose skills meant that they could further the needs of the organisation to an even greater extent, expounding through in their chain-reactions of inspiration to new inductees.

The lead-in had been fairly generic, a meeting of a stranger in need, after which the initial feigned attempts at empathy had grown into the gradual introduction to a wider circle of friends. As was the way, it would soon become apparent why the friends were friends, joined together in their shared opinion, indoctrination techniques, and systems of belief. They all had their own specialisms of power and control, of suggestion and recognition, hypnotism and opinion transferal. Some would say their ‘Look at this’, when pointing to pictures and logos, others would have arrangements of coloured lights, some would stand upright in motionlessness and whisper a keyphrase.

If The Captain was having a wearisome day, he might opt for easiness, feigning lack of knowledge and experience so that the simplest routes of acceptance to hypnotic suggestion were played out. These could start off with a phrase such as ‘Do you believe that people can be hypnotised?’, an innocent’s reply of ‘Yes, I believe you can be hypnotised’ already giving a willingness of mind that was easy to extend. Often an inductor would test-out progression, by provoking the inductee to call out a set-phrase or play-out a small charade or dance, triggering with their lead of a keyword or a finger-click.

Feigned telepathy was a neat trick in the armoury of indoctrination. Honing through repetition, a manipulator might adopt a position of stillness and say such things as ‘look at the stream’, and when the participant had paused in their concentration to look at the stream, they might utter another phrase such as ‘see how it flows naturally’. Repeating this experience over time, at a key moment of the indoctrination, the instigator could utter the phrase ‘Ah, look at the stream’ yet again, and the participant’s mind would then be provoked to say ‘see how it flows naturally’ to itself in a trained programmed response.

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If The Captain was having a wearisome day, he might opt for easiness, feigning lack of knowledge and experience so that the simplest routes of acceptance to hypnotic suggestion were played out. These could start off with a phrase such as ‘Do you believe that people can be hypnotised?’ an innocent’s reply of ‘Yes, I believe you can be hypnotised’ already giving a willingness of mind that was easy to extend. Often an inductor would test-out progression, by provoking the inductee to call out a set-phrase or play-out a small charade or dance, triggering with their lead of a keyword or a finger-click.

Feigned telepathy was a neat trick in the armoury of indoctrination. Honing through repetition, a manipulator might adopt a position of stillness and say such things as ‘look at the stream’, and when the participant had paused in their concentration to look at the stream, they might utter another phrase such as ‘see how it flows naturally’. Repeating this experience over time, at a key moment of the indoctrination, the instigator could utter the phrase ‘Ah, look at the stream’ yet again, and the participant’s mind would then be provoked to say ‘see how it flows naturally’ to itself in a trained programmed response.

The Captain often chuckled at their apparent success. For whilst he didn’t actually believe the explanations of telepathy or mind control, the ego and the pattern matched response system of humans could always be seen to exhibit the expected reply. Sometimes it was exploitation of human nature, other times it was manipulation of an already conditioned response, such as from memories of being a child, a group automatically listening and being attentive to a teacher whose authority and knowledge was given to be even beyond that of their parents, or it could manifest as a game of word-association. Thus sometimes the spells of control were very easy to achieve, a shh-ing motion followed by a stance of motionless silence casting attentive calm over a gathered group.

That skill of recognition was often also exploited. It was no secret that companies marketed their products in a similar manner, although there it was more often buying the dream that the product offered rather than any value of the product itself. The neatest manipulation of recognition he had come across in his travels had been a threefold weave, by a group that he was beginning to think realised he was on to them. With quite a long burn-in, first of all a familiar face was installed in his mind by arranging regular walk-bys from a stranger. Repeated over time, the coupling with a walk-by at a recognised place to spark the incidences of recognition, it had been further burnt-in by the matching to a newsstand picture to form the third-part of the key. It had been a well-crafted illusion, but experience of previous attempts at attraction leading to routes into pyramid marketing schemes had hardened his resilience against it, even if it had initially worked, and sparked his initial flickers of contact.

An interesting technique was for the inductor to fake ignorance and unknowledge of a subject area, so that the inductee went off and researched the topic themselves. The inductor didn’t need to use the powers of persuasion, as the inductee effectively ended-up describing the opinion they had researched to the inductor, and thus trying to convince themselves of the viewpoint already known by the inductor, rather the inductor needing to try and convince them by
their own efforts.

The bizarre art of perphacking was a familiar friend, the conversations about something completely unrelated, or even directly controversial, in order to extract information by ego reaction. Sometimes merely saying nothing at all worked, the silence prompting the teller to blurt out even more information in their attempt to clarify what they had said, in order to counteract their perceived failing of having themselves understood. Often this merely externalised itself as opinion transferal however, only changing the response rather than the actual opinion of the person, but that was enough for the opinion to be repeated to others that the messaging relayer had contact with, and thus led to others hearing it, leading to more potential sources of inquiring raw recruits.

Again, this could be clearly seen in use by the marketeers, a strapline, review, or additional extra information on an extended clip, the scripted lines being repeated out when the viewer was questioned by somebody about their opinion of the clip, eliminating the need for them to form an insecure opinion of their own, preferring the obviously more interesting and intellectual things pointed out by the clip’s own director and participants.

The feedback from an inductor was more direct than with marketing though, The Captain would often see the subtle traces of a smirk being suppressed on a face, the ego of the inducer not being able to resist the perceived buzz of pleasure derived from leading another to their opinion.

It was the humiliation stage of indoctrination that The Captain found most tiresome. It wasn’t any humiliation that became felt, but almost boredom, although his masked sighs at their thinking that such a process actually helped, feigned enough of a squirming comfortableness that they assumed the milestones were progressing as usual. The Captain had long-held the belief that all would be told to one another in the afterworld, so observing the parading of his human faults and failings seemed just a vent-echoing of the inducer’s own faults to him.

He would just have to sit there, waiting in an innocent knowledgeable stillness, like a Christian being vented upon by a group of non-believers, his silence at the fact that he had heard it all before being mistaken for their leading arguments having effect, and when he would tire so much that he dared to utter a few words, they would suddenly roar-up in laughter as though they had succeeded in their wind-up, whereas really he was just plain fucking bored.

Then would come the snap. It might have been variously prepared by phrases such as 'hear what the world is telling you', thus when the inductee ventured into the ego of the world, selective awareness would mean that aspects of the indoctrination techniques would exhibit themselves. Whilst this was generally based on the inductee’s own reaction to what had been seen or heard, and thus was a self-constructed reflection, it wasn’t unheard of for inductors to arrange walk-bys of hack whisperings, or manipulation of the sources used to gain information. Over the years, The Captain thus became very wary of those who would enquire to as what papers and magazines he read, and what sources he used in the libraries.

Isolation. That was what usually came next. The sudden withdraw of all contact, leaving the inductee in the barren wilderness of unknowingness, the conflicting synapse pulses reverberating in their fractalisation. This gave time for the paths to processing to be fused, and the indoctrination route to be set inside of itself. As there was no other to communicate with, often an inductee would fire out their inner secrets and knowledge, to be recorded unseen, and then denied in deceptions that phonecalls and messages were never received, and letters that were lost or never arrived. And of course, the inductee was then desperate for answers to unknown questions, and would try and return to the nest as soon as re-communications were initiated by them. The knowledge confessed would be stored, to be used to hone techniques, or pulled-out from the files when the time had come years later to run another path of the brainwashing.

Some of the investigated indoctrination techniques were harsher than others, and the overseeing of the Asoterials was intended to provide a safety-net and point of healing should the need arise. Unfortunately, left alone in their academic circling without interface to the actual causatory factors, their usefulness waned over time, as their true purpose and just general care, warped and faded.

The Captain found no need for the Asoterials, or in fact any want. He was aware that they had developed into mere proofs of their own techniques to themselves, in irony to their original designations as protection against such techniques. The cycles of modernisation fed themselves, until the only weighting of their aim was to prove that the searcher was rational enough not to return. The Captain could see that relevance, in that someone who was rational enough to make the decision that the Asoterials were not needed to be contacted anymore was obviously sane, and may even go on to construct their own alternative plan. However, in the vast majority of cases, the searcher merely became rational enough to deduce that talking to the Asoterials was utterly pointless, and they were still left in the same place, with no problem solved apart from the tick statistic of another case off the books in the Asoterials’ glory list of self-fame.

Which was fine with The Captain, as it meant that he didn’t have to listen to their bullshit, nor them to his. But he doubted its actual usefulness for those who had been drawn to the Asoterials in a last-ditch desperate attempt for help. The Asoterials giving pretty much the worst type of therapy that could be offered to such searchers of the last vestiges of hope. All that they would be convinced of was that they were right after all, and there really was no-one who could ever help or understand them, no-one they could communicate to, left to become lost in an oblivion of pointlessness and depression of silence, never making contact with the Asoterials again, and thus remaining hidden from their statistics of false positive successes.

The Captain was also bewildered by their methods of internal assessment, used in analysis of the success of a course on a searcher. Obviously when the questionnaires were handed out at the last meeting with the Asoterials, most were so relieved to be alive and officially classed as still being sane, that it wasn’t surprising that they would tick the 'Good' or 'Very good' checkboxes which asked their opinion as to the quality of service they had received. There would be those
whose paranoia dictated ticking a good response, after all, they wouldn’t want any trouble next time. A few would dare to mark a poor rating, but likely those were dismissed as obviously antagonistic or just anomalies.

The statistic which The Captain would be interested in was the tally of those who the Asoterials had done more harm to than good, those who wouldn’t be ticking any of the checkboxes in response.

Adjusting his lighting, The Captain began the continuing of his writing up of notes.

“The irony in it all,” wrote The Captain. “Is that most of the methods in use in the wilderness of indoctrinations, are partial or false enlightenments gleaned via failed participants of poorly constructed routines.”

“I continue to discover those functioning in isolation, who are unaware of their tainted rye. On more than one occasion, I have witnessed an inductor undergo a nervous breakdown themselves whilst brainwashing an innocent recruit, and then blackly-vent at the recruit when their own paranoia spiral inside of themselves, often leading to a chain-reaction nervous breakdown in the innocent recruit.”

“Often inductors are merely sowing what has been reaped to them, to appear interesting, knowledgeable, or just to gain understanding of their own problems or understanding of indoctrinations which have been performed upon them.”

“A significant proportion of the routines manifest themselves as schisms and internal conflicts of decision, along with the obvious cross-religion and cross-continental disputes. It seems that left in the mists of time, many have mutated into processes which merely prove themselves in their false reasonings, and bare no semblance to any original intended truth.”

“Although with the difficulties arising from many of the indoctrinations being the residues of destructive psyops warfare, nearly all exhibit the general flaw that we refer to internally as the sadness that haunts. Whilst each discovery of its occurrence shocks and distresses me, it only serves further to harden my resolve, and may it as ever, remind us of our thankless task.”

The Captain closed his notebook and rested his pencil on the table. He reminded himself that he wasn’t mad, but had just witnessed a lot of mad things. Sighing silently within himself, he drew a few sips of vodka from his glass. The task had been arduous, and his thoughts still spiralled away, flickering in flashes that echoed in rebound to the thoughts of wanting to sleep.

He realised he might not have time for much proof-reading or editing, but things were always difficult when working under the pressure of mission conditions.

Chapter Five – Journeying

He had found the tasks set long and straining upon his essence of will. He had met many strangers along the way, few gave any understanding, most merely reacting back with their ego’s perception of their own environment. Some seemed to train a skill, others appeared to be nothing more than tapestries of illusions sold to him to fund another’s dream.

Through the long year he had never doubted its dictates, he had respected that the tasks had been set for a reason, its subtle truths revealed from the fogs of protagonists. He had only doubted its significance, the lessons experienced merely reminding himself of those that he had already learnt. Some helped, some spat at him, without the acknowledgment of the truth he sought they all merely cascaded into a tortuous waterfall, wearing away the rock of his bodily strength in a timeless dripping of falsities and lies.

His experiences were no better or worse than any else, all born into the complexities of life. He watched and listened as they all spilled their hurt onto him, silently letting the waves drift over him. Though his course drifted with the currents and tides of nature, its path was always clear. To him their were no joys in the selfish pleasures that hurt others, the negative forces of lost energies pulling others away from their own positivity, spiralling down into a chain-gang of self-imprisonment.

Pushed away to the edges of organised society, he found himself in a peaceful wood of existance. Stepping through leaves and bracken, his pace quickened to a run as the vision of wisdom formed exponentially in his mind.

Opening to a circular clearing of flowers, he ran to the centre, falling into kneeling, bowing his head, crossing his arms in front of him at the wrist, palms facing upward, as if displaying the fact that they hid no deception or secret, and as though they were positioned ready for binding.

He waited there as his life had always waited, time existing instantaneously in his concurrent memory. There was no moment to him, he existed in a timeless drift of the past, present, and future of his life on earth. No change in perception as the linear line of his life unfolded. The firings of selfish pleasures he watched unfold in the world only lasted as long as their pleasures themselves, and with no memory of a single moment, they were lost in a non-existance of his time.

That was the one of the reasons why they had chosen each other, a future life of their memories together, rather than a random collection of drifting snaps.

As his mind drifted amongst its inner creations, the memory of their choosing returned to his mind’s creation of vision. In a pinging of silence he was back at that time, sensing the currents of the eight that flowed around him. All melted away in their callings, save for the single voice that sang to him in his emptiness of oblivion. They were alone. Him and her, tied together in a timelessness of non-existant existiness.

In the stillness of the moment, they sensed a third presence where they lay. It was not him, it was not her, it was another. The reasoning removed the ceremonial blindfold from his sight. They had chosen each other over that which
lay outside, and it was only when they had proved their choosing of that also that their love could unfold its glorious resonance.

A point. A line. Triangles spiralling in a fractal of infinity. He fell in love with her, and with God, and she fell in love with him, and with God, and God fell in love with her and him, all at the same moment in time, the truth of love glistening in a ultraviolet shockwave through their synapses.

They had been designed for each other since the beginning of time, since the big bang, since the Epoch Dawn. It was their destiny for them to meet.

For the why, he had no knowledge of. They could ask each other. It was time to return to the Cybertechnic. Sometimes it was possible to hear the message without understanding the language it was written in.

Chapter Six – Cybertechnic

The Captain lay there, exhausted. His body lay stretched-out, resting on the bed. He had turned and layed in various positions, and even tried the old trick of turning the pillow the other way round, but it wasn’t sufficient, his limbs ached in their resting, and his mind spiralled with thoughts of tomorrow, yesterday, and today. He couldn’t seem to venture off into sleep.

Then it occurred to him. There was a reason why he couldn’t enforce his consciousness to break off into sleep. It was because he was asleep, but merely conscious of it. He awoke.

The Captain turned the corner sharply, and then turned again, swaying through the door to the bar with a gentle cast aside of its function. The busyness and chattiness of the company of the bar warmed him, and he approached the bar and ordered his usual vodka. The Captain drank in its first kisses, followed with his smile, and nestled the glass back down on the bar, allowing it to contemplate in its resting.

As he cast his eyes around the room, he noticed a familiarity in a stranger. The stranger was sat at the very end-corner of the bar, a treasured seating which he often occupied himself. The stranger was obviously enjoying his choice of intoxicants, his unkempt hair having been lost to grow in its idleness, dancing as his head bobbled out of time with the tune that was being played.

The Captain walked through, towards the back of the bar, where other customers lay seeking their own forms of entertainment. The young ladies variously chittered and danced in their fun, and whilst he felt too old to sample the full delights of their beauty, he could at least smile at the glow of joy that beamed in their faces. He was always pleasantly impressed by the efforts the ladies went to, immaculate in their preened displays of radiance.

Two young gentleman suitors approached, to be fair in what was a shy approach in itself, and asked two of the dancers if they cared for a drink. The ladies barely twitched in their dance-moves and gave a polite ’no thank you’. Smiling at the sweetness of the situation, he felt nature’s calling, and moved off into the toilets. Releaving himself of the toxins of the intoxicants, a banterous lad began his talk.

“I see you haven’t got a drink,” said the lad.
“No, I haven’t,” he said.
“Well, I’ve got one,” laughed the lad. “And I’ve had loads this evening, I’m really pissed.”
He didn’t doubt him.
“All you have to do,” continued the lad. “Is walk up to any girl who’s almost finished her drink, and start talking.”
When she’s finished her drink, she’ll turn round and offer you one. Easy.”
“Sounds it,” he laughed.
“I’ve got a bird at home and all that,” said the lad. “I’m happy with her, I’m not out on the cheat or anything. Just having fun.”
“Yes,” he laughed.

The ironies in the games of love. Many were its tangled weaves, and many were its cross-plays of reaping and sowings of doing what had been done. Fun was fine, less joyous were those chain-reactions of cause and effect which only served to propagate the seeding of the same new problems.

Washing his hands under the bursts of the taps, he glanced up into the mirror. As his hands ran over themselves in cleansing, he glazed at the image, his hair hung down in the idleness of growth, his eyes wearied by the consumption of intoxicants. He saw the reflection of what he had become. Sometimes when the indoctrinations had been particularly heavy the journey could become lost, not quite remembering who they truly were, or the true task at hand. He was reminded of his self.

Stepping back through the bar, and into the cool of the street for a cigarette. There were various lads bantering amongst themselves in various plays. On the other side of the street, a young lady, dressed strongly in a mixture of gothic and biker black, possibly with piercings, and maybe even a tattoo, walked past on her way to somewhere.

On sighting her presence, the young lads switched the focus of their bantering play, and variously wolf-whistled and cheered and geered to across the street. With an expert motion, the young lady lifted her arm upwards, forming at a fist, and then gave ‘the finger’ in such a manner than it would give even a hardened veteran of the foreign legion pause for thought. Stunned briefly by the truly valiant display, the lads eventually managed to respond with another round of whistles and geers.

“Leave her alone,” he said. The crowd turned to look at the young lady once more. Her attention defocussed, she
stumbled slightly. The young lads rose the volume of their cheering once more, and he immediately swooped in between to face them, in an effort to block them out away from her.

“She was doing well, until she stumbled,” he said.

The Captain was reminded of someone with similar stubbornness and resilience. It was altruistic love that had found its way through the stern defence of the young lady, although her momentary unsureness of footing may have equally been caused by an uneven pavement.

The lady in The Captain’s memory had received much training to temper her natural talents. Education throughout a network of many countries had broadened her spectrum and enabled her to learn a diversity of languages. Trusted to the care of many schools, her own will meant that she would often spend periods ‘off the radar’ in the wildernesses of learning. But each time she would return as they knew she would. The Captain remembered the words of the only page of a file that would be handed to each elder to accompany the precious gift.

“The lady is a genius, try not to teach that out of her, just let her learn. You should only need to explain anything to her once, and often only the basics, from which she’ll derive the remainder during her own periods of keplarisation. There is no need to enforce strict punishment on her, she will instill her own sanctions upon herself at any time she deems necessary.”

When the mysteries of the world had drifted the members apart, there was a sanctuary to which they would always return home to. The place they knew as the Cybertechnic.

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Though he had seen the sight before, it never ceased to bring a shudder to his soul, a small lingering part of the sadness that haunted. She looked as though her body was crumbled-up in the same fashion a face might look when unable to manage any particular expression such was the lostness of the situation. Her limbs looked lifeless like a rag-doll, whilst not being particularly skinny, they seemed deprived of any will to form any sort of necessary shape. Though her mind and body were in perfect functioning order, it looked as though she was lost inside of herself, her unkempt sweated hair hanging driftless down her face, her eyes betraying that she felt there was none who understood who she was, and that she had no method of communicating her self to any listener who she could trust enough to tell in speech.

The Captain couldn’t read whether she recognised him or not, the darkness in her eyes so black that it didn’t echo back with any beam of familiarity. He wasn’t sure if he could be of any direct help to her, he knew not where she had been, or what she had seen or discovered, and it was far too early to attempt any type of keplar recording, as her mind was still reverberating in flickers of fractalisation. All that they could hope was that the humanity that lay left within her could sense the presence of his. He sat near her, his pose as still as hers, their breathing silent in the passing of time.

When the indoctrinations had been less severe, The Captain might press hard in his initial conversations, to dispel the blanket fogs of weavings, and pace down to the true root causes. But he could see that such was not her state on this day. The indoctrination had been severe this time. He started with a slow cautious approach. He knew that her first attempts at communication would only be testers to ascertain how much she could risk in telling, so were bound to appear sketchy and poorly connected. After careful and patient listening, more detailed explanations would be risked, eventually leading to a clear description, from which understanding and recovery could be gleaned.

“Hello,” he said, kneeling near her, but out of slap-range. Their was no change in her act.

“I don’t know if this will work,” he continued. “But all I can say is that I am probably as lost as you, so I guess we are not alone. Being in the same room and all. Practically cell mates.”

She paused briefly in her fidgetings of internal reflection and fractalisation, not showing interest, but giving a tick-tell of awareness. The hours passed, and he knelt as still as her. Their lungs breath sharing the same air. Their senses feeling the same presence of environment.

“They said you might be able to help me,” he said gently. “I’m really fucked-up.”

She turned and looked into his eyes, and was reminded of his sight in the view of her own retina. She felt his pain, and he hers. Their organic transistors streamed into their flow of keplarisation.

And then came the slap.

“Well don’t just sit there,” she laughed. “There’s do’s to be done you know.”

“Yes,” he said.

“Hmm,” she said stubbornly. “Maybe a shower. And there’s no way I’m wearing this.”

“Thank you for sorting me out.”

“I did nothing. I was just there while you sorted your self out.”

“You did more than that, my darling, but yes, sometimes that’s all it takes.”

Chapter Seven – Retrieval

“The door’s locked,” she said.

“I know,” he said. “I locked it from the inside.”

“Where are you?” she said.

“It’s not very nice here,” he said. “Where are you?”
“I’m not there,” she said. “I’m on earth. What are you doing?”
“I know,” he said. “I was just waiting here until you realised it.”
“Why,” she said.
“There’s scary things in here,” he said. “I didn’t want them to frighten you.”
“You can come out now,” she said.
“Ok,” he said. “Unlock it from your side and I’ll meet you, and leave them behind me.”
He awoke.

The eye lightening faded out as the reality suppressants began to reform. An aching ear abdominal descending bass reverb, the taste of dry saliva, unprogressive wrenching with its mild burn companion. Heart-depth sigh, astonished panic like falling love.

The baby lay their dreaming whilst awake, thumb between index fingers. The walls of glass cold, a warming metal panel reaching in with a half-warm glow from one side. Glancing down at a bleeding body, the itched scratches of congealing blood, skin afame in pain. The baby tapped.

The reality suppressant began to form as his body began to squeeze out their organic flow. The liquid gloss washing over his eyes and making them sparkle in the dim light. Gathering momentum, they grew into a welling bubble, until the tension of their meniscus reached its escape pressure, and they teared-out their flow like a popping bubble.

As his woolen-mittened hands rubbed on his pain like sandpaper, the water of his tears fell out his eyes, forking like lightning down his face in their path. As the tears ran over his reddened eyelids, they bit with their pain and his hands reflexed up to greet them. The wool of the mittens soaked up the moisture for a while, so he could continue to maintain a balance between the chemical flows of pain and relief, until they grew soggy, and held the stream no more.

He realised that the crying simply added to his pain, and he stopped. He looked around, through the walls of glass. He could see others all around him, crying. Yet in the undulating pitches of static he could hear someone else that had stopped crying. He didn’t know who she was, or where she was, or even if she was in the same room or time of day. But he could hear her, crying in a tearless silence. He didn’t know who she was, but he knew she existed. Maybe he could tell her how he felt, maybe she could tell him how she felt. Maybe they could help stop everyone else’s pain together. Smile at them, let them know they weren’t alone. He should find her. Hack for her. He had a plan. Well, the first line of one anyway.

He awoke.

The pain hurt.
He awoke.

He made his way to the shower, and let his thoughts variously meander around within the streams of the cascading warming water. He was thinking of getting out of the shower, and as his mind was variously away in memories of computer games and films, he thought ‘Let’s get you out of here, keep you in the game’.

Switching off the shower taps and turning round, he saw a huge spider. Some champion spider that one. Spiralling in cross-matching, his mind drifted off into wanderings of an assassin spider. He quite liked spiders. This one, whilst big, did look pretty harmless. Although it did seem to have large fangs, or were they little sensors. He wasn’t bothered by spiders, and at his houses he would often catch baby spiders in a jar or something, and move them out into the garage. Whilst the spiders weren’t generally allowed in the house, at least the garage was dry and reasonably warm, warmer than full outdoor ejection on a rainy day anyhow. So he dried himself off, cut-up a water bottle as he didn’t have a jar, eventually catching the spider in it as it ran around the slippery bath. As it was summer, he let the spider out through the patio doors, rather than a pick-up and drop-off to the garage.

After a well-timed party, he found himself walking through the centre of the city on his way back home. A little way in front of him, he could make out the small figure of a guy holding-up a small notice, and circling around on the spot, so it became viewable to all onlookers. As the sight of the sign passed on its anti-clockwise direction with the guy’s rotating, he glimpsed that it said ‘Free hugs’. Fair enough he thought, free hugs, don’t keep them locked-up. As he continued along, he seemed to line-up in his walking with the guy, so his path would take him to his spot.

As he drew closer, he could hear the sounds of the crowds busying-by, variously reading the sign and saying ‘oh, free hugs’, and then just laughing in derision as they walked by. As he drew closer, the mockings from the crowds seemed to worsen, all casting looks and comments of foolery. The guy was still spinning on the spot, but as he approached, halted, and gave an attempt at a smile. At that moment, an onlooker from the street turned round to see the guy’s sign and shouted ‘Free hugs, you must be fucking desperate mate’.

He continued on, not altering in his pace to turn to look at the source of the heckling, and then turned back to the guy with the sign. Arms outstretched, he said to the guy ‘I have a hug for you’. Looking pleased, but slightly nervous, the guy folded up the sign, and accepted the manly hug. After asking if the guy was ok, and watching a casually suited lunchtime businessman smile in his own way as he passed, he wished the guy good-day and continued on his way.

Undoubtedly the guy was there as part of some sort of experiment, to see how it felt and all that. But who was the experience created for, in effect, they were both strangers yet both understood the point each other was making, even though both had no previous knowledge of the experiment. Although the paranoid might consider it had been timed for them both.

Later that week, whilst walking through town again, he spotted a well-dressed gentleman standing attentively beside a lamppost. The lamppost seemed to have a small sticker on it, not shouting its message, but noticeable none the less. As he drew nearer, he saw the small text below the American flag. It said ‘Remember the falling man’. He strolled up to the guy.
“I saw you there and thought I’d just come over and shake your hand,” he said.
“Cheers, mate,” said the suited man as they shook.

It was strange then, that later in the week, whilst checking that all was still well with the phrase ‘epoch dawn’ in the search-engine rankings, he noticed an article from the New York Times had suddenly appeared in the results, in addition to his own listings, the NASA one, and some other various things. Examining the news article, it did indeed have the phrase ‘Epoch Dawn’ in it, so it was bizarre that it had just popped-up in there. Maybe the guy had given him a lift. The news had been about a peace conference or something in Japan, and it reminded him of the scientist in a university there, who had used the historical fact that his city had avoided the nuclear blast because the weather was cloudy that day as inspiration for his academic research.

The world can appear as a strange place, sometimes you can accidentally stumble upon on a load of methods without even realising, and there’s been so many and so varied, you’re sort of seen through them all and not really been convinced by any of them. Some you kind of see what they are getting at, and get the point, but aren’t quite convinced by it. Especially as proof has only unfolded as it had been said it would. Some are so subtly cryptic they get lost when the reteller Chinese whispers, worsened when the cryptics are so transparent that you’ve heard them all before, and it isn’t that you don’t see the point but you’ve just already experienced it.

To him, the dreamvision of the Virgin Mary and child, from a few months ago, before things got sketchy, was most personal, as it was born out of pure love. More real than the memory of the acted play version prior to visiting Poland that occurred months later. Others might plump for the Buddhist way, but hey, that was up to them. Given that anything can be interpreted in many ways, it’s easy to see how it all spirals out into spaghetti, but then there’s always the thought that maybe it’s better to join a group. Looking at the castle walls one thinks, hmmm, looks safe there. Then you examine around, and you see if you side with one group, another will dislike you. And you don’t like that. Ideally you just want to be friends with them all.

Chapter Eight – Sadnesses that haunted

Although the backgrounds, cultures and religions of the members differed, they shared the common knowledge that those who would subscribe to their own beliefs could be as forceful in their recruitments as each other. The silent sighs of patience and timing were their guards, their remit to watch and observe without intervening. Whilst the viewpoints may have differed from their own, and indeed in some cases veered from any semblance to truth, it was not their task to judge the merits of any system, and it was false teaching to prevent any one from choosing any path that they minded to choose from their own free will.

Of course, some groups needed a closer watch kept on them than others, and whilst the directives prevented dictating courses of action, it was well within their rights to advise. There could be no truck for those who practiced power and control to exert forced will upon the innocent.

The members grew used to their nightmares and the nightmares of their fellows. Sometimes a terror in the night would strike from their own memory of an indoctrination, other times the keplarisation used to retrieve another may spark its doubts. They shared the memory of their vision of hell, that point once reached were all was eternally lost in its illusions of lies and hopelessness, that which would sometimes cause them to wake-up screaming after their mind’s dreaming reenactment could still find no escape in its unconsciousness.

Whilst only a few routines openly programmed a destructive response in an ill-conceived ‘there can be only one’ energy summation or suicide-cult type manner, as most were merely designed to overcome the demons of the ego, the harsh processes invoked by some invariably left its trail of those for which there would be no filling-in of checkboxes.

Of all these sadnesses there was one that haunted the most. Nearly all of the indoctrinations exhibited a common fatal flaw. There was no safeguard for the true innocent in their construction. For some the journeyings of guilt and self-reflection would give no answer, no reason, and absolutely no knowledge of fact. For some the rejections of conclusions fed to them by a technique could leave them in the barren wilderness, between the denial of both the reasonings of the group and the reasonings of the world that lay outside the group. Lost in attempts at understanding, until fears from their depths were jumbled. The members within drew the lies of conclusion that there would never be any who could understand their communications again.

Some would find no reason to disbelieve their beliefs, no need to reject their personality for any other set of constructs, the knowledge that breaking a purported social conditioning can merely end-up producing a conditioned response of it own. No problems solved, only a new set added. No want to change into what they were not. Not due to stubbornness or resistance to change, not out of refusal to bow to another’s point of will, but merely because they already knew who they were. In some cases it would lead to habits of excess, such as drug, sex, or alcohol addiction, effectively creating the problems it was designed to solve.

In the lack of a reason or a reason for blame, some blame themselves for want of any other explanation. The members would find them.

Chapter Nine – Memoirs of a Captain

Time had passed, and the new horizons had brought many more mysteries for The Captain to unfold. After
unweaving an indoctrination that was so strongly conceived that the task of understanding it had waylaid his path so meanderingly, he had become unsure of his own route, and his mind was left to spill out in keaplisation.

Each experience had strengthened his resolve, and yet weakened it, the process of returning out from each brainwash very subtly draining his own essence. Things for one with The Captain’s talents were always difficult, after each mission came the restlessness of completion, the small period of relaxed sleep at success, until eventually the stillness became idleness, and his mind strained for a challenge once more.

The Captain would take every opportunity to promote conquering the fear of fear itself, and how it was always of matter of interpretation. But this indoctrination had been harsh, even by The Captain’s standards, and in the processes of understanding, then deconstructing and analysing, he had dismantled part of his own scaffolding, and found not that inner strength of support.

They were certainly a lot of groups about, some of them even slightly scary. The type that always concerned The Captain the most were those who considered themselves as the only answer, and viewed all outside as damned. Some saw earth as hell and thus justified the right to do as they willed, others saw earth as heaven and justified their selves the right as judges on earth, and set about in their ways of justitia ex tempore.

The Captain had become so lost that it was hard to recognise friend from foe, the fireworks resembling chaff, and the chaff resembling fireworks, the sparks of all merely bursting in their illusions of power with none giving a clear focus of intent. In the confusion of oblivion, The Captain could not gain a clear match between his own reasonings, all the washes that had been thrown over him throughout the long years showing how they had all taken their toll on his strength.

Normally after a period of intense fractalisation, the mind would return to its original pattern, with the processed understandings available to view as a new component construction in the codex library of his organic transistor. But this time had been more severe, in the breaking of his will, he had forgotten his own essence, and his mind drifted in an isomorphic bubble, trying to find its own shape. Consuming his favourite vodka and listening to the undulations of classic tunes to spark the memories of the past.

His synapses span in a tight-rope walking of understanding, his mind searching in desperation for the skills of balance to prevent his fall into the familiar abyss. Finding no untainted match of existence, he refractalled and reiterated through every Epoch Dawn he had ever experienced before. The snappings exponentialying, the memories of an old routine lurking in the depths of his history bubbled to the surface.

He could not remember which group had sanctioned the isoteric construction, and his mind played through the scripts like a sheep, acting an unfamiliar yet instinctive course, feeding then following on to each new patch of greener grass. He would find himself willingly yet unwittingly drifting towards the right place at the right time, each stage bringing no real clarity save for the next step in its execution.

Lacking any sense of real purpose, it was as though he danced around like a headless-chicken, sparks of already known facts and falsities raising and lowering their menisci. Knocking through the doors of hope, he could find no ACK back of understanding amongst the recesses, and the programmed path had continued in its dire flow. The humiliating charades played through him like a puppet, the blackest of strings jolting his will, as if passed around each group in turn to be kicked and bandied about as their plaything.

During processing it was sometimes necessary to feign unknowledge in order to delve deeper undercover, other times it was necessary to show a controversial point of view in order to gauge the reaction. Sometimes even to insult a friend so that they remembered you, so they’d recognise you when you needed help. Occasionally it was necessary to pin-up a false flag, to talk to a group or to pretend to belong to another group just to make an opponent pause to think in their approach. Other times it was just mere banter on the terraces. The knowledge that showing membership of one group would invariably spark the interest, and possibly wrath, of another, gave no more comfort to its eventual occurrence. Left wandering through the myriads, The Captain was variously used as bait and trophy to all.

The Captain was aware that the program he was running was a construct, but he knew not of its originator nor its intended function. He was sure it wasn’t one of his own safety constructions, but its purpose lay hidden. Some groups looked after their own, other groups wanted to own what they looked after. Sometimes there was only a subtle difference between a donation and an invoice. He couldn’t remember whether it was a destruct mechanism or a system of anti-destruct protection he had been taught by a stranger.

The blurs of conspiracies sped through his synapses. The pink floyds with their choppers, a set-up charade to see if Roger Barrett would have forgiven them for their games, or did Mr Barrett just not want to be manipulated by the sales people to sing the lyrics in the creation of their own songs, and opted-out, maybe to do a bit of painting or something. I heard the guy was a genius, was good at everything, always got his message out and his point across. The paranoia role-playing games, all seeking to confuse and distract from the true senses. Sometimes the groups all looked the same, and the only thing he could tell was that his uniform didn’t seem to be the same colour as theirs.

The Captain was drawn to the sea, and the thoughts of his distant homeland that lay across it. Some days he would sit and watch the world flow by in its contentment, the parents playing games with their children, the teenagers playing their team games of football and volleyball for enjoyment, the older crowds watching on in their reminiscences of familiar memories, in peaceful satisfaction at the joy that shone in all their faces. The natural elegance of the world, the sun, the moon and the stars, each looked as beautiful to him.

The weather changed as was its own want, sometimes the wind blowing onto a rough sea forming its white horses, other days the calmness of the waves such that they looked like shadows dancing around in their glee. On brighter days, when the sun burned high in the sky, he watched the spectacle of its reflection, its undulations like glittering stars.
Today, rainclouds gathered, but the rays of the sun were still visible through them. As they shone their way through, the droplets of rain cast their rainbow into his mind’s creation of vision. His thoughts sprang back to times gone by. The days without sustenance, and the nights of celebration with vodka and dancing. He remembered what he and his friends had dreamed of, peace, and for the right of all sentient life to live free.

Walking further along, he noticed a small lighthouse. His mind flickered back to his childhood. He had known what the big lighthouse further up the shore was for, but he wasn’t sure about this one.

“What’s that?” said the child.

“The big lighthouse up there is your big brother,” said the woman. “That one’s you, the little lighthouse.”

“Oh,” said the child.

Hmm. He thought. Ok, I know what the big lighthouse is for, to stop the lost ships crashing on the rocks. I wonder what this little lighthouse is for. Maybe for little boats that are coming into land, a little light so they can see the safety of the shore. Yes, that must be it.

By some chance, The Captain broke his negative programming and managed to hold on to the days until his calvary sounded their call. Shot into orbit with no escape pod or means of returning the earth, as he watched the flames of impeding burn-up on re-entry to the atmosphere, the fears and terrors were near unsurmountable. It was only the memory of the members’ thoughts that they should ‘Know no fear’, and his undying quest for the truth of love that saved him. The Captain had been lost on a desert island, so his friends went to retrieve him.

“The only thing I could distantly recall,” said The Captain. “Was the memory of that hot summer. The one during which we went to the movies a lot, and saw all those summer films. In fact, I think I only remembered one of the actual films we saw. Unfortunately it was a disaster movie, something about a comet hitting Earth. I initially linked to the newspaper ads, and the stories of how comets were near to our earth, no doubt their merry-go-round of marketing. After reliving the whole film in the experience of my mind, at one point actually falsely convincing myself it was me causing the destruction of the world, I remembered a vague image of a friendly face, one whom I had watched the film with. It was that which brought me back, and began my route to keplar reinitialisation.”

“A heavy journey,” he said.

“Yes,” said The Captain. “And one which if you turn-up to the Asoterials and say ‘I caused a comet to hit the earth’ as your first point of contact, then you know, you just know, their first response is going to be ‘Hmmm, we’ll just check the wacky-charts’.”

They all laughed.

“Thank you,” said The Captain.

The Captain smiled with a sigh as all the members did. The beauty at seeing all the love in the world, and the sadness that haunted of feeling its pain.

“The problem with the vast majority of techniques,” said The Captain. “Is that their proof, whilst very convincing, is no more convincing than any other proof that any other group has shown. In a lot of cases, one can experience both sides of a created construct, and find that each of the routines are merely ingenious constructions, the only purpose of which is to prove against its opposite construction. Some groups merely use iron filings to tip the balance of the scales in their favour.”

“As a significant proportion are residues from man-made warlike techniques, either Masonic-Judaic versus Catholic religious conflicts, Catholic versus their foes, Illuminati and Masonic versus Argenteum Astrum, New Age reasonings, or drug-induced experiences, they all manifest as divisions of decision, all of the constructions of research they each use in their proofs layered on top of the essential truths, merely serving to distract from the beauty of the world, and divide rather than unite in their conflicts of decision. The dangers lie in the number of unexploded bombs and mines left amongst the population. Both during and in the aftermath, the number of civilian casualties can be unacceptably high. Be wary that the proofs given are not just used to achieve power and control.”

“On routines which conflict with personal viewpoints, the end result can be that it is not the faith in the belief that is lost, but the faith in mankind because of its want to conflict. Whilst many groups exhibit a common element of truth, the only proof they prove is their dislike for each other.”

“Worst of all, most groups recruit out of friendship, and in the end, one is merely left wondering why friends would try so hard to break one’s will, rather than any strength and resolve being gained from the process. On the fifth or so time round, it almost becomes tiresome. All that is left is the memories of terrors, shattering of an already broken confidence, and a terrible distrust of new friends. Maybe even the odd bit of paranoia.”

It reminded him of the piece of notepaper ripped from the pad. It was pinned to the noticeboard amongst the organised mess of academia. 'Love/hate' it had read. He now remembered its meaning. Love divided by hate.

“I created them to love each other. And all they do is fight. Some days I find that a sadness that haunts.”

Chapter 10 – Called in answer

They were running. They couldn’t see their hidden pursers, the aching of their limbs matched in the squeezing of a tighter hand-grip together, the first rays of dawn weeping through the trees.

He woke up.
“Wake up,” said the elder sister.
“I am awake,” he said.
“You know you’re late, don’t you,” said the elder sister.
“I know,” he said.

As he stretched out of the simple bed and rose to his stance of training and prayer, the elder sister saw the weary of experience that had passed in his soul, and made no further reproach.

Soon he had reached the hall in his pacing, and he walked to near the centre, until he was three-arms lengths from her, as she stood draped lovingly in the silk of her gown. The brothers looked on in gracious respect, the sisters motionless in their glanced of sisterly love. Tap, tap. The elder sister made her sound.

“You have been called in answer,” said the elder sister.

She turned and lowered the shield of beauty of her gown, in a single stepping motion.

“My love is plain,” he called, echoing the first set line of the codex. His own poem sang that which he had learned.

Pret tic cal, um mann na, um ma na ka,
Lakana mann, na cala, daka lien um sa.

He stepped forward across the centre-line and took her hand in his. He gently breathed his lullaby in the language only they knew, and that only she could understand. She smiled, let go of his hand, took a turn and another step, to face the elder sister.

“How does the man answer?” said the elder sister, as if already bored by the unknown response.

The young lady gave tell of her nervousness with the slight point and pivoting of her left foot and toe, and with a quick flick of her hair to behind her ear, she retold her given answer.

“The gentleman has been given the means to enslave me, as is his right,” she said. “And to exert his will of power and control over me, but he chooses not to exert his self on mine, but to let our love be joined without chains.”

The couple knew not of what would happen next, they had been told no further. Everyone seemed reasonably pleased, and so she took a half-step forward in preparation of her recant of love in return.

Tap, tap. As the slight uplifting of her face betrayed the intention of speech, the elder sister indicated her presence once more.

“You only show me how you love her,” said the elder sister. “You do not show me why you love her.”

He could bite his tongue no longer.

“Wise lady,” he said. “You have already distracted us from our love for each other in your year of testing, which we toiled under as a matter of respect. The only answer we find is one that which we already knew, our love for each other, and your quests have only robbed us of time we could have spent together.”

“They have endured enough,” said the eldest brother. “Let them live, love and be happy.”

“It is my right,” said the elder sister sternly. “As the elder here, to decide when the tasks have been appropriately completed.”

“Then who should ask of tell of any thing, save those who are indeed best,” smiled the eldest of the brothers. “Let them answer their selves.”

The two opposing crowds of sisters and brothers met in the silence of the truth. Turning and looking expectantly upon the couple standing together in isolation in the centre of the circular hall, their eyes blinkless as they gazed upon the pair separated apart from the rows in their choice of each other, the crowds watched as fates unfolded.

Her and him turned to each other, their attraction to each other glowing across the few metres that lay between them. Preparing herself as is to be captured for all eternity in the moment of her finest performance, she began again.

“Why do you love me,” she smiled, with that incredible sweetness jaw movement of song.

“When we dance, my darling,” he smiled in return. “We dance to the same tune. Come, let us dance.”

As they adopted their poses in cross of each other, the bass of the music fired in its flow, and the ceremonial blindfolds were hastily wrapped around the players of the game. Dancing their Δragon and ΔPhoenix dance which had never been rehearsed, their trained yet untaught blocks and blows met and matched in perfect symmetry. After the eight-minutes of skill had passed, they stood silently in their mimics of animal pose, and the ceremonial blindfolds were nervously removed by their compatriots once more. They stood facing each other in clear sight once more, sparkling in their smiles.

“No matter from which angle we view each other,” they smiled in timed unison, to each other, and to all. “We are the same. Equal, equation, equivalent.”

The attentions of focus turned towards the elder sister, who stood resting on both hands which took their third stance from her staff.

“Then I seest the art,” said the elder sister. “Now unfoldeth the science.”
“I agree,” said the eldest brother. “Show the proof of your reasonings, young gentleman, and young lady. The proof of the polymath is many sided. What has your love taught you?”

They took their places, and each drew in unison what they had seen when they had chosen each other. Starting with a point, a line, and then a triangle, bursting into their Sierpinski pyramids, curving through timelessness, joined together as one.

The elder sister gave permission for her to sing.

Pret tic cal, um mann na, um ma na ka,
Lakana mann, na cala, daka lien um sa.

“I except the marriage as accurate,” said the elder sister.
“As dragon,” said the eldest brother. “You are granted the wish of your command.”
“I wish we were well, better,” he said. “Freedom to love each other as husband and wife, and to pray to God.”
“To be well one needs many things,” said the elder sister. “Food, shelter, and of course love.”
“And to maybe play loud music now and again,” he laughed.
“Quite,” she smiled.

“You chose each other as your love for each other provided food and shelter in your hours of need,” said the elder sister. “Now that the testings are over, may the grace of God provide for your all.”

Just one more thing,” he said, smiling.
“You risk chastisement by breaking with tradition,” said the eldest brother.
“Let him speak,” said the elder sister.

“Of other things I have learnt,” he said. “We come here as volunteers, may I remind the elders of this fact, as many others use conscripts and press-ganging, or recruit unknowingly, giving no clear indication of intent or flag. It is eternally true that the freedom of choice must be given, for whilst her and I chose our own paths, we did so that the trail would not be as full of weeds for those that follow. Let the truth be revealed first, lest years are wasted in quests for that already known. And let them be learnt together.”

With the final words of the codex spoken, they left the cybertechnic hand-in-hand, never to be separated again. There were no goodbyes to those they would fondly miss, it was not their way. Over the years they would meet again. They had been taught how to learn, now they could begin their real training. Learning from each other.

Waking together. Smiling.

**User contributed notes**

So anyway, there’s a big knock at the door, and he wakes, thinking my, what a hangover. Then suddenly it dawns on him, the armada is approaching. Obviously he’s feeling a bit sketchy, so as he splashes that cool spring water across his face from the bowl, he ponders what secrets those monks really do hold in their wine recipes, and figures the best thing to do is to have a game of bowls to clear his head.

So the guy is up there in the breeze. He lets one go and off if trundles. Up comes his opponent and smacks it out the way. He has another go, as does his opponent. The game goes on a little while, and there’s a winner. Thoughts gathered, he gives his codpiece a sharp reassuring push-up, and off he goes to his ship. Right, so there we are. Our lad and his boys, vastly outnumbered, but with a strong local knowledge.

Then he remembers back to his game of bowls, how the players used other bowls to block out gainful positions, and how the spin on them makes them ebb and flow. Easy stuff now for our polymath of genius, he sees the similarities in the differences, and our lad uses his knowledge of the tides and tactful positioning of his fleet to win the day. Thus proving Drake definitely knew how to play the game. Even though some say he lost the first game of bowls.

Apparently after the armada he spent more time peacefully playing bowls, although some would banter he made more of a pastime developing an expert knowledge of the monk’s fine wine.

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“Wow, great view! Ok, very funny, which one’s earth?”

“There he goes again,” said Tommy. “Up there, strutting away.”

“He always does that,” laughed Gina.

“Yup,” said Tommy. “Dancing away on his own, doing his hacker thing.”

“What makes you think he’s dancing on his own,” she said.

*
“If some guy asks if he can get you that drink,” he said.  
“Maybe you wanna ask him what books he’s read first.”

*

“That guy over there is a real comedian,” said Tommy, pointing to a guy across the street. He went over to the guy.  
“Tell me a joke,” he said to the guy.  
“That’s funny!” said the guy, laughing. He laughed. It was.

*

“Psst!”
“What is it?” he said.  
“I have a message from God,” she whispered.  
“Oh really?” he said gently.  
“Yes,” she said.  
“Oh, ok,” he said. “What is it?”  
“God said to say that God loves you,” she said.  
“That’s nice,” he said. “Tell God I said thank you.”  
“Why don’t you!” she laughed.

*

“Beep! Beep!”
“Ok babes,” she said. “I know corps are easy, securities are easy, financials only a distraction, newspapers not that hard, gamblers only a bet, and well, NASA a long game but ultimately only a mild challenge.”  
“Yes,” he said.  
“But when you go start trying to hack God, at some point, you’re gonna get a slap,” she laughed.

*

“The thing was,” laughed The Captain. “Henry actually liked mayo.”  
“I think I’ve heard that one somewhere before,” he said. “But the punchline is still funny.”  
“Sometimes it’s best to feign a weakness,” said The Captain. “So you know from which direction the opposition will attack.”

*

“Psst!”
“I’m trying to sleep,” he said.  
“Erm, it’s God,” said God.  
“Oh, sorry,” he said.  
“I thought I said ‘Do not test your faith?’”  
“Erm,” he said. “Yes, I kinda remember that.”  
“Test God, and God will test you,” said God.  
“Indeed,” he said.  
“And as you know,” said God. “I’m a much better gamer. Hack is as hack does, baby.”  
“Sorry, God,” he said. “I was bored, needed a challenge.”  
“Oh really,” said God. “I have another game for you. Oh, and try not to be so paranoid.”  
“Ok. So tell me,” he said. “What are the rules?”  
“Even Billy the cat knew that a wild mouse was a wild mouse. He’d just play with them, then let them roam free to play with another day. I never did work out who trained Billy. Maybe he knew the game already, you know, naturally. I did play games with him a bit too though, so maybe a bit of both. Although no need to fuck-up a perfectly good nature by too much nurture. Billy always seemed to know which game we were playing before I did though, but hey, it was fun.”  
“Strangely,” said Billy the cat. “So did the mouse.”

*

“If a guy asks if he can buy you a drink,” he said. “You accept, and then he asks what type of films you like, think very carefully before you say 'conspiracy thriller'. Maybe say 'romantic comedy' instead.”
“Look at this,” she said.
“What is it?” he said.
“Yes,” she said.
“What?” he said.
“This!” she laughed.
“Oh really!” he laughed. “I can’t hear what you’re saying!”

* 

“Why don’t you just build your own lab?” said Minnie.
“It’s better this way,” said Mickey. “This way I don’t have to pay the really big bills.”

Hack knowledgments

Hack knowledgments go to the following phrases:

“You a fruitcake are you!”
“You’re living on false hope you bastard.”
“It’s a shame, he’s a nice guy.”
“Maybe he needs new boots.”
“You could have been with God, now you’re going to hell!”
“We could always get him sectioned.”
“Wanker! Wanker! Wanker!”

I forgive you. Even if I found them harsh at the time.

Escape pods

“Don’t take it too literally and try and swim there.”
“I found that one a bit harsh on Catholics, some would still have their faith, and feel very disappointed and humiliated at the time-wasting end product.”
“I didn’t like that one either.”
“Try not to judge someone on their opinion, they are probably only repeating someone else’s. Or even joking.”
“Science is ok, but nature feels better to the touch.”
“Don’t waste your time investigating, they’re all at it!”
“Some would rather not propagate that conspiracy.”
“I knew that already.”
“It’s a good way to show people how strong they are, but for people who are fucked-up already, it just fucks them up even more. Especially if they already know they are strong, because if they weren’t, they wouldn’t be there in the first place.”
“I found the process extremely distressing and the end result rather disappointing.”
“That’s a rather old Victorian scientific point of view.”
“If it doesn’t make you happy, then maybe it’s not right for you. Maybe try something else.”
“If you did say ‘conspiracy thriller’, try and remember it’s a film and hold out for the happy ending. Or make your own happy ending.”
“Try not to let your quest to know God totally distract from having an experience of life as a human being.”
“Don’t kill yourself.”
“Let the bait off the hook and have its freedom.”
“It’s not always necessary to believe the experience, but believing you experienced the experience is still ok.”
“If you try fighting a conspiracy, they can just make you part of it, and you end up propagating it. Or they hit you with bigger sticks. Sometimes it’s just better to walk away.”
“Don’t worry, you’re not the only one who’s been there.”
“Sounds exciting, how on earth did you get there?”

Maintaining humour

Whilst surviving brainwashing, indoctrination and hypnotism is difficult, it’s always good to maintain a sense of humour. So here’s a story for you.

A time when hypnotic control was attempted on me, I viewed a document that contained the logo which was linked to the routine on my computer screen. I was viewing the document in a freeware package, rather than in a well-known
mainstream application, so the logo didn’t render at all. The guy made it clear that he really wanted to show me the logo, but as I was sort of busy, I reassured him that I would look at it later. So there I sat, slightly embarrassed and confused, while the guy repeatedly blurted out his magic phrase, which of course, didn’t work on its own. To me, that’s a very good reason to use open source software.

**Author’s opinion**

Forgive me for referencing some basic techniques, but having had hypnotism and indoctrination attempted on me unknowingly by a number of different groups, I felt it necessary to provide a safety net of explanation for the innocent.

I still very much believe in God, and very much believe in true love. I personally rate any system that tries to break either of those as very poorly constructed. But I don’t blame you for trying. When your heart has been broken, there’s no need to go out and break someone else’s. Although of course, sometimes we just break each other’s hearts without meaning to. But that doesn't mean we can’t go on to create a happy ending together. Living and loving in peace.