

# **SHARDS OF LIGHT**

Short Stories by Bill Meikle



## Introduction

*I think short stories are natural outputs when you're trying to write novels. Spin-offs. Like beads of sweat that sometimes drip off of you, or wood shavings that pile up when you're doing a carving. Like gold nuggets that surprisingly appear when you're panning for gold dust in fine sand.*

*Grab them up and be glad for your luck.*

*Another reason to write novels...*

*Shards of Light.*

*Three of these stories are unfinished. A secret democracy was half written in 1993 in a diary I was travelling with in India. It was too interesting in it's predictions for the future (today) to revise, bicycle subways kind of wanders off, and iDod is missing work at the climax.*

In the story I'm about to tell.  
Throw a coin into a wishing well.  
Where its going we can never tell  
We all ran towards the ringing bell

UNTIL THE FUTURE.



IT CAME UPON A WINTER'S NIGHT,  
THAT I WOULD TRY WITH ALL MY MIGHT,  
TO COAX THE MUSE OUT OF HIS BOX,  
BEYOND THE LATCHES AND THE LOCKS,  
TO DANCE FOR US A LITTLE JIG,  
AND BECOME A LITTLE BIG.  
CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE SOUL,  
IN POETRY, IN ROCK AND ROLL,  
AND WHEN HE'D DONE HIS LITTLE DANCE,  
AND SPLIT THE SEWING ON HIS PANTS,  
I'D CLAP MY HANDS AND SHOUT ENCORE,  
I'D SHOW THEM WHAT APPLAUSE IS FOR,  
CAUSE MUSES SHOW UP LESS AND LESS,  
THERE'S SOME WHO'D SAY IT'S FOR THE BEST,  
BUT ME I LOVE MY POETRY,  
TENACITY ALACRITY,  
I GUESS I'D SAY I'M REAL ENTHUSED,  
TO GET THE CHANCE TO BE BEMUSED.



## Wordings

Chronologically, the nuance engine received more attention before the unusual eclipse.

Ramifications propagated, engendering seven chains of events.

This is one of them.

It involves the Kremulon, manifest emperors of the region in question. Stolid waxmen, they walk in yellow shadow, emanating a stink of whisky and whores.

We were sentries, armed and terrified, tasked to protect the yellow powder outside the mines from the hungry Wotnoby. The Kremulon were miners of sulphur, steaming amarillo in the night as we stood guard.

! In the aftermath, the nuance engine should be seen as a dominant force.

It is no easy task, predicting an eclipse so encompassing that we lived in icy darkness for a year.

It was coming.

Unbeknownst and unannounced, a chemical rainbow appeared, warning us, pummelling ice flows on the mountains far above.

In ripples of heat we stood below, painted in golden dust, experiencing pain, dry mouth, exchanging rebellious whispers, resenting our Kremulon dictators so bangled and unworthy.

Then darkness befell us as the Nuance Engine had foretold.

And in the year long black silence I shivered in the night, and discovered you.

These are my wordings to you who shared my darkness, you glimmer in the night, in hopes that you will reconsider.

Perhaps perchance to reflect on our time together at least.

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No shakespeare am I. Nor even Antegro, noble poet of our times. I am a humble sentry, a guard at the mines, and you found me in the darkness.

We were both drawn to the cafeteria. Railings to feel and food to eat, I felt your touch and I held your hand.

I touched your face.

Then we were hugging in the night to keep warm.

After that things proceeded naturally and then it got downright carnal.

I experienced feelings in that silent darkness that I'll never forget.

We spent a month together in animal bliss and when the lights came back on you left.

Clearly I feel better than I look.

I was impressed on my side, if it matters. The beautiful woman I held in the cold was real. Stood there naked blinking for a moment. Then you got embarrassed, grabbed your things, Made your exit.

I understand the scenario. You work in administration, perhaps a secretary or an executive. A lowly worker with a nice warm body was good to hold on to in the cold.  
I need to let it go.

Only a few white collars listened to the nuance engine and joined us underground. Most died up above in the chemical rain. When the chemical rainbows turned into hellfire. The disease that rotted wounds and spread infection through the towns probably killed most of them up above.

I was below with you.

You kept me alive.

These wordings are my long shot, my hail mary pass, and I send them to you, although I know not your address or even your name.

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The silence engulfed us.

In the cold night we were unable to speak, some kind of explosion had deafened us. That's why I endeavour to speak in a literary manner now. Because those few words you whispered on the final day said so much. It was poetry.

If I am to amaze and ingratiate, I must impress you with my out-of-the-ordinary mind. You already know my body. My father was home schooled and he home schooled me. Lame little asteroid with 50 people exploring the margins.

While Dickens and Milton are old friends I have gaping gaps in my knowledge in other fields.

My physics is awful. My math is a joke.

Just tunnels of mnemonic memory tricks taught to me by my father. That's what fills my head.

So I pin a tiny paper to the bulletin board at your work.

All it reads is your poem, which I have learned now and studied.

If you read it please call. I'm sure you office types know my numbers.

My name is Lance. Lance Gatsby. Human being.

The nuance engine rolled into town like a circus carney, erecting a tent and starting a tout session complete with 'step right ups'.

But the pitch was unusually plausible. The engine seemed to model things more effectively than the status quo.

"The official model predicts that planet Entaurus 3 will pass us by safely," it began.

"The nuance engine calculates that explosions on far off Taness 2, have thrown planet Entaurus out of alignment.

It will actually pass inside of our sun, entraining with it, causing a year long solar eclipse,"

There were nervous giggles from the audience, and shouts of disbelief. But as the days passed and we understood the images and calculations,

Some of us grew troubled.

We looked in to survival.

We built the underground. That's where I found you.

I got your words.

A memo from corporate headquarters, a Caysey Jarvis. That's you isn't it. The legal department no less!

'Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.'

That's John Donne isn't it.

He also wrote:

'Now thou hast loved me one whole day,  
Tomorrow when thou leav'st, what wilt thou say?'

I am your servant Caysey. Treat me well.

Ours was not the only story of bonding that occurred when the eclipse took place. Many women paired up underground and they survived.

A thinning took place in the personnel. Stupid administrators (mostly pudgy stubborn males who wouldn't listen to the Nuance engine) all died, and the non-listening workers went with them.

Those of us left were smart people, adaptors, mostly female administrators, and their studly workers (smart enough to listen to the Nuance engine) who helped them through the darkness.

A natural selection had taken place.

Our mine got more efficient and made more money.

Everybody thrived.

Then the Wotnoby came.

I wasn't working, I had the day off, but the explosions could be heard from my apartment. The Wotnoby aren't wild animals who eat sulphur, just very close to it. If wild animals carried weapons and threw grenades.

They don't for example, have language, just a chimp-like series of grunts.

Next day at work I was taking open fire as I tried to protect the sulphur they were eating. I thought of you, Caysey, as I battled these devils. They aren't very dangerous, just annoying.

I had time to think of our time in the darkness.

'Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.'

Got your latest memo Caysey. About the cabin you've borrowed, the weekend away.

I'm in. Let festivities commence.

Thanks for an excellent weekend.

If these are my memos to you then let the record show that you were tight again on this occasion. In the darkness you were like that for the first two weeks.

Then on the fifteenth evening you softened. You were clay in my hands to mould.

We must reconvene and pursue this softening.

What words are these that pass before my eyes, but tortured searchings from the centre of your soul.

In poetics you speak to my centre as well.

So I attempt a reply. A holy communion of that which is at the core.

Let us gather our forces and overcome this speed bump on our love. This zit on our passion.

You feel that I am an unworthy partner sometimes.

Your misgivings are written on your poetry. On the things you order at a restaurant.

In your smile.

I feel that you are my opportunity.

My way out of the darkness.

If only I could reach into your heart.

Into your centre.

Thank you for your excellent reply. It was both scholarly and erudite.

I hit 280 on the bench press this week.

I shot some Wotnoby.

We have to meet in the physical not wordings way.

## XC

Sand. That's all Jeering could see, in all directions. Ground coral really.

"It's just Lamu. Not the Sahara desert," said the Maiden looking at the sand dunes.

"Where the hell is the ocean?" asked Jeering in confusion, out of breath.

"5 minutes that way," she said pointing north.

"I thought we were going to experience exotic pleasures back here, but it's a bit of a slog isn't it?" said Jeering plodding onwards through the sand.

"There's always tonight," said the Maiden flirtatiously.

"Once I wash the sand out of my butt crack," said Jeering wistfully.

Jeering had met the Maiden in Nairobi. At the Thorn tree, a watering hole for travelers.

She was German, her name was Elsie.

Jeering had taken a women's studies course back at Williams, the ivy league school in the U.S. he'd just graduated from. That's why he was calling her 'The Maiden,' not 'the Conquest' as was his habit back in the dorms.

Jeering was a dog. Proud of it too.

The Maiden didn't care. She'd flown down from Nairobi to an exotic island off the coast of Africa with a rich yank. He had some teenage boy baggage but underneath he was really sweet.

She was working in Kenya, on her 2 weeks off. He was traveling for a year before heading home to the rat race.

They both were trying to have fun fast.

To a cafe at the edge of town. Goat curry, and for the tourists a bottle of wine.

They stared into each others eyes politely, but this wasn't love, this was wild human abandon.

Then drunken, back in town, giggling their way down the narrow streets. Back to their hotel room.

"Lamu is a car free city," said Jeering deadpan.

"I noticed," said the Maiden smiling.

"Hitchiking is poor," he went on seriously.

"Tough to catch a ride with no cars," agreed the Maiden.

"Dhows are your best bet," Jeering pointed out.

Sailboats with triangular sails.

"I saw a lot of Donkeys too," said the Maiden.

"Mule injected," said Jeering.

Then naked, lying on the roof of their lodge, behind bamboo curtains on one side and with the ocean on the other, Jeering was ranting.

"This place is fucking romantic," he said.

"No cars, just sailboats," said Elsie.

"Old men in fezes playing dominoes in front of the mosque..." said Jeering.

"Children learning to fly kites from a traveller with a backpack," said Elsie.

"Spices, they are the clove kings," said Jeering.

"Cinnamon. i think I smelled that," said Elsie.

"I liked getting lost with you at the beech today," said Jeering.

"We should get lost together again soon," said Elsie. And they snuggled and looked up at the stars.

Next day they went out to the beech again.

They ignored the world class snorkeling on Lamu and built a sand castle on dry land.

"I am interested in digging a hole to China," said Jeering shoveling madly.

"I dig holes" said the Maiden, and they embarked on a large excavation.

We're talking a 2 meter circle rapidly becoming 2 meters deep. Jeering sat in the cool moist sand at the bottom of the hole and happily shoveled loads into a bucket to be handed up.

"It's kind of an anti castle," said Jeering.

"The opposite of a pile of sand," agreed Elsie.

Elsie joined Jeering at the bottom of the hole, and they were flirting towards concave congress.

Then they fell through.

"It's quite amazing that you never found this," said a voice.

They were in an underground cavern with brick lined walls. A cloud of dust obscured most of the details.

There was a strange looking man sitting on a chair, reading a magazine.

"Scientific American, July 2013." He held up what he was reading. The cover read: 'To Seek Out New Life.'

"I read that on the plane over," lied Jeering.

"Who the hell are you, where are we?" interjected Elsie.

"My name is Mr. Smith. I am from one of the M class planets that I am reading about here," said Mr. Smith.

"An alien," said Jeering.

"If you can see my planet with primitive telescopes it's kind of just across the street, not so alien," he said.

"Your English is excellent too. No trace of an M-class accent at all," Jeering said doubtfully.

"I learned from old Beatles songs. After that it was easy," Mr. Smith replied.

"So you guys get our radio signals?" asked Elsie.

"And your awful TV. I wish we got cable," said Mr. Smith.

"Need a dish," said Jeering. He walked around, surveying the complex.

A while later Jeering was scraping the sand off some sculpture he'd found in a corner of the cave, and Mr Smith was sitting down again reading 'Scientific American'.

"They're collecting information on Gasses on the new planets across space. It's only a matter of time before they find oxygen." he said.

"And that's a problem?" asked Jeering.

"Oxygen points to life. It's created by plants," said Mr. Smith

"And you don't want us to seek out new life," wondered Jeering.

"We just want to control the timing," said Mr. Smith.

"The timing for.." asked Jeering.

"Interspecies contact," said Mr. Smith.

"Oh. that," mumbled Jeering.

"First thing we found with oxygen was a rock with lichen," said Mr. Smith. "Still, that was verifiable life on another planet," he added.

"We found some water I think," said Jeering.

"Water's a good start," said Mr. Smith. "It has oxygen in it."

"So we're just about to find you guys?" asked Jeering.

"Well we hope it will take a while, but it's probably a matter of years not decades," said Mr. Smith.

"Awesome," said Jeering.

"That's why we selected you," said Mr. Smith.

"I've been selected?" Jeering replied.

"Yes six humans are being asked to visit our planet," said Mr. Smith.

"Ambassadors," said Jeering.

Elsie got to come along on the transport ship to Mr. Smith's planet.

"What's your home planet called?" she asked Mr. Smith.

"XCVFWS4G32" he answered.

"I think I'll just call it planet XC for short," said Elsie. And so it came to be known.

There were 5 other ambassadors along, some of them with their large families. The rich guy was from Africa. The poor guy from America. Someone was playing against stereotypes. The other 3 were Asians: designers and artists, a poet too.

Jeering was non-comital. He sat in a padded lounge and read the XC literature.-

"So much like us and yet really different," said Jeering.

"The biology seems to be the same," said Mr. Smith.

"Except different," said Jeering.

"Different sun to adapt to," said Mr Smith.

"Different gravity," said Jeering.

"I mean even on Lamu I wouldn't have walked down the street," said Mr. Smith.

"You have a blue tinge, but nobody would really notice," said Jeering.

"And we are kind of squished," said Mr. Smith.

"Different gravity, like flounders.." said Jeering. "I'm surprised your voice works the same."

"It's an implant. Our native audio is sub audibly low or above what you can hear, like whales."

A month into the two month long journey Mr. Smith got talking one day in the common room.

"Of course we want to start formal relations with the Earth just not too soon," he was saying.

"We still show signs of immaturity," suggested Jeering.

"Exactly," said Mr. Smith.

"So why the ambassadors?" asked Elsie.

"We want the relations to begin," said Mr. Smith.

"Glad to meet you," said Li Fong, the sarcastic architect from Beijing.

"Have you eaten rice?" asked Mr. Smith in polite Chinese.

"Got some grub an hour ago," Li Fong answered in English.

"The ship is well stocked..." he added.

"So the timeline: August 2013, today you're reading an article about astronomy on Earth," said Jeering to Mr. Smith.

"How us humans are sampling gases on dozens of new planets we've found," said Elsie.

"3 to 5 year. That's my prediction on how long it will take to find a simple oxygen atmosphere," said Mr. Smith.

"But that's just moss and such," said Jeering.

"Then another 5 years to find a more complex atmosphere" said Mr. Smith.

"Then what, a meeting you're trying to avoid?" asked Elsie.

"Postpone," said Mr. Smith.

They didn't talk about it for a few weeks..

In a back eddy moment Jeering found Elsie in the dining space on the ship and they ate together.

"I never really asked you the smalltalk questions like what do you do for a living?" he said.

"That's why I liked you," said Elsie.

"What do you do for a living?" he asked rudely.

"I'm an agricultural extension worker. We're looking at rice farming on the Tana River delta," Elsie finally answered..

"Not far from Lamu," enthused Jeering.

"Rice farming with hippos nearby," said Elsie.

"They found artifacts from as far away as China in the great Zimbabwe ruins." Jeering pointed out.

"I wonder if someone followed the coastline from India and brought rice with them too," speculated Elsie.

"Exactly. I wonder how the aliens learned to make macaroni and cheese," said Jeering eating from his plate, changing the subject.

"Not too bad," said Elsie joining in.

"So you are an expert on farming rice with hippos?" said Jeering with his mouth full.

"Pulling hippo ploughs," agreed Elsie with a straight face, drinking a glass of water.

Then they were there. Planet XC.

No parades or news conferences just an under the radar visit.

The woman in charge was called Miss Jones.

She was the one who had selected the ambassadors for this mission.

"If we all look squished to you, then you look stretched to us," she said as she walked into their first meeting.

"Our footprints are stretch marks," volunteered Jeering.

"I don't think you should try walking down the street," said Miss Jones.

"Mr Smith almost tried walking down our streets in Lamu," said Elsie.

"Looks too squished," said Miss Jones.

"And then there's the fact that nobody can hear your speech up here," said Miss Jones.

"The only reason you can talk to us is that you have implants," said Jeering.

She moved her lips silently.

"That's what we sound like to you, a dog whistle," said Miss Jones.

"So you're squished and you talk in dog whistles, aren't you at least way ahead of us in technology?" said Jeering.

"About ten years," said Miss Jones.

"That ship we got here on was decades ahead of our technology," said Jeering.

"We didn't build that, we bought it," said Miss Jones.

"So you're in contact with other, more advanced species?" asked Jeering.

"Right now we have official contact with twelve planets, but we've heard of lots more," said Miss Jones.

"And now us," said Elsie.

"Slowly but surely," said Miss Jones.

The ambassadors were left in the complex to acclimatize. A couple of days later Miss Jones came back.

"I have a stalling mechanism." she said.

"I hope it can keep us humans busy for 10 years." said Jeering.

"Fear. Essentially it's fear," she said.

"Go on," said Elsie.

"10 years from now the humans are going to find planet Jaron 4, which will have the most advanced biology they've come upon yet. Around about then we're hoping that long distance imaging will really leap forward for the humans. To the point that microscope scale images can be gathered from mosses and lichen growing there."

"Maybe you will have to teach us how to do that by backchannels," said Jeering.

"Perhaps," said Miss Jones. "The microscope images reveal that some of this moss has been genetically engineered,"

"Nice," said Jeering. "Our first proof of aliens."

"And this wouldn't be the genetic engineering from planet XC, which is only a little better than humans, but some stuff we purchase and plant from a planet very far away," said Miss Jones.

"So not just the aliens in the hood but truly intimidating ones." said Jeering.

"That will shut us up and cause us to think for at least 10 years," said Elsie.

Li Fong, the sarcastic architect from Beijing was ranting back at the complex.

"I think this whole need to stall is about the Chinese," he said.

"This point in human history is about the Chinese," said Jeering.

"We're becoming super powerful, and they don't trust how it's going to go down," said Li Fong.

"One bad future would be the new Chinese superpowers overthrowing the world and turning us all into robots," said Jeering.

"Or the war that breaks out when the West feels too dominated," said Li Fong.

"Things to avoid," said Elsie.

"Ur at least stall until they're resolved," said Li Fong.

And then with little ceremony they were returned to Earth.

"We weren't even told to be quiet about our journey," said Li Fong.

"Because nobody will believe us," said Jeering.  
And so it would go.

That is not to say that a strong anecdotal whisper of the stories didn't exist.

The word was out, Jeering and Li Fong were cult heroes if not big media heroes.

Elsie was back at work in Kenya when Jeering showed up in a Land Rover.

"I got a job doing archeology on Lamu," he said.

"Discover the underground," she said.

"Exactly," he said and they ate some rice Elsie had grown on the Tana river delta and drank Tusker beer, Kenya's finest.

5 years later Jeering and Elsie were in London for a reunion with Li Fong and Branford Rice the wealthy Black ambassador from Cambridge.

They were pleasantly surprised when Mr. Smith and Miss Jones were at the table next to them.

"I guess you got the communications we were sending about this reunion," said Jeering.

"We had to be here," said Mr. Smith.

"Things proceeding on schedule I trust?" said Li Fong. Mr. Smith had the latest issue of Scientific American from July 2018. 'Finding new life'.

"They found some oxygen planets just like we predicted," said Mr. Smith.

"We'll have to meet again in another 5 years," said Jeering.

2023 and they met again, this time in a noodle shop in Beijing.

All of the 6 ambassadors were there. Jeering and Li Fong, Brandford Rice, and the three asian women.

Mr. Smith and Miss Jones showed up a little late and squeezed into the table with a large crowd all around.

"Not the most private place for a meeting." said Miss Jones.

"Pretty anonymous though," said Jeering.

"The stalling mechanism is in place. From latest reports, planet Jaron 4 will be discovered any day now," said Mr. Smith.

"And then, thanks to the tech you bought, we'll be too intimidated to meet anybody, stay at home types" said Jeering.

"We'll see how it plays out," said Miss Jones.

"The 6 of us are a leak, we know the ruse," said Li Fong.

"We want the problem to be solved, we want this relationship to grow," said Miss Jones.

"And yet you're fairly sure that we won't be heard," said Jeering.

"Yes," said Mr. Smith.

The news broke that alien artifacts had been discovered.

The details about Jaron 4 and the genetically engineered moss were being kept secret. It would take years for the super advanced modifications to be studied before average people could gain access.

China and NATO were about to go to war. They said it was over Taiwan, but it was really about China's ascendancy to power. They were getting 'too big for their britches' the Americans said and 'needed to be taken down a notch'.

"It's just like the XCers predicted," said Jeering, reading the paper.

Jeering was at law school, following the path of many Ivy league liberal arts school grads to the bar. He was still with Elsie, they had been bonded forever by their star trip. This was kind of too bad for Elsie. as Jeering was pretty incompatible with everyone.

Then Jeering was on 'The Feed', a popular interview show at that time.

"Sources say that you predicted findings on planet Jaron 4 exactly." said the interviewer.

"That's because I knew exactly what was going to happen," said Jeering.

"Because you and a group of 5 others were transported to a planet near Jaron 4," said the interviewer respectfully.

"Yes, Planet XC and we were given information that the whole gambit on planet Jaron 4 was a stalling tactic,

implemented by the Xcers to gain 10 years of time while Sino-Euro relations are resolved ,” said Jeering.

"Stalling for what?" asked the interviewer.

"Before Interspecies contact," said Jeering.

“Of course," said the Interviewer.

"They want to meet us, but they want us to get our house in order first," said Jeering.

"The whole China vs Nato thing.” said the Interviewer.

"Exactly," said Jeering.

"So how did they set up Jaron 4 to stall?"asked the interviewer.

"They introduced some genetically engineered moss,” said Jeering.

“That would be the secret that authorities are keeping from us,” said the interviewer.

"Yes, but it isn't really genetic engineering from planet XC. They're only about 10 years ahead of us, they used some technology they bought on the open market from a distant advanced race called the Sith." said Jeering.

"So they're in contact with other races?" asked the interviewer.

"15 now but they know about several others," said Jeering.

"Is there a way that we can reach these beings?"asked the interviewer.

"They're monitoring this signal even as we speak, I think if we arranged a meeting in a couple of months they would come down," said Jeering.

"No frigging way," said the interviewer.

"This will be interesting," said Jeering.

Two months later Jeering was on THE FEED again. Mr Smith and Miss Jones were out in the studio audience although only Jeering knew.

"Welcome back to our show Mr. Jeering," the interviewer began.

"Glad to be here," answered Jeering.

"Didn't you say that citizens of planet XC look squished to us?" asked the announcer.

"Just flattened from the top down, not like flounders," answered Jeering.

"So if I put a salmon's head in a vice and squished it would that look about right?" the interviewer went over to a how-to set that was part of the set and graphically used the tools.

Mr. Smith and Miss Jones were seen to be leaving the audience.

"Well, diplomacy zero, hot headed ignorance 1, I can see why humans won't be ready for another decade or so," said Jeering.

"And stay out!" said the interviewer to nobody. Signifying nothing.

Time went by and it was revealed that Mr. Smith and Miss Jones had come down this last time uncloaked. There were pictures. Simulations had reconstructed a pressure wave when they came down cloaked to the last ambassssdor's reunion. This time it was broad daylight. They'd walked like Gandhi into the human fire with peaceful intentions.

The announcer had scared them away.

"That guy is an asshole," said Jeering to the anchorwoman on the tv interview.

"People are either open to the aliens or they become assholes," said the interviewer.

"It would seem," said Jeering.

"Elsie's pregnant!" said Jeering to the screen.

"Congratulations," said Mr. Smith in reply.

In a weird press conference the president of the United States had talked to Mr. Smith and Miss Jones on Skype.

The technology to make the signal go fast enough came from XC if earth based stuff went that far there would be a huge lag.

Now Jeering talked every day, keeping in touch.

"Do you think the baby was conceived on XC?" asked Miss Jones.

"Are you asking if we got sexy on XC?" laughed Jeering.

"The gravity is different, this person may look..." said Miss Jones.

"Squished," Jeering finished the sentence.

"Yes," agreed Miss Smith.

"Wear it with pride I say," said Jeering.

"We'll see..." said Mr. Smith.

And then, one month later Jeering was on THE FEED again.

The interviewer had Miss Jones on a live video feed from CX, and was apologizing profusely.

"I don't know what came over me. It was something about arriving unannounced," said the Interviewer.

"Protocol. We are sort of the team in charge of starting things off informally," said Miss Jones.

"Get things started with anecdotal power," said Jeering.

"I'm thinking official recognition will happen soon," said Miss Jones.

Official relations between Earth and planet XC took about a year to get underway. Treaties between China and Nato had to be signed as a condition. In the meantime Mr. Smith and Miss Jones introduces a friend Mr. Salmon, who was in charge of pushing the boundaries on race relations.

"I want to see if I can cause anger that might become dangerous," he said.

"Weird," said Jeering.

It turned out that Mr. Salmon was more like a subversive comedian than a dangerous stranger.

"Don't tell us the truth so much," Jeering would say in fits of laughter, "it hurts too bad."

Miss Jones began long conversations with Jeering as Elsie's pregnancy went on.

"I chose you because you were a poor American, I wanted to play you off against the rich African," said Miss Jones.

"I went to an Ivy League school," protested Jeering.

"But you got there on scholarship. You write award winning essays but you grew up in a trailer park," said Miss Jones.

"You know too much," said Jeering.

"I do my homework," said Miss Jones.

"What's with the three Asian women?" Jeering asked Miss Jones.

"Most humans are Asian women," said Miss Jones.

"Statistically yes, but with Li Fong doesn't that make it a bit too many?" asked Jeering.

"About 70% should be Asian if it was a good representation. But Sita Maba is from South America, living in Kerela," said Miss Jones.

"I guess you covered most places but Europe," said Jeering.

"You are from Europe too," said Miss Jones.

And slowly we caught a glimpse of everyday life on Planet XC.

Mr Smith lived in a cave built into a mountain, Miss Jones in an apartment near the centre.

"The centre for Alien Studies, that's where we stayed," said Jeering.

"Near where I live," said Miss Jones.

Official relations between Earth and planet XC were stalled for years. It was going to take the decade that had been predicted to bring relations between Asia and NATO to a resolution. Then XC could gain the attention it deserved. Until then it was informal learning. The best kind.

Elsie's baby arrived in May. Jaron Smith Jones Lancaster. Jeering was the proud father. The godparents were on a planet far away.

"His head is only a little squished," said Jeering.

"A sign of character," said Elsie.

And Jaron would grow up the first of many trans-planetary babies. Miss Jones would have a child too, Quez, fathered by a man on XC, with Jeering as a middle name, he'd grow up talking to Jaron on Earth, and they didn't think it was very alien at all.

Miss Jones' husband, Tomag, was a recluse spending most of his time far from the city at a fly fishing lake where there was an ancestral cabin. When he was in town he was a professor at the university.

"Jeering we have to talk," he said one day over the video phone.

"I'm glad you said that. Your wife and I talk so much," said Jeering at home at their apartment.

"We need to, uh, broaden your perspective on the universe," said Tomag.

"Just meeting another species will probably take a hundred years to integrate," said Jeering.

"Yes it's good to learn in baby steps," said Tomag.

"So what have you got?" asked jeering tired of delay.

"Those underground caves on Lamu, where you met Mr. Smith, do you think that he got there with a ship?" asked Tomag.

"I always assumed so," said Jeering.

Tomag stood up and the image became his point of view.

"I want to show you something," he said.

"I always wanted to look around your cottage," said Jeering enthusiastically.

Tomag went down a path away from the lake to a dusty mountainside. Beneath some tarps he revealed a door.

"This is our cave entrance," he opened it and walked in.

"Most cabins on earth don't have that," said Jeering with curiosity.

The image proceeded down a hallway. Some rooms were finished like the inside of a house, some were stone cavern walls.

"You've been told about The Sith, now it's time to learn about their ancestors from thousands of years ago, The Old Ones," said Tomag.

"So this is an ancient culture that exists on The Sith Planet," said Jeering.

"Only in ruins and ancient scriptures," corrected Tomag.

"And.."encouraged Jeering.

"The old ones travelled all over the star system, further even than the Sith have managed to go,"Tomag went on.

"So we're talking about ancestors more advanced than their children?" queried Jeering.

"Mystically so," agreed Tomag. "But the Sith may not even be the children of the Old Ones. Kind of like how a modern Egyptian doesn't have much to do with the people who built the pyramids."

"So much lost learning," Jeering said. 'Anyways this is all leading up to this," he opened a door to a dazzling cavern. Sapphires and Rubies encrusted the walls. Diamonds marked a central circle.

"Was this place built by the old ones?" asked Jeering.

"Exactly. It's a portal room and they're all over the place, even on earth," Tomag said.

"A Portal room, does that mean it connects to other planets?" asked Jeering.

"The old ones walked the universe with a freedom that's hard to comprehend," Tomag answered.

"Even to earth," marvelled Jeering.

"Even to earth," agreed Tomag.

Elsie and Jaron were at the restaurant already when Jeering sat down to join them.

"Where have you been?" asked Elsie.

"Oh just in an ancient cavern on a far off star's planet," Jeering said distracted.

"Every day stuff," Elsie agreed seriously.

"Mm" said Jeering playing with the baby.

But the portals were real. Jeering's entire model of the universe had rearranged.

Quite a day.

"So we're talking about a universe that's like a Swiss cheese full of holes," Jeering and Elsie were lying in bed talking astrophysics.

"And these 'Old Ones' found the natural tunnels and built shrines?" asked Elsie.

"We're not sure of their religious significance but each portal seems like a ceremonial, holy, place," said Jeering ignoring the pun.

"And they were hidden so the natives couldn't find them?" asked Elsie.

"Ours are deep under the Sahara Desert," answered Jeering.

"Tough to find," guessed Elsie.

"Get this, There are 12 species the XCers know. Humans are the only ones that haven't found their holes in the cheese," laughed Jeering.

"Us Earth-folk are not great on underground imaging. My uncle was looking for water on his ranch. a good place to dig a well. The experts didn't have high tech gadgets but they used 'witching' where you walk over the land with a triangular stick, in the 21st century!" protested Elsie.

"They wait for a watery feeling?" wondered Jeering.

"I guess," shrugged Elsie.

"No wonder we didn't find the Portal," concluded Jeering.

"We need Google Earth underground," suggested Elsie.

"x-ray vision like Superman," agreed Jeering.

Tomag was in the tunnel again when Jeering called.

"On earth I would be called a professor of archaeology," he told Jeering, taking some notes.

"How about weird squished headed alien guy?" suggested Jeering.

Tomag laughed. "That too," he agreed.

"Are we going back to the portal today?" asked Jeering.

"We're there right now, in fact I wanted to show you this," the video went dark although you could tell Tomag was moving.

"What is it?" asked Jeering."

"I've gone down the tunnel that leads to earth," Tomag answered.

"So you could give me a phone call?" Jeering was amazed.

"I'm deep under the Sahara, but if I had a phone..." Tomag was in a place with a little light from an odd glowing source.

"Still you got here so fast!" Jeering enthused.

"The ancients walked the universe like a stroll in the park," Tomag agreed.

"So what are we going to do next?" Jeering loved this.

Tomag was at a series of cavern entrances that Jeering guessed lead to places all over the earth.

"We make a phone call," said Tomag choosing a tunnel and setting off.

Elsie and Jaron were at the restaurant already when Jeering sat down to join them.

"What's this?" Elsie was looking at some papers that Jeering had placed in front of her.

"It's a crossroads," answered Jeering coyly.

"Huh?" puzzled Elsie.

"On one path we stay in the city, I stay in Law School," began Jeering.

"And the other?" Elsie asked although she knew the answer.

"We fly to Africa and walk through a doorway to the universe," enthused Jeering.

"Tomag will be waiting under Lamu won't he?" Elsie reasoned.

"We can walk with him to the stars," Jeering answered.

"You already quit school didn't you?" Elsie guessed.

"Those plane tickets leave in a week," confirmed Jeering.

"I like getting lost with you," Elsie said.

"Let's get lost together" Jeering agreed and baby Jaron burped in confirmation.

**That was the year that cellphones started controlling external devices. Wireless bluetooth speakers were everywhere. Lenses that send their images to your phone...Microphones that amplify**

your voice but also save a copy of your performance to your phone...

Mechanical ants performed ballets controlled by a phone that year.

Robots in a warehouse made decisions in collaboration with a phone to fill an order.

Model planes in the sky performed elaborate tricks controlled by a phone.

That was the year I met Trickster Raven.

He was sitting down on the dock at Granville Island when I met him. Not busking, but hanging with a busker, a guy who did electronica with a solar panel.

"Pretty quiet," I said.

"Cloudy day," said Trickster.

Another time he was down at the water unloading a cargo from a radio controlled sea kayak.

"How does it move?" I asked him.

"Little propellor powered by an electric engine," he answered.

"Lithium cells," I said impressed by his array of laptop batteries.

"We have a bunch of kayaks I control from here," he showed a little map on his cellphone.

"So each of those little kayak images exists in the real world?" there were a couple of dozen boats spread out around the lower mainland. Up the rivers, in the inlets.

Sure, we do courier work, a little package delivery, run up the rivers, over to all the islands," he answered,

"People think it's a romantic way to send flowers," I guessed.

"Exactly," Trickster answered.

A third time he was selling scallops on the dock.

"Direct from Oyster bay," he shouted.

"East coast of the island up by Qualicum isn't it?" I asked Trickster.

"Never been there myself," he answered.

"How far do your boats go?" I wondered.

"Including dead zones, all the way up to Port Hardy," he answered.

"I guess they can sail unassisted through the areas where there is no service" I ventured.

"Interesting problem running a boat without a phone connection," said Trickster.

"That's how boats have always been," I thought but didn't say out loud.

"You need to know about the island network," Trickster said softly.

I let it go that time but it was going to come up again.

A month later I saw Trickster again on the street downtown. Granville and Hastings, and he looked so at home hanging with the street people, I hated to interrupt.

"So what is the island network?" I walked up to him and asked.

"Hey there, what's your name?" he replied recognizing me.

"Patric," I answered leaving out my surname.

"Irish," he guessed.

"My grandfather," I allowed.

"The island network connects squatters who live on little islands up the coast, north of Port Hardy, there are 500 clicks of uninhabited temperate coastline up there" said Trickster.

"Past cell service," I said.

"Each camp has a dish, hidden in the trees," said Trickster.

"And your Kayaks pass between them?" I asked.

"It turns out that small packages are big," said Trickster.

"Illegal packages," I ventured.

"Initially yes, but that didn't work. They kept getting ripped off," Trickster laughed.

"So what do you move now?" I asked.

"Mostly watts. We have a system of buoys that charge batteries out in the deep water, kind of like those flashlights you shake to recharge," Trickster bragged.

"I've seen them selling them from a barge, down by Chinatown," I said.

"Renting them," corrected Trickster.

"And they come all the way down from Port Hardy?" I asked.

"In Cambodia 60% of people sit and watch TV at night powered by a car battery. Why not us?" said Trickster.

"Because we have plugs in the wall," I said.

"You do, my clients are mostly street people," Raven corrected.

"It's because of you that I see rubbies on the street watching TV." I said.

"There is a third world country inside Canada. The silent poor. I work for them," said Trickster.

A few months went by.

I was studying sociology at SFU not really thinking about Trickster Raven.

But while Marx and Engels were a lot of fun, I couldn't help thinking of the real world and Trickster trying to get power to the people on the street.

I went looking for him at Granville market.

He was sitting in a cafe with A GQ-ish looking guy in a business suit. Apparently they had smoked a joint together, because they were talking very fast and had red eyes.

"85% of the land in British Columbia is owned by the government. Crown land," Trickster asserted.

"And yet most people can't afford to own property," added the business suit.

"Patric, have you met Ryan?" he's my lawyer." said Trickster interrupting to introduce me.

"Associate," corrected Ryan shaking my hand.

"I thought it might be good to have someone with a law degree give Trickster a refresher on the land tenure system in BC," I said.

"We're here to help," said Ryan making a gesture like he was there for other reasons.

"A lot of our camps have legitimate tenure," pointed out Trickster.

"Mushroom pickers, herring fishermen, Geoduck divers, a pretty fringe bunch," Ryan added skeptically.

"I think I'm going to do a paper on the island network," I interjected.

"My B.A. is in sociology too. Trickster told me," said Ryan.

"A test of your ability to put up with bullshit, I opined.

"And law school is a test of your ability to deliver bullshit," said Ryan.

"So you guys put up with and deliver bullshit, can you imagine people who eat promises? Masticate hearsay?" said Trickster.

Our chat went on until the cafe closed.  
Ryan and I remain friends today.

It had been a full year since I had seen Trickster Raven.  
I'd finished my sociology degree and had taken a year off to decide on a topic for my master's thesis.

I heard that Ryan was now a full time lawyer for the Island Network.

I was down at the science centre one day, underneath the big aluminum geodesic golfball, by the Whitespot.

I looked down from the cement walkway and who should I see on the dock below but Trickster Raven talking on a cellphone.

I made my way down the ramp to see him, rehearsing all the things I meant to say if I ever ran into this guy again.

"Patric!" he called to me as I approached.

"My kayak gets here in a minute and I just called a commercial courier service, can you take a picture when the kayak gets here?"

"Good to see you," I offered picking out the camera app on my phone.

"Ryan was talking about you the other day," Trickster gossiped.

"My profs know him, star pupil," I confirmed.

"I hope we can afford to keep him," Trickster shrugged.

"How is business selling to street people with no cash?" I asked.

"This is high end flower delivery we're working on now." said Trickster.

The kayak arrived and I took a picture of Trickster retrieving the flowers from the front hold.

I sent him the image because his phone had printing abilities.

"The customer will love this," Trickster enthused pinning the image onto the flowers.

"What good is a romantic kayak delivery without proof," I pointed out.

In mythology, and in the study of folklore and religion, a trickster is a god, goddess, spirit, man, woman, or anthropomorphic animal who plays tricks or otherwise disobeys normal rules and conventional behavior. It is suggested by Hansen (2001) that the term "Trickster" was probably first used in this context by Daniel G. Brinton in 1885.

I got the text from Trickster just a few hours later.

It was a quote from Wikipedia giving me some background on his name.

"What about that carving?" I texted back to him. We had talked earlier about the Bill Reid carving in the Museum of Anthropology. Depicting mankind as albino crabs living in geoduck shells. The creation myth says Raven discovers man that way.

"My family name is more like Edgar Alan Poe's 'The Raven'," he texted back.

"But dad was doing acid that year I was born, and he named me after the Haida creation myth," Trickster confirmed.

The sculpture of The Raven and the First Men depicts the story of human creation. According to Haida legend, the Raven found himself alone one day on Rose Spit beach in Haida Gwaii (also known as the Queen Charlotte Islands). He saw an extraordinary clamshell and protruding from it were a number of small human beings. The Raven coaxed them to leave the shell to join him in his wonderful world. Some of the humans were hesitant at first, but they were overcome by curiosity and eventually emerged from the partly open giant clamshell to become the first Haida.

The courier showed up and took the flowers from us.

Then Trickster said goodbye to me and was off on his ancient carbon fibre mountain bike.

I was left standing on the dock in front of the science centre, wondering what had happened.

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Her name was Rainbow Streaming-Love-From-Heaven McGuire. A hippy child for sure. But not the lazy unclean variety. Hard working and attractive and Ryan fell for her when the Island Network had a convention in Campbell River. Nora was her colleague. Next island over. Some kind of mutant variety of a Willing Workers on Organic Farms volunteer from Oslo. The inside passage reminded her of the fjords at home. Nora reminded me that I had a heart.

And time would progress and we'd spend days at those camps.

More likely to catch a seaplane up than Trickster's kayaks, we loved those girls in their 3 inch thick blue styrofoam huts. Dark green tarpaulins wrapping us in secrecy, deep in the woods, heating tape rather than campfires keeping us warm.

Secret mansions powered by arrays of laptop batteries like a Tesla Roadster and lit brightly with 5 watt LEDs. A composting toilet attached and on

duty, and a cogenerating cookstove baking bread and heating the house.

Rainbow made us stir fry and wove tapestries.  
Nora told us Viking fables of old.  
Ryan showed his talents as a guitar player,  
I did some baking.  
Cinnamon buns all around.

Internet dishes and cell phone repeaters kept us in touch,  
and the fresh food arrived on kayaks each day from Port Hsrdy.

We traded this cargo for charged batteries we'd collect once a week from deep ocean.

It was summer. On the rare years when there are months of sunshine, the Central coast of BC is the nicest place in the world.

Sometimes Nora and I wouldn't see Ryan and Rainbow for days.

Bathing in waterfalls, although the hut has a perfectly working shower,

Nora taught me about lovemaking, because I was a klutz.

Then rainbow was pregnant and the winter began.

We still went up there, still loved our ladies, but with a child on the way and ice in the air we were more serious.

Of course Rainbow was a midwife and planned to deliver in her hut.

Still on Mondays the girls would don wetsuits to kayak out to the open sea and collect batteries.

Ryan and I would convene in a hut talking it out.

"She's absolutely insane having the baby up here," he'd argue.

Other times he'd update me on his legal work.

"So you've got this multimillion dollar Tidal energy company and they are finding it too expensive and labour intensive to keep their buoys bobbing in the waves.

Along comes Trickster Raven.

---

Back in the city for a few months it seemed like another world we had visited up the coast.

Ryan was in court arguing for a new category of land use. Wave powered generator keeper.

Trickster Raven was selling styrofoam sleeping boxes with heating tape and batteries to street people.

Of course the batteries were from the island network 'keeping the homeless warm because the government's too lame' system.

Nora skyped a lot, for a while there we thought she was pregnant too.

But only Rainbow was burdened enough with pregnancy to find the work on the buoys difficult.

Ryan and I found a few sunny days in November and flew up.

Rainbow was showing and trickster had put her on a special 'high vulnerability' list that meant she got extra food for storage and batteries for warmth.

Ryan did the 'I'm a little insane', expectant father thing and fixated on a wood stove for Rainbow.

"She can't burn wood because the island network is still a stealth operation.

If I won my case and she had tenure then she could burn wood. No counting on buoys out to sea for warmth in the winter, My child deserves better."

At Christmas the girls flew down to the city. We made merry at my apartment, with muld wine and sausages.

"Cheese and crackers," said Ryan when I took his picture.

He had reason to be smiling. He'd won his case. Rainbow was going to get her wood stove.

In fact January and February were the construction months, totally unusual to build in Winter.

Ryan paid to helicopter in a team of log builders from Port Hardy. Took a few weeks before the weather broke.

So near to the ocean and under the forest there was only a foot of snow on the ground when they got there.

They felled some trees right near her styrofoam box and built a small cabin with a wood stove in 50 days.

A reason that things went smoothly was that Nora and Rainbow provided food to the workers.

That supplies for everyone arrived in unmanned electric sea kayaks was a testament to the quiet efficiency of Trickster Raven.

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"I'm a diabetic," Nora was crying on Skype.

"Trickster has been sending me insulin, but for some reason it didn't arrive this month."

It was all coming horribly clear.

There was a huge storm.

Rainbow was ok in her new log cabin giving birth.

Nora was at her place feeling things she hadn't felt in years.

Since the last time she'd missed her shots.

Slipping into a diabetic coma.

Ryan and I caught a ferry to Nanaimo, from Vancouver, and drove the 6 hours up island to Port Hardy in 3.

And there we stood. Watching the storm at the dock, out over the ocean.

Helplessly feeling our women in distress.

"Rainbow is fine, she's going to chastise us for worrying," Ryan said.

He'd just had a facetime call on his phone.

"I reached Nora too," I said in a scratchy voice.

"I don't think she's going to be offering any birthing assistance," I added.

We both looked down at the package.

Insulin I'd procured from a pharmacy in town.

"This is the part where the overweight sociologist paddles courageously through the storm to bring his girlfriend Insulin," I whispered.

"Don't do it man, we called search and rescue," Ryan pleaded.

"They won't go out til the storm is over." I said resolutely.

"That might be good enough," argued Ryan.

"She could barely talk for fuck sakes, she's only got a few hours." I walked away crying.

"Where are you going?" Ryan shouted after me.

"Sometimes you have to risk death if you're going to live with yourself," I shouted back.

---

"It was a bit odd how just as I was paddling away in a rented Kayak that one of Trickster's boats showed up.

"Of course I'm better off in this, if I pass out for some reason the little engine will get me there," I told myself.

"I'm doing this for you Nora, because you need me and it seemed like the right thing to do at the time."

"The guy at the rental company said a Kayak was best in big water. Of course he looked like a bit of a surfer dude."

"This is big water. This stretch is before the Inside Passage. Rollers direct from Japan. I think I'm getting altitude sickness.

"This is fucking far. If the Ferry to Bella Bella takes 14 hours and you are half way, I have at least a 20 hr. paddle ahead of me,"

"Phosphorescence! Every time my paddle hits the water there is a splash of green light."

"I had a visitor. There was what the locals call a 'sucker hole' in the clouds and a native guy in a tarped off zodiac and twin 80 horse mercs came

out to see me. I gave him your insulin and told him how to find you. Probably he thought I was headed back to Hardy, but In heading to you, Rainbows going to have her baby,I have to make sure you are ok..."

"Dolphins! I was surrounded by a miraculous school of dolphins. There must have been salmon running underneath because the mammals were partying at the surface. It was magic. I was witnessing life at its grandest. Maybe 1000 animals.

I may fall asleep and let the little engine get me there. It's beautiful when it rains out to sea. Ocean calms down and becomes a sheet of raindrops. You're close now Nora, I hope I see you on waking.

Weather kicked up again. Just when I was quietly cruising to you Nora I was suddenly paddling again. Hours of labour in whitecaps unsure of direction and unable to check. Just staying alive. My survival suit got hot with sweat as I battled the storm with paddling. A disappearing took place, as reality folded into one next paddle, one stroke more, and nothing.

I saw your face in the mist. I probably passed out.

---

Ryan got to Rainbow's cabin almost a full day before I arrived.

Caught a seaplane from Hardy in the sucker hole. He spent 8 hours keeping Nora alive before Charlie the guy who had the insulin remembered he had an old cell phone in the glove compartment of his boat and called her styrofoam box for directions.

He must have been close to get service.

The insulin worked just in time because Rainbow was giving birth. I arrived just as baby Connor was hitting the scene. An 8 pound boy.

I often wonder if Trickster Raven was involved in bringing Nora and I together.

The missed shipment of Insulin, the Kayak that showed up just in time.

I like the idea of a prankster behind everything. Nora my wife does also.

## *Shiva the destroyer*

*I am Sita. I was born in Uganda under Idi Amin. Like all other Indian families we were expelled from that country when I was just a baby. My parents caught a dhow from Mombassa, cradling me in their arms as we crossed*

*the Indian Ocean, stopping at Reunion,  
the Maldives... Made our way from  
Bombay to Bhubaneswar in Orissa and  
my father got a job at the zoo there. I  
had a happy childhood full of white tigers  
and elephants. I thought perhaps it was  
Ganesh the elephant god who was  
watching over me. Little did I know...*

*I met my husband Jazz and we made our way to America. It was there that I realized Shiva the destroyer might be at work (as Rudra). We arrived in New Orleans with our new baby who we called Shasta, and went to work as a cab driver even though he had an MBA from the university in Calcutta.*

*A few years later Katrina took our home and it began.*

*In 2010 Jazz was fishing off the Louisiana coast when the oil well broke.*

*The crew headed for newer cleaner waters only to be taken by a storm. I never saw my husband again.*

Shiva was destroying I knew that.  
Still, Shasta and I moved to the west  
coast, where we thrived. Years passed. In  
the Seattle schools she got a scholarship  
to MIT and it seemed that all would go  
well.

Then one summer, the fires started. From  
Alaska to northern California.

The forests burned... Once again I lost  
our house and truly... I lost my hope.

In a moment of great sadness I visited  
the old park, and sat in the ashes. It  
was as low as I have been. Through the  
ashes I found a sprout reaching for the  
sky. I tried to focus on the new life. A  
car pulled up behind me. It was Shasta,  
home from school driving one of those

*Nissan Leafs. We stood in silence  
together.*

*"Mom there is a reason we worship  
the god of destruction," she said.*

*"Shiva is the destroyer" she said. "but  
also the transformer. Bringer of change."*

## Replicating Putnam

[bcmeikle@shaw.ca](mailto:bcmeikle@shaw.ca) (Bill Meikle)

There was a crossroads in my life. I read Putnam and found that in 1936 he had blocked the veins of dogs. Occlusions. guess what? They got MS! or encephalomyelitis which is pretty much MS...

So why didn't science pay any attention? Dunno. They fixated on the notion that MS is a neurological disease, and handed it over to neurologists. Putnam did work with blood thinners but it was the wrong path... When animal studies were conducted it was using EAE as the 'animal model' for MS. This was encephalomyelitis caused by injecting an animal with part of the nervous system tissue from another animal. A kind of allergic reaction that all the medicines were based on.

So there I was and I could see how it would go... Chronic diseases were a major cash cow for pharmaceuticals, neuros were still in charge, fast change was impossible. In this case, bad

replication was very possible. Average imaging didn't show ccsvi, so if one wanted to prove it untrue they could just take standard pictures.

This was the crossroads. I kissed my wife and kids so long and I flew to Angola.

what was in Angola?? That was where Jonas Purn had his cattle ranch. It was a country without rules on animal studies...I had met Jonas on the web, he had MS(grew up in Scotland where there's low vitamin d) and wanted to know. We found a local vet and we clamped the jugular vein on 10 cows. Every month we slaughtered a cow, and the vet did an autopsy.

It took till month 9 but those last 2 cows got MS. I flew home and published the results on the web. Only patients cared that this was the mechanism! .Scientists cant hear unless it comes from the right sources. Still, the stanford animal study was due in a few months, and even docs would read that...

So I was settling in at home confident in my knowledge that Putnam would be replicated, when the stanford study comes out. Because they used mice, that have a short life span, they didn't see the lesions appear. Science would go back to sleep. Just like 1936.

So there I am back in Angola again. This time we do surgery on 20 cows blocking their veins. We don't start killing (and eating) them until month 8 then we see 1 a month for a year. By the end of month 24 these cows are spastic with balance issues...For sure this is it.

I mean its not like Patients aren't getting fixed. Every day someone flies off to somewhere and gets some stents put in, some angioplasty, but a lot of people aren't fixed. A lot of doctors still voice the old line. If you look up MS today you will still see 'an autoimmune disease, neurological in origin. Neither of those is true.

I proved it. I replicated Putnam.

# The iDod

by Bill Meikle



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## Chapter 1

At a police briefing:

"So the designer of this new iDevice went rogue," says sergeant Kelly. "There's kind of a tradition to leave a new phone in a bar. Leak that new device to the press, but this guy, Clarence Litmore, used his credit card to fly all over the place, and drop gear on kids. We have the credit card records."

"Went rogue in lots of other ways too," says Bryce looking up from a laptop.

"Says here he was supposed to deliver the first mature handheld expert system. There's so much room in the iDod that a ton of processors could be piled up and make a super computer. They had access to the 'Watson' code that won jeopardy, and they were supposed to make a truly smart handheld device that could pick stocks and make middle class people rich," says Bryce.

"But Litmore took his team away and they lived in a fancy house up one of the valleys behind Berkley for 3 months. When they emerged they had a mature hand held expert system all right, but it didn't pick stocks for middle class Americans, it was dedicated to making the poorest people in the world survive and thrive."

"That's all well and good," says Kelly, "and we can see why Litmore had to act out his little Mother Theresa gig, but now they're going missing. Three of the first five users have disappeared."

"Who would do that?" says Brogue.

"Dunno," says Kelley "I guess it's our job to find out."



## Chapter 2

At a shareholders meeting for The Manzana corporation

Charlie Evans took the floor.

"You've got to admit Litmore has huevos. He got all Robin Hood on us and stole the iDod. Gave it to the poor."

"Put it on the tax sheet as PR," said Nimbly.

"Might have to," said the Boss.

"Well, only five of the poor," said Snarky.

"Should have known six months ago when he insisted on that horrible cloth screen," Clara Thorn offered.

"It's a sheet of plastic, wrapped around, but it makes the iDod fairly affordable for the low end market," said Snarky.

"That thing is a machine that prints money," murmured the boss.

"Look at these numbers...He gave it to 5 kids that he remembered from his travels. Peru, Tanzania, a native up in Canada, some Chinese kids.

"The five iDods set to work earning their owners cash. The bootstrapping is still fairly random. Google ads, iPhone apps, a little freelancing as a coder, but in a few days all 5 machines had earned \$500 that they put into the markets. The thing has processor power to run 5 billion portfolios in simulation and choose the best. They all doubled their money in a week. In 3 months our 5 little beggars have become millionaires. Which isn't saying much these days but it points to some good things for a year from now..."

"If there's anyone left," said Sarah

"Yes, we do have a security disaster on our hands," said the boss.

"Little detail," Charlie Evans said.

## Chapter 3.

A TV News Anchor:

So the big story in high tech this week is the Manzana Corporation's new handheld device the iDod. It's a little crystal ball dodecahedron you hold in your hand to watch video, surf the web, talk like it's a cellphone, and apparently lots of extraordinary new things... like automatically earning money on the stock market!

To give his thoughts here's our high tech correspondent Malt Crosswords.

Malt what's so special about the iDod?

Malt Crosswords: I guess this thing is going to boost the amount of processing speed we expect from a handheld device about 1000 times.

I mean most people, given the job of building this, would just take a bunch of the circuit boards from a cellphone, and stack them inside the iDod. But the manzana engineers are weird. They created pentagonal circuit boards and made a dodecahedron out of those...then they did the same thing smaller, in several layers like the skin of an onion. At the core they put a bunch of housekeeping items like the battery, but they also figured out a really innovative hub that allows this thing to send signal from anyplace to anyplace really efficiently. Central Station if you will.

Anchor : So it goes really fast, what does that mean?

Malt: Well computer scientists have evolved a number of new skills over the last few years using super computers that were impossible on a handheld device until now. I mean this thing is going to be able to talk really well, play the stock market for you, model the weather, win at jeopardy running the Watson program... It's going to be really cool.

Anchor: So we're talking about a little crystal ball that can be a magic friend for children!

Malt: Don't know the ethical implications of bonding children with devices but we already sit them in front of tv's...why not allow them to be friends with a crystal ball?

Anchor: And what about the other story where five of the iDods were leaked all over the world?

Malt: And three of the recipients have now gone missing...Looks like there was a big fight at the Manzana corporation. It's an interesting question: If you could make a machine that earns money automagically who would you give it to? The people who need some money the most at the very bottom of the food chain, or people who already have devices that can almost do this stuff anyway...

Clarence Litmore who designed the iDod went with the poorest people.

## Chapter 4

Bonk and Snarky meet in the bathroom at the Hockey game

Bonk while urinating: Seen the iDod?

Snarky is washing his hands: Ya, we're looking at it at work.

Bonk: Looks to me like Litmore taught the thing to hack on the user's behalf. I ran a trace on the black arts page where people who are working on black software put up bugs and offer bounty money to anyone who can kill em.

Snarky: Ya I know about it.

Bonk: Well that's how these Dods made their seed money, not like the official story which says something vague about writing apps and selling advertising. They were mercenaries on the dark market. Giving power to bad guys.

Snarky: So maybe that's another reason Litmore gave it to the poor. The thing does illegal actions on it's user's behalf. Auto Robin Hood mode.

Bonk: Ya, so our job at the office is to figure out how illegal.

Snarky: I guess I'll get someone to look at that too.

Bonk: Sharks got this game.

Snarky: We'll see. Good to see you man.

Bonk: Later.



## Chapter 5: Yunnan

Sook Yin stared at the photograph. It must have been 15 years ago. She was a little peasant girl around 3 or 4 in backless canvas pants like babies used to wear before diapers... Her bum was open to the air! And look at her parents! Standing in the yard in their old fashioned Mao Suits. Her dad working on a bicycle, as if there were any roads to ride on in those days!

The white man who took this shot was hiking up to chicken foot mountain back then, a buddist temple that marco polo visited centuries ago. Rested here for a few hours, played kites with some children. She remembered him.

I mean lots of white people walked by their farm in the valley across the lake from Dali but this one wrote letters. She still had his business card. In the mirror at the back washroom were dozens of cards left by tourists who borrowed the john. A primitive squat latrine really. This foreigner was special.

He came back with the pod.

The seed that changed everything.

There is an old Bei legend told in Dali, of a beanstalk and some seeds. This dod was some kind of magic seed too. It could speak the local dialect not just mandarin or Cantonese and that made it more fun to talk to than rich tourists and their translators from Beijing.

She was Bei not Chinese, a proud minority.

Daddy said to keep it quiet from the neighbors so she hid the iDod above the pig shed in the back yard. She'd go back and talk to it every once in a while. Friendly, it would ask her to put it in the sun sometimes so it could recharge it's batteries.

Other times it would tell her it was time to go to the post office and pick up papers. She liked it when she got mail. Sometimes it would be from her pen pals in Germany and Iowa and other times it would be paid credit cards and other treasures the pod ordered for her. Daddy said to not take candy from strangers so she wasn't saying much about the credit cards. He liked it when she bought him a new tractor one day though. Now that she was 19 and a beautiful young lady who worked at the bar across the lake he didn't ask questions. He knew she hung around with tourists, he hoped she knew what she was doing.

That night the dod seemed to be dreaming, it's faces morphed through images it had seen the day before. Sook Yin felt warm in a thick wool sweater she had purchased with her new credit card.

“Good night magic seed,” she said

“Good night,” said the iDod.

## Chapter 6

### At Laughing Cloud's Prison

Laughing Cloud was locked in the back room of the Arab's house.

He had walked the 140 miles to Dawson Creek, took him about a week. But he had the moose dropping to talk to and it even spoke Kwadacha, which was the language he grew up listening to his grandparents talk. It was pretty good.

I mean Dan his stepfather had tried to take it away when he first saw it. He figured out a way to hide the iDod in the big tent that was their house these days. Couple years back when his mom first got together with Dan they had been styling it up in a brand new house built by Indian and Northern Affairs , but Dan lost the house gambling ay, and they had to live in a canvas roofed shelter in the cold winter. Lucky they had a fire in the house or they'd be freezing.

The moose dropping got him an interac card and he took some money out to buy his brother drugs. His brother kicked the shit out of him most days, so getting on his good side was the first order of business.

Then he realized that he had enough money to buy real hockey equipment. That's when he hit the road for Dawson Creek.

A spending spree followed, trying all the fast food places (3) and eating til he felt a little sick really. It was when he went down town to get hockey gear that the arab approached him.

"You are one of the 5 who got the orb," he said in a strange accent.

"I think you're talking about the iDod," said Laughing Cloud.

"Yes can I see it?" said the man.

Laughing Cloud gave it to the man. It didn't light up for him, didn't do a thing.

"So this surface. It's not only photovoltaic so it can charge itself in the light, but it must read fingerprints," said the man.

"The guy who gave it to me said it would only work for me," said Laughing Cloud.

That's when the Arab grabbed him and threw him in a car. He's been in this back room of the house, locked up ever since. There were kebabs and Falafels to eat passed through the door to him into his room cell.

Laughing Cloud had a few letters and a pictures with him from Litmore the guy who gave him the Dod. He took these out and looked at them to pass some time. That old picture was from when he was 5, met Litmore on the highway, blew some soap bubbles with him. Litmore liked his name and his 'delightful laugh' and wrote a few notes to him over the years.

Now he was in the Arab's prison thanks to that guy.



## Chapter 7

The reporter is angry.

Ritter: I'm not saying the cops are useless, but there's no way you would have even generated a case file to follow up on this if it wasn't for the press. We were the ones who actually flew around and tried to interview Litmore's five recipients.

Kelly: And for that we thank you, Miss er, Ritter, but we just wanted to flesh out our report a little ourselves. Get the details first hand so to speak.

Ritter: And so you dragged my butt down here in a patrol car. Some thanks I get.

Kelly: The little girl in Peru, was finding her home difficult??

Ritter: I mean, Litmore was a fairly strict follower of a group of guide books from a company in Australia called 'Lonely Planet'. Once I got those it wasn't hard to follow his routes. All 5 of the recipients were people he met in his travels years before, he has a web page where he keeps track of his travels. All I had to do is look it up and follow the guide books. I even found pictures of all 5 people up there on his site.

Kelly: But we aren't talking about the central cities in these countries.

Ritter: No, mostly on obscure hiking trails a few days out on chicken buses. Rosa for example lives on the Inca trail in Peru. The ancient city of Machu Pichu can be hiked to for a few days, through the mountains there, passing some very poor settlements that can't be accessed by car. That's where Rosa grew up.

Kelly: And this Sook Yin girl lives near Dali, in China...

Ritter: Litmore traveled the southern half of China. His other kid lives in the Tiger Leaping Gorge. Yunan again.

Kelly: So the native kid in Canada, he kind of breaks the mold.

Ritter: He's not from a hiking trail, the best guess I have is that Litmore met him during his summer job in the northeast of BC. He was doing surveying, I think..

Kelly: So many bugs up there..

Ritter: And that just leaves the African along the shores of lake Tanganyika. It's near where Jane Goodall does her work with chimpanzees at Ngombe stream. Took me days to get there, I should have hired a float plane.

Kelly: His name is Willox Nyinenda. He is one of the missing.

Ritter: As is Laughing Cloud in Canada and Chan Ye in China. This is not how it's supposed to go...

Kelly: Never is...



## Chapter 8

### Litmore at Manzana

Clarence Litmore drove a Tesla Roadster. A high end electric sports car. His girl friend Angela thought it was very cool. Electric and slick were the order of the day at the Manzana corporation, a parking lot full of Nissan leafs and Toyota Priuses, so Clarence was just another average player. But cooler and richer. These things cost \$100,000.

Tesla Roadster.

He walked onto the campus with Angela and the receptionist waved at them. Angela was a beautiful woman and he was a handsome and powerful young executive. They looked good together.

It looked like it was going to be a good day. Then they were met by detective Botch the Interpol man , assigned the case from Germany.

"Mr Litmore, we'd like to ask you a few questions. " Botch said.

"We could sit down over here," Litmore motioned them to a seating lounge. The Manzana campus was very user friendly. Angela excused herself and went to her work as a graphic artist in the video department. "We are trying to understand what's happening with these disappearances," said Botch. "To tell you the truth I took a couple of friends to a bar a couple of weeks ago and we brainstormed out all the disaster scenarios associated with me doing this crazy drop. Recipients going missing was discussed."

"So you saw it coming?"

"All 5 of the people live in primitive social structures. Anything powerful would naturally pass to the most powerful players in the little ecosystem they live in."

" But you put fingerprint controls on this,"said Botch.

"So the 5 people were needed to go along with the device when it passed to the person who took control of it," said Clarence.

"But this seems to have pulse readouts too," said Botch. "It senses your blood flow. You couldn't say, kill the hostage and cut off their hand to drive the machine."

"Right, the nature of the design is that the users must be kept alive if the bad guy wants to get money from the Dod."

"Merciful design," said Botch

"Strong, dangerous, medicine really," said Litmore. "I hope it works."

..and some days went by and Litmore met with his old friends at a swank house in a ravine near Silicon Valley and it came forth:

"We think you built a device to have these kids kidnapped," Jaycee accused him. Litmore argued into the night and got very drunk. "It's unclear where the Dods have gone. I wouldn't be surprised if we find one with a religious leader. We can't predict what mankind will do with such a Device," he mumbled.

"Why would a religious leader get one? "

"A device where technology is indistinguishable from magic," Litmore said.

It is programmed to speak obscure local dialects well. It is programmed to make suggestions to its owner on how to improve routine actions each day. Incremental tiny change in things like how you get water. It is programmed to use advanced logic to help worm a way out of impossible tragic situations. It can't be operated without a child as an intermediary."

"Your children have grown up," said Lara Litmore's X.

"There were a few parts of the design that took longer than I thought," said Litmore.

“You’ve worked on this for decades,” said Lara.

“It’s not our job to predict what mankind will do with this technology,” said Litmore drunkenly.

“Go to sleep,” said Lara.

## Chapter 9.

### Willox and the Very Black Men.

Third escape. Running, leaping across small creeks, sliding in the mud... It is raining so hard you pick a huge leaf and fashion a hat out of it. Tie it on with some twine you make from a small lanai hanging from a tree.

They've caught you twice, they'll probably catch you again. In these Verunga hills of Zaire (now Congo), the very black men rode into your village on the lakeshore a few days ago on a gunboat, and took you like a slave. You were stolen.

They call you the dung beetle and the iDod a piece of dung, and that is ok except when they hit you and whip you and tie you up in a shed.

Your name can be Willox. Willox Nyinenda and you were raised at the Christian Missionary on the shores of lake tanganyika, one of the deepest lakes in the world, where dinosaurs still dive for cover and weird birds call out from the jungle to the dry Serengeti close by.

The very black men come from Angola you think, or Namibia. Some place with a different language, different customs.

The iDod won't make money without it's owner getting a cut, so if you escape you're styling... Bank accounts fat. This fugging river is a bit of an obstacle though, in getting away.

You ease in up to your waist. Perhaps that's a hippo you can see downstream a bit. You try not to think of crocodiles but about 20 ft from the bank you do see a pair of eyes floating above the water. Calmly and quickly you make for the bank. There is a moment when you don't know where the animal has gone, but it has turned downstream when you find it...

They catch you when you make it to the road on the other side. Beat you a bit. Burn you with cigarette butts. Take you back to your cell in the jungle.

And so it goes.

## Chapter 10

### At a Police Briefing

Bryce was at the laptop again.

“The Sunwatchers. They are an odd Asian charity group kind of like the Aga Kahn foundation. Their money seems to come from 6 Kuala Lumpur/Singapore billionaires, and that's it, quite small time really...”

“But they took the hostage. Some weird kind of hostage taking based on the idea of 'better us before others grab her,'” said Kelly.

“We have surveillance footage of her, she seems to be having an enjoyable time at a beach resort south of Hong Kong,” said Brogue.

“But a couple of weeks ago We had a trail that showed Chan ye in KunMing shopping for all the things that teenage girls wish for. Looks like she was having lots of fun with her new money . Then the trail drops off.”

“Well not completely, now she charges her meals and souvenirs to a credit card registered to the Sunwatchers,” said Bryce.



## Chapter 11

### Chan ye

Robert was briefing Chan Ye on the foundation's game.

“We are the first 20 names on the waiting list. We will get the first 20 Dods shipped to China. The Dod's release date has been moved forward a week to 10 days from now. Manzana has decided that the best way to help the three hostages is to make them nothing special. Flood the world with iDods. Then everyone is a hostage and nobody is.

“Of course some of the software won't be there. The stuff that makes money. We have plans to download that stuff off Chan Ye's Dod and mass produce millionaires. But it's unclear if we'll be able to do that.”

Chan Ye stretched out on the soft mattress.

“This isn't so bad,” she thought

“There are worse outcomes than being abducted by do-gooders. ”

The suite in the hotel was plush and she could call room service whenever she wanted.

I mean it was really lonely and a bit scary but she had the golden orb with her to light her way. Since it arrived the world had taken on a strange golden light, and it was hard for her to really be afraid of anything.

“I have purchased a number of very stable blue chip stocks on your behalf today. Their returns are low, about 3% but they will rarely waiver. You have lots of capital so it isn't so much a time of acquisition as a time of consolidation. These stocks have paid the same small return for decades through turbulent times and will provide you with a solid income..

“Thank You golden orb,” Chan Ye said, and she lifted the ball onto the couch where she was sitting.

“The man outside the door said that their head man was going to come and see me today,” she went on.

“That is Kwai Lee, the well known billionaire from Kuala Lumpur,” said the iDod. ”It is important that you tell him about the worldwide release that has been moved up to ten days from now. Then everyone will have a ball like me and holding hostages will not be necessary.”

## Chapter 12

A TV News Anchor:

Anchor: So the big story in high tech this week is the Manzana Corporation's new handheld device the iDod. It is set to be released in 3 days. For more on this, here's our high tech correspondent Malt Crosswords.

Malt: Hi jerry, the air is abuzz today with talk of, and hopes for, the iDod. Manzana is really showing how good they've gotten at releasing new products. Apparently it was no problem for them to move things forward a full week, causing us all to rush to our local store and get our names on the waiting lists sooner.

Anchor: So this was to help the hostages?

Malt: The notion being that with iDod's everywhere there is nothing exclusive that will keep the five in custody.

Anchor: But the word on the street is that they'll be disabled...

Malt: It's not about the iDod, it's about the illegal software that Litmore packed onto it. The black market will have to try and supply the apps, which is tricky because other than their strong knowledge of viruses and security, thieves are stupid.

Anchor: The street will find a way.

Malt: Clearly, and time will show us the effects of this strange evolution...



## Chapter 13

Bonk and Snarky meet in the bathroom at the Hockey game.

Snarky while urinating: So the iDod is out. Gonna get one?

Bonk is washing his hands: I don't see how you're going to sell a device that won't fit in your pocket.

Snarky: Seen our ads?It's a magic crystal ball!

Bonk: Can't drink the Koolaid on this one. I've already got enough e-waste.

Snarky: Preorders are huge. Let's face it people just want to be seen using our latest shit.

Bonk: Device as fashion.

Snarky: Only two hostages left. The Chinese girl was taken by sunwatchers for her own good.

Bonk: We suck at international investigation.

Snarky: Interpol's got a guy on it. Manzana security is moving quietly too.

Bonk: Sharks are stinking it up tonight.

Snarky: Maybe a miracle will happen and they'll get a goal.

## Chapter 14

At a shareholders meeting for The Manzana corporation.

Charlie Evans took the floor.

"Well, after 1 month of sales we're making lots of money on the iDod." he said.

"Best sales month since the phone," said Nimbly.

"The iDod 2 is just around the corner," offered the Boss.

"So is a law suit over the two kids who are still hostages," put in Snarky.

"I don't think we should be celebrating good sales when those awful pictures of that African boy being tortured are in the news," Clara Thorn said.

"Torture isn't exactly the corporate image we want to project," said Sarah.

"The thing is a machine that prints money," murmured the boss. "Look at these numbers...The 2 kids that are being forced to work it have made over 3 million dollars each..."

"Why so little?" asked Charlie Evans.

"The machines spend most of their time doing backflips to outsmart security," said Sarah. "I guess they need fake ID and paperwork for each of their 'clients' and they're hiding lots of things..."

"So far they've outsmarted any attempts to track them and shut them down, they've used 100s of assumed identities," said the boss.

"Shape shifters," Charlie Evans said.

## Chapter 15 :

Sue Ritter, reporter:

Ritter: I'm here in Peru at the home of Rosa Pisco, a first 5 iDod recipient and the success story that Litmore probably hoped for, for all his 5 young people, when he handed the iDod's out. While the shots of Willox in Africa after torture horrify us, we must take hope from these images from Mach Pichu and Rosa's uplifting tale.

We cut to a montage with sappy music. We see Rosa's iDod teaching the villagers about clean water and paying to drill a well and install piping to the huts these people live in.

Ritter: This project actually failed as the well-diggers couldn't find water way up here in the Peruvian mountains, and the iDod then paid for mortar to repair the 14<sup>th</sup> century aqueduct angling across the hillsides, that brought water to the area in Incan times..

A parade of new material possessions strikes one when they enter this andean village. A new tractor, a solar panel, a dishwasher, a colour tv. A motorcycle. A shiny new car. Clearly the iDod has invested well for this tiny settlement and seen to it that the distribution of money is fair.

Then as the uplifting music soars we cut to the potato fields -sloped not terraced- that Rosa's family farms. A meeting of farmers and a shot of the iDod's new research garden where the local potato varieties are catalogued and bred.

Then we cut to a bar where Pisco sours are being swilled and Rosa is dancing with her iDod and several villagers have joined her in a ring. People look prosperous if a little awkward in their new clothes. Idod clothes.

## CHAPTER 16

### Wilcox Escapes

Running, jumping across small creeks, sliding in the mud down chutes towards a river. It seems like you've made a clean getaway this time, early in the morning, when the very black men are sleeping off the drunken feast you bought for them last night. It stretched into the drumming dark hours after midnight when you packed your bag to go..

You come to a road and catch a lift in the back of a truckload of goats.

It's customary to pay for rides when hitchhiking in most of Africa. You've folded a few crisp notes into your belt ,that you sneakily got with your credit card when the men took you to a gas station, and you pay with those. Your geography is screwed up even with the google earth guesses you've been making each night while you lie in bed. The glow of the volcano is 180 degrees from where you thought it would be. You don't speak the language they are talking up in the cab ( maybe French?) so you can't ask where you are. It looks like this truck may be headed for Burundi.

You fall asleep and when you awake you are outside Bujumbura Burundi and your truck has pulled off into a rustic rest stop to pause for a moment and water the goats. Trouble is the truck is now tragically stuck in the mud. Thick, enveloping mud that takes large truck tires and swallows them whole. It looks like it could be hours before it is free.

Sook Yin talks across the idods like everyone is next door. Turns out the 5 originals were set up with a private communications app that allowed them to talk and see each other whenever they wanted. It's just nobody figured out how to use it til now. Just had to press the little icon for 5chat.

When the call came in Willox took the opportunity to get out of the way of flying mud in Bujumbura and ditched under a tree to talk. Laughing cloud was still locked in the bedroom somewhere in Dawson Creek, he answered hanging upside down off the bed. Chang Ye was heading home to Tiger Leaping Gorge to see her family and she found wifi in a web Cafe in the last town before she took the boat across the Yangtze and walked to her parent's house. Rosa had the sketchiest signal hacked together by a tech all the way from Lima (hired by her i'Dod) who built a tower for the antennae on the mountaintop above her home.

Sook Yin: So Willox are you really free?

Willox: They will hunt me down, they are bad men.

The device does the best real time auto translation that Laughing cloud has ever seen. I mean the video consoles some people on the reserve used were pretty high tech, but he could talk in Kwadacha and Sook Yin would hear it in Bei!

“I am still locked in this room, but I have learned that the man they call 'the arab' isn't Arabian at all. He is from Rajistan a desert province of India.

“Small town people everywhere make stupid assumptions on race” said Sook Yin.

“So many people think I'm Chinese when I go to small towns,” she said.

“I had never even heard of the Bei peoples” said Laughing Cloud.

“I suppose you've never heard of the Kwadacha.”

“The majority are minorities” said Rosa who was a native Peruvian (Amerindian) with very little Spanish blood in her.

Then days would go by and the iDods were silent and then you'd hear rosa “what time is it?”

And of course every one spread out all over the world would have a different answer, but Chan Ye would do the math and figure out what time it was at Rosa's place in Peru. There was video too...so it was like there was an open window connecting the 5 people. They were still special and now they needed to make something of it.

## Chapter 17:

### Kinsky and Ritter fly to Africa

Kinsky was an operative for Manzana security. She sat on the jet liner to Africa next to a handsome banker.

“It's an unusual position, running security in a non military operation” she said.

“Must get a tad frustrating,” said the banker.

“Well, it's always been a contradictory quest. Manzana dates back to the hippies from the 1960's, so there is a definite pacifist streak running through the company's culture and ideology. But when you look at computer viruses and the clear supremacy Manzana has in that area of 'security' you see it's not a clear cut case. So here I am crossing the world trying to defeat a kidnapping in the jungles of Africa. I don't even carry a gun.”

A pause where noone says anything for five minutes.

“I Imagine the press has a pretty close watch on you,” said the banker.

“ I think I saw Ritter on this same flight,” said Kinsky. Ritter was sitting in coach trying to save a little budget for the next leg of her journey. In her notebook she was trying to piece together what she knew about the whereabouts of Willox Nyineda. She formulated a list.

Land in Nairobi.

Rent car, drive to Tanzania.

Head up to Berundi.

Find willox somehow.

Head down lake tanganyika to Willox's village.

It was lucky she got a budget out of her editor at all. People had compassion fatigue in regards to the last 2 iDod hostage story was getting stale. Ritter took out her swahili phrase book and did some memorization. Moja, mbili, tatu, nne she counted out loud. A little black boy in the seat in front of her heard her lesson and sang along.

Back in business class Kinsky's flirtation with the businessman reached a peak.

“My husband and I are going to Europe this summer,” she said.

“Oh you're married,” he said.

And then the pauses were most of the time. They landed and parted company.

“Jambo,” said Ritter to her contact.

“Habari” he said back...

## Chapter 18:

### a skype Ritter/Litmore interview

Ritter: I thought this was a story about a new gadget from the Manzana corporation, but it's turning into something bigger than that: Mankind and supercomputers reach a new turning point in evolution. Will we survive it?

Litmore: I think since a super computer won at Jeopardy people have been thinking "What other games might this computer help win?" Games that pay money? Doing science, doing art? Making war?

Ritter: And now it's in a device you can hold in your hands...magic.

Litmore: ...and we see some excellent software for helping gamble, play the real estate market, and of course the app I demoed with the first five iPod kids which is playing the stock market.

Ritter: Which was illegal. So computers can not only win at jeopardy they can win at money making?

Litmore: What worries me is these can be programmed to win wars too.

Ritter: Definitely computers give competitive advantage even right now..in all fields that use them with skill. The question is, will this leap in abilities make a more pronounced gap appear between haves and have-nots?

Will it become have an iDod or be a have not an iDod?

Litmore: Manzana shipped about a million dods in the first run out the door.. I think with pre-orders and expanding global sales they're looking at five million iDodecahedrons by the end of the month.

Ritter: Probably the knock-offs aren't too far behind. And software?

Litmore: There have always been financial planning apps. I stepped over the line a bit when I demoed how autonomous these things can be with the iDod, but there are serious rules prohibiting machines from buying and selling over the web...now it will just be software making good suggestions to humans.

Ritter: Like get out of the house and go for a walk, you need some exercise.

Litmore: The device is image acquisitive. It will always vote in favour of any trips outdoors being considered. Each night it spends a few hours in an integrative state where it sorts all it's new images into categories.

Ritter: Dreaming.

Litmore: More like filing really but people love the idea...

## Chapter 19

### Last time we heard from Laughing Cloud

Laughing Cloud: I think the cloud that I was named after was pot smoke.

Barnaby: Laughing gas. That's what they should have called you.

Laughing Cloud: The name of my farts.

Smith: Hey LC you have the same name as that kid up in Canada's been kidnapped.

Laughing Cloud: Probably because it's me. I'm typing to you from one of the first five iDods, locked up but still activated.

Barnaby: Cool a hostage. That's a good thing to put on your resume.

Smith: I figure you can't really type into those things but they have some kind of Super-Siri that types for you.

Laughing Cloud: Actually it has a cool wrap around keyboard graphic that is surprisingly good. It gets most things you say if you ask it to do the typing but I like this old school keyboard too.

Barnaby: So what, are they feeding you enough?

Laughing Cloud: More like Greece than Arabia, I think. His wife is from Greece, the daughter of a shipping magnate.

Barnaby: Why haven't they just arrested this guy if you can just call the cops.

Laughing Cloud: We've been moving for the last little while. I am locked in the back of a pretty comfortable RV and for a couple of weeks, we've been on the road.

Barnaby: Should make you easy to pickup:

Laughing Cloud: I think for the last couple days they've just been driving in circles on a farm that's offroad, trying to confuse me.

Smith: Are you confused?

Laughing Cloud: Not. This grass is green. We didn't cross a border. The only place with green grass in Canada, in winter, is Vancouver and the Fraser Valley that's connected to it. We're probably in Abbotsford.

Barnaby: Or up highway 7 with Willy Pickton.

Laughing Cloud: These guys seem like businessmen. Not killers.

Smith: That's the good news. Keep us posted.

## Chapter 20

### Tanzania

A narrow paved strip runs through the savannah in northwest Tanzania and Ritter had rented a car to drive it.. People said she was better off getting a local driver and sure enough, like in most poorer countries, it was cheaper to get a car and driver than a car alone. She contracted with Jomo at the Nairobi airport, and they headed off on their adventure the next morning.

Less than an hour after leaving Nairobi they crossed the border into Tanzania. Then they drove all day to the west through elephant herds and Masai villages. In the afternoon, Jomo stopped at a strange sight. A white woman was walking beside the road with a huge jerry can in her arms.

Ritter: Kinsky! What an odd place to find you.

Kinsky: I'm not out of gas, it seems to be an overheated radiator that's giving me troubles.

A single hyena watched from a hundred metres back.

Ritter: You paid extra to do it without a driver didn't you?

Kinsky: I wanted to be by myself for a few hours.

The hyena tookes a few steps towards them.

Ritter: You'd better ride with us, it's looking a little wild out here.

They drove onwards to Kinsky's car and Jomo took a look.

Jomo: Mbaya sana mama. There is a hole in your radiator as big as my thumb.

So Kinsky called the rental company to come pick up their beater and they became the three musketeers, entering Burundi as tourists on Safari.

Ritter knew from experience that mentioning journalism at the border would add a lot of time to the process. Ritter got a cell phone call as soon as they came into service range around Bujumbura. Willox had gone silent but the last word from him was that his captors had made a deal to sell him to bigger criminals. The handoff was at 7 o'clock on the lakeshore in Bujumbura.

Now they had to find out exactly where.



## Chapter 21:

### YouTube Comments

Stacy Grin was not interested in computers. She was one of several cleavage strong females who were in the comments section under the iDod5 movie on Youtube. Litmore was a hunk. Laughing Cloud was like Jacob on Twilite. That Girl Sook Yin in China played some pretty songs on her synthesizer... It was a nice thread to hang out in. She had 6 or 7 comment videos up there already.

It was a great effect the first time they tried it. The five iDod kids in a five way split screen on Youtube. Interviewing each other, telling jokes. The movies got tons of hits. It was Willox who generated the app to allow these movies to get made easily. The iDods could assemble software for you if you asked correctly...Small apps that do specific things well.

Today there were only 3 faces in the 5 boxes and there were two glaring empty spots... text over those boxes said "taken hostage"

Stacy made a comment about how sad it was that 2 of the folks were missing. In truth she thought they were just on vacation or something, she didn't really follow the details of hostage incidents. It was a dusty 3<sup>rd</sup> world story that she couldn't really think about. Her imagination didn't include images to make the story real. She liked things that were bright and modern and clean. Shiny, not like Rosa's place. She could see the wooden shack where the Peruvian girl was broadcasting from.. Totally alien. Don't know why she hung out with such rifraf but she wanted people to think she was interesting. Not just another pretty cleavage to look at.

She wrote: “come back boxes 4 and 5...! NMJC.(not much just chilling)”

## Chapter 22.

A TV News Anchor:

Anchor: So the big story in high tech this week is the Manzana Corporation's new handheld device the iDod. It's a little crystal ball dodecahedron you hold in your hand to watch video, surf the web, talk like it's a cellphone, and apparently lots of extraordinary new things....it's the first handheld supercomputer. Today is it's three month birthday since introduction. To give his thought here's our high tech correspondent Malt Crosswords. I just saw the little Youtube clip on Rosa Pisco's village in Peru, and all the excellent work that's been done in that difficult, mountainous country with the help of the iDod.

Malt: well at three months we're seeing the wonderful power for good and also the power it can give to evil. The iDod has empowered both. I just hope there's some common sense human progress that comes out of all this too.

Anchor: So Rosa's village is turning into Switzerland, and Sook Yin in Dali,China is making that region into something new too.

Malt: Well Chang Ye at Tiger Leaping gorge in China has been picked up by the Sunwatchers again. They have 20 dods now and they need hers to inform the others using the not so legal means that the first 5 got. I wouldn't say she's a hostage, more like a forced employee of a firm.

Anchor: And the two boys: Willox and Laughing Cloud what's their status?

Malt: Dark times. Turns out some of the Manzana engineers put some stuff on the iDods that Litmore didn't know about. War games, and simulations in military intelligence. They probably couldn't help themselves since those programs use hundreds of variables. The kind of thing this multi parallel iDod system does well. It screams... These first five iDods suddenly became very desirable for warlords the world over, and very dangerous things to be in charge of.

Anchor: So it's building schools and housing in Peru but it's causing violence and anguish elsewhere in the world. I wonder how Mr. Litmore would feel about it.

Malt: As a matter of fact I've arranged for Mr. Litmore to Join us this evening.

Anchor: Thanks for taking the time Clarence.

Litmore: Well thanks for having me, there is always an incentive for me to get my side of the story out at any time.

Malt: Are you happy with the iDod's success?

Litmore: A huge sales success but we were fairly sure that would happen. We dared to reach for more

Malt: Like feeding the poor.

Litmore: The group to keep your eye on is the Sunwatchers. They are the ones working with mass producing wealth for the poor, and the viral agents such an undertaking would involve.

Malt: So Chang Ye is with good people?

Litmore: I knew Kwai when we were in college together. He is watching everything we do and making moves accordingly.

Malt: Otherwise, are America's teenagers having fun with the iPod?

Litmore: There are some great new video games reaching the market as we speak.

Malt: Sounds good.

## Chapter 23

Angela speaks out

Stan: Our guest today is Angela Litmore the wife of well known Manzana engineer Clarence Litmore, who designed the iDod, and uh, unleashed it on the world.

Angela: Actually I'm just his fiancée. And even that is only since last weekend (she holds up a ring on her finger)

Stan: Well congratulations. I hear that this is not your main agenda today though, but you're here to launch a counter-offensive.

Angela: That's right Stan, you see I work partly at Manzana and partly at the advertising company that works for them. I'm a video editor. I make those pristine, emotionally manipulative, ads that we are famous for.

Stan: And today you have one to help sell the iDod.

Angela: Not exactly. You see the news is that four out of the five original children that clare gave the Dods to have now been kidnapped. With the recent disclosure that those first five contained military software, a month came upon us where the most powerful and defence minded men on the planet, feel at a disadvantage without that code. The iDod is out and it will only be a month until third parties make that and other software available to all. But for now we have to deal with the fact that four out of five original users are hostages, because only they can currently run the state of the art military software ..

Stan: And news is in this morning that the Sendero Luminoso, a revolutionary group in Peru is 'in talks' with Rosa Pisco down in Peru.

Angela: So five out of five. Maybe we should roll the video. Remember this is not paid for by Manzana, but a collection that was taken up amongst the employees.

The video starts. Emotional music, but perhaps less manipulative than usual, cuts in.

A montage of iDod users:

A small boy creates what looks like a finger painting on the dod.

An old man photographs a pelican in a bird sanctuary.

Hundreds of iDod users tie their devices to colorful balloons and float them into the sky (on strings). They create a primitive wifi network across the globe for a day. And also a great colorful shot.

A poor village gets its first clean water. Children splash it around and play.

A doctor takes the dod into a patients room to help explain a diagnosis..

An old Chinese man talks to his grandson in America in Chinese. The young slick grandson hears the message in English and smiles.

Rosa's village has 10 or 12 new cars and a new hardware store. Three or four elders with magnificent weather worn faces sit outside it telling jokes.

A stock trader runs the floor with his iDod in hand.

Two young lovers build their first house with architectural drawings from the iDod,

Stan:( Weeping) A little manipulative isn't it?

Angela: That's my job. There's going to be a lot of ugly reports this week and I think we have to show the good part of Clare's intentions.

Stan: You want the world to know...

Angela: There's more to the story..

## Chapter 26

### Sook Yin's Trip

All was looking prosperous in the village near Dali that Sook Yin lived in called ShuangLangXiang. A new cobblestone road had been built back towards chicken foot mountain and the iDod was running an excellent research garden that all the farmer's in the area were learning from.

Strange Spanish style ceramic roofing tiles were showing up on some of the houses in the village. There was at least 1 shiny new pickup truck on this side of the lake now. And Sook Yin had the first Solar panels in town on her dad's place.

There was a new school, being built with iDod money too. She hoped it was going to be gr

She lived on the web, tracking Willox and Laughing Cloud, trying to keep track of Rosa and Chan Ye. There were reporters who contacted her on the internet that asked her for interviews, and to take part in conference calls. The village was just getting services now that allowed her to take part in a hectic global life even in her peaceful village.

To get away she would go for walks with her iDod... Back to where the trail grew thin, and climbed into the foothills. The foliage here is beaten back like the scottish moors. You way mistake it for a scrub brush foilage, but in truth, it is a forest, heavily harvested for firewood by a dense population of locals.

If Sook Yin was lucky she might see Tibetan hunters on horseback as she got higher up, closer to the temple.

She liked to talk to her iDod about plans she had for the future...In this case she was playing the dod like a keyboard as she walked.

On the day in question she saw the three men across the valley coming towards her. She thought it was a little odd to see

these guys two of them in suits and ties, way up here in the foothills. When they met she assembled a few details for when she would talk to the cops later. One of them was wearing a t shirt that said “Tamil Tigers” , another of them was carrying a briefcase that said “Kurdistan” on it. The third guy, the burly one who spoke some english , had a tatoo that read 'NWS'

Sook Yin had heard of NWS, She knew it stood for 'nations without states' but she didn't know anything about them.

“You're coming with us. “said the thin headed guy with the t shirt.

“You're taking me hostage?” “Sook Yin asked.

When she awoke it was dark and she was in a strange place. There were electric fringes on objects that she had never seen before but she'd heard about it from the travellers at the hotel where she worked. LSD. This was the way she would see if she took the drugs that some of those backpackers had with them.

And what a place! Clearly the bad guys had walked away from the lake instead of back towards Dali. This was inside the temples at Chickenfoot mountain! She recognized the dozens of statues. Marco Polo came to see this amazing sight on his long walk from Europe a few hundred years back. Hundreds of hand painted statues were built into the roof of this amazing place.

Sook Yin awoke to hundreds of pairs of glass eyes starting down at her from above. Representing Bhuddist characters and legends, the roof was one of the wonders of the world when Marco Polo laid eyes upon it in the 1700's.

Now it was just plain surreal as Sook Yin lay in the dark tripping for the first time, with hundreds of midget sized gods hanging over her in colourful garments, and then the bodies moved back, and a field of stars opened up. And there was a

scepter or a streetlight and it was shining weakly in the sky and some characters could move! At first Sook yin thought they were the ones on the roof, from legends that were told by the Buddhists. But then as 5 gathered around the light she saw she was looking at laughing cloud! And there was willow and rose. Sook yin and Chang ye were there too reaching out for the light sceptre. They were all gathered around the light and reaching out towards it and then... Flash ! A huge and very bright light takes over the sky.

Sook Yin watched wisps of light dance around for a little while longer and then she fell asleep. It was all a bit much to take.

She had a dream and the big burly guy who was her captor had the sceptre in his hand and he was running with it. Just before she awoke he came in for an extreme close up so we could read the NWS tattooed on his skin. Sook Yin woke up in shock.

## Chapter 27

Bonk and Snarky meet at the hockey game.

Snarky: Yo Bonk, we meet again at the place of peeing.

Bonk: But this time it's just the lineup for the actual urinals where we meet.

Snarky: Funny how drinking 2 large beers during a first period motivates one to empty one's bladder for the second.

Bonk: So one can drink a couple more.. Hey, what about your hostages aren't, they running 5 for 5 this week.

Snarky: It's kind of trendy. Everybody's a hostage.

Bonk: I'm obsessed with this case. In fact, I'm taking a couple of weeks off work. Wanna do some looking around for myself.

Snarky: Not that you're mired in red tape trying to run through normal channels.

Bonk: No

Snarky: We got a guy working with the pirates right now. They're 2 weeks away from having an app for every iPod that can do all this military intelligence stuff.

Bonk: Then the problem goes away.

Snarky: Ya, it's not creating super powers that causes imbalance. It's distributing them unevenly. Right now the tables are strangely slanted.

Bonk: Ya. Hope we all live to tell the tale. NWS has one of the hostages.

Snarky: Maybe that holiday isn't such a bad idea.

## Chapter 28:

Rosa meets the Sendero Luminoso.

Rosa needed to get away. Her fellow peasants along the Inca trail were using their iDod money to create cafes and bed and breakfasts along the valley bottom. Even a camera store. It was too touristy for her, and she didn't like it.

She hiked above her village, where the ancient Incan aqueducts still brought water to the potato fields. She walked to a place where she knew the trail would lead along the ridge-tops until Chiau came into site. Older than Machu Pichu, it was a ruin that not many people visited.

The site was empty when she got there. She could be alone. And she found an ancient room to sit in, or some rocks in a square the shape of a room at least. Her iDod had been talking all the way in about global news events, which looked quite important. She touched a screen and a number of processes awoke. It didn't seem odd to Rosa to be using an iDod in a ruin built by Incan or pre-incan civilizations hundreds of years before.

Chan Ye didn't think so either. She sent a link to a Youtube movie for NWS. Rosa sat quietly and watched...

A very corporate presentation with electronic music and 3d graphic logos wooshing in.

Narrator : NWS stands for Nations Without States, a non-governmental organization operating in dozens of countries around the world... NWS represents 10's of millions of members, and participates in all levels of the economy.

When you think of conflicts today, be it the Kurds in Iraq, or the Basques in Spain, it inevitably ties to National Identities that were not represented when the current State system arose. Languages. Ways of knowing. Unique cultural traits. Family. Those are the things that make up a nation.

The word state is tied to the word 'static, and implies an organization that doesn't change that much, but our world has many unresolved states, with different groups vying for power. In some cases like the u.s., there is a fairly healthy dynamic equilibrium that is reached through democracy. In other places, like northern ireland, or palestine, there is violence and death.

So we live in a world with nations, usually defined by language, and states, defined by statesmen. In Canada, for example, the Quebecois are a nation and they sometimes seek to be a state. Other times they are powerful members of Nations Without States. The Palestinians of Israel, some native tribes in America, Kurds...

Rosa took a break and walked around a bit. There was an old woman in a bowler hat and a hooped skirt walking a trail on the other side of the valley. She looked for the cow that she would inevitably be herding but found nothing...Rosa was despondent.

“So Sook Yin's been taken by these NWS people and all the other groups seem to be linked in with them,” she said to Chang Ye over her Dod.

“I see a nasty conflict occurring when they all get linked up,”said Chang.

“But Sook Yin is Bei. She is from a nation without a state herself,”  
said Rosa.

“I wonder what she thinks?”

...and then on the trail back just as it was getting dark she encountered the Sendero Luminoso. Active in Peru for the last 40 or 50 years, they were Maoist terrorists. Rosa was easily picked up by them and taken to a hut they seemed to have commandeered.

The leader was Juan Carlos.

“It's important that you understand who we're working for, In this case the Sendero Luminoso are simply doing a job for cash. It's the Palestinians and they are giving us 100,000 to send you and your Dad over to them.”

“So I'm being sold like a common slave,” said Rosa.

“No, common slaves cost way less than 100,000,” said Juan Carlos.

And she was gassed to sleep and woke up in a desert far away.

## Chapter 29

### Wilcox in the Forest

Another escape. Running, leaping across small creeks, sliding in the mud.. It is snowing so hard you try to pick a huge leaf and fashion a hat out of it. There are no broadleaves here. This is Russia.

Sub arctic forest now, all is snow and sharp ice spears that bite you if you're not careful. You cut your knuckles trying to break through the top of a small pond for a drink. It is patchy and windblown this snow. You find a pile of leaves that has no snow covering it.

At home they taught you to snuggle down in a pile of leaves to stay warm at night. The only trick was making sure there were no ants at work in the pile or it could be an itchy business!

“Hm,” you think, “No ants here. In fact it's too cold for anything alive to even go outside.”

You run quickly on the spot to try and warm up..It's getting dark, you keep moving, maybe you'll find a road. Then, when the light fails, you decide to try the leaf trick. You bury yourself deeply and fall asleep.

3 hours later you wake up. It's midnight.

“FUCK,”you yell.

A voice in the back of your head says “Africans don't swear. You're a little more polite than most people”

- “Fuck off, Im freezing!” you answer, and the voice falls silent.

Your fingers and toes are numb. Desperately you fumble through your pockets and you find it! A book of matches with 4 strikes left. This is important and could mean the difference between life and death.

With the first match you start the leaves ablaze. They're a little bit dry you've found a fairly sheltered area and the blaze continues for 5 or 10 minutes. Your pant leg was frozen from getting wet at the pond. You manage to thaw it out.

With the second match you try to light a bundle of sticks that you gather. The fire quickly goes out. When you break a stick you see that it is green wood.

“Fuck,” you shiver.

The third match you are serious and it's gotta work. You find some dry dead wood and gather together a lot.

“I have no axe,” you say out loud

“...so my fire has to be a huge pile of kindling.”

You want it known that the 3<sup>rd</sup> fire worked. A bit. You were stumbling through the dark looking for yet another bundle of kindling when you struck your head on a branch.

You were unconscious for some time and then as if it was on an iPod, you saw Laughing Cloud.

“Hey Willox, looks like you're having some troubles with our northern winters.”

“Fuck you,” you say out loud to nobody at all if you're even conscious.

“One more match?” asks Laughing Cloud.

“Ya it's gotta work this time,” says Willox.

- “To build a fire,” says LC.

“You passed through an evergreen forest, You want to go back to the evergreen forest and collect all the lowest dead branches off the trees. They will be dry even in a snowstorm and they'll have a wispy moss on them I hope. That's great fire starter.”

Willox slept for the last couple of hours before sunup. When it was light he traced his path back for an hour or so 'til he came to a wood that had green needles on the trees even in winter. He brought some bark from the deciduous forest but mostly this fire was made of the dry dead branches he broke off at the bottom of the trees.

“Thanks Laughing Cloud,” Willox said to the wilderness.

## Chapter 30

At a shareholders meeting for The Manzana corporation

Charlie Evans takes the floor.

"It has been our most profitable quarter ever, but I'm starting to have nightmares about Litmore's gadget," he said.

"The global situation leaves us exposed to litigation," said Nimbley.

"exposed? The whole world is going to blame us," said the Boss.

"Well, let's blame Litmore," said Snarky.

"I mean we're not the ones who gave ultimate power to those kids, we just sell hardware," Clara Thorn offered.

"It's only ultimate power for a few more days," said Snarky.

"This NWS group is sending us private ransom notes" said the Boss "Making some wild claims about having a presence in outer space."

"There are records that they have been putting private payloads into near space for years," said Kinsky.

"They seemed to be harmless parts for a future experiment. We found a base in Chechnya that they operate out of."

"Maybe a few days is all they need," said Charlie Evans.



## Chapter 31

Laughing cloud in a hole in New West.

I write to you all today as a prisoner. This bulk email will go out the first chance my iDod has to find signal. Some of you are family and friends, others are police officers and detectives who have asked to be kept in touch.

My theory is that I am deep in a hole in New Westminster, under a family's home. I have reason to believe that my captors only access the home when the family is out, on weekends when they go to Keats Island. I've just overheard a few snippets. I don't know where that is but that's a big clue.

They're treating me fairly well. I get fast food brought to me regularly always from a different place so they are being careful, and I'm holding up ok. There is only one guard in the hole with me from Monday to Friday. He has a separate 8\*8 box that he lives in, and there is a hallway linking to my 8\*8 box. On the weekend 3 or 4 people may drop by and the door to the hole is thrown open, I can see a bit of the basement at the top of the hole. Looks like a painter's ladder.

It's risky for me to write this here but I have a plan to get this to you. So far there have been 3 different guards, and I want to put my plan into place the next time guard#2, a female, is on shift. I'll slip the iDod into her food bag on Saturday, and hopefully by the time she notices as she heads off to the food store, and sounds alarms, the iDod will have silently found some cell phone signal or wifi and this message will be sent to you. If it captures some useful pictures too I'll tell it to send them on.



## Chapter 32.

Angela's next ad on tv

To whom it may concern:

My name is Clarence Litmore, I am an engineer at the Manzana Corporation in Silicon Valley, California. I made an arrogant move when we were releasing our last product, the iDod. I illegally gave out 5 copies of the machine to people I remembered from my travels.

Now, because I also made it so the machines would only work for the 5, these 5 have been taken hostage and are being made to play war games on powerful men's behalf.

There is a threat to destroy the united nations which you say should be renamed the United States. I can't believe it's real. I mean in the 1980s there was talk of 'Star Wars' defense systems that would blast moving targets out of thin air, and I suppose it was imagined that some day there would be satellites that could destroy targets. But those didn't work. What has really changed in the last 30 years?

A video that shows up on youtube.

Mr Litmore:

Thank you for your thoughts regarding the NWS and our verifiable threat towards the united nations organization. There will be a demonstration of the technology soon. After that we will demonstrate it by destroying one target on each continent.

What has changed since the 1980 is nanotechnology. Lenses made of nanotubes with exquisite ability to focus coherent light on distant targets, wait and see.







## Chapter 33

The Sunwatchers mass produce millionaires in Kuala Lumpur.

Kwai: Do the math. We bought 20 iDods. We gave them to 20 people with specific instructions that they would earn enough money to buy 20 more iDods and distribute them. This has now happened 7 times. There are thousands of recipients involved in this.

It's viral..

Ritter; My name is Susan Ritter and I'm a reporter following the stories that have sprung up around the world with the new Manzana product, the iDod. Today I'm in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and I am talking to Kwai, the founder of a group called the Sunwatchers, here.

Kwai: 'So we end up with this horde of rich peasants, and it's spreading to china, to those relatives in Bangladesh. This is going to have a real impact on the poorer nations of the world.'

Ritter: There is a lot of good work being done, Schools, bridges. Is there much corruption?

Kwai: Of course with every new wealth goes a spending spree that includes a lot of waste.. But there is some mature and intelligent work that is being done too...Investment in agriculture, business.

We have a lot of information videos that we ship with the dod that encourage the new user to be a good citizen and continue the chain. People are doing it! Poor man's honour runs deep. Distribution from manzana is sometimes a problem though. We wait months sometimes to get our product.

Ritter: The viewers will wonder about your perfect American accent.

Kwai” I went to college in the states with an oddball engineering student called Clarence Litmore.

Ritter: So this goes back a long time.

Kwai: To the dorm rooms and seminars...

## Chapter 34.

Bonk meets Stacy  
she is waiting in a seating area in the North wing of the San Francisco airport.

Bonk: He's not going to show up.

Stacy: Who?

Bonk: Laughing Cloud, the guy you met on the internet and were going to go to Hawaii with.

Stacy: How do you know?

Bonk: I read your emails... let me introduce myself. I'm lieutenant Bonque of the Silicon Valley Civic Police.

Stacy: Self appointed spy guy too.

Bonk: This is turning into something very important Stacy.

Stacy: You even know my name.

Bonk: Im following every lead I can.. We're talking about global implications.

Stacy: So what do I do now? He sent me tickets to keep going.

Bonk: You could keep going to Oahu, or you could fly with me.

Stacy: And where are you off to.?

Bonk: I'm heading up to Vancouver to look for Laughing Cloud.

Stacy: count me in.

## Chapter 35.

A TV News Anchor:

Anchor: So the big story this week is the actions of a terrorist group called NWS who have destroyed a city block in Boston with their weapon in outer space. Our man on location is Norm Normanson. Norm, what does the scene look like?

Norm: Pro stuff, this was an extremely well executed and apparently safe operation.

Anchor: How can you eradicate a city block in Boston and do no harm?

Norm: It was condemned and slated for demolition. NWS helped out in that way, which is weird.

Anchor: Well they certainly got our attention, let's hope that their intentions remain honorable.

Norm: It will be interesting to see the counter-strikes that will go into place. Clearly they have hacked our imaging systems to hide their operation.

Anchor: Because this must be solar energy trapped by a huge solar sail in outer space.

Norm: Which our systems should be able to see. But they've compromised it somehow.

Anchor: Interesting.. Keep us posted.

## Chapter 36.

Litmore and the Anchorman discuss the situation.

Litmore: It's a decaying orbit. That's the most important piece of information I have today.

Anchor: Nice to see you too Mr. Litmore.

Litmore: What they've managed to attain is an extremely weak decaying orbit for the hardware they've been sending up for years. The scientists I was talking with earlier today thought the system would fall in less than a week.

Anchor: Some comfort in that.

Litmore: And we can see their solar sails now, we've cleaned up the security hole that allowed them to “erase” them for the last few years.

Anchor: And it is years, isn't it? That's how long it takes to build up such an immense force using solar that can destroy buildings.

Litmore: And how do you store the energy? We were imagining some kind of battery or capacitor.

Anchor: I suppose it is a weightless atmosphere, so lead acid batteries would work.

Litmore: Not when you're paying a huge sum for each piece of payload you ship up there.

Anchor: So NWS is behind a whole new technology.

Litmore: We think they're using the fact that they're in a vacuum to cycle the energy in a kind of coil. Kind of like using a mirror to shine a light all the way around the world.

Anchor: And then beam it at targets on earth.

Litmore: Using the nanotechnology Lens that Snarquis is known for. That's who we think is behind this, is Jaques Snarquis, the Quebecois inventor.

Anchor: But he's not alone.

Litmore: He has connections all over the world.

Anchor: Huh.

Litmore It's more like a bunch of radio stations in a circular landscape than a coil this thing. The energy signal gets passed from station to station with no friction because it's a vacuum, and stores up for the big day.

Anchor: And tomorrow's another demo.

Litmore: I think we'll find they have a limited number of targets, and a limited time in space.

Anchor: But will they have enough time to do their dirty work? We find out their plans tomorrow after the demo.



## Chapter 37

### Rosa in Palestine

Rosa and her iDod are doing some solid financial work on behalf of the Palestinians. She works in the ministry in Ramallah with her iDod behind a hand-carved wooden door in a dusty hallway. She has a badge on that says 'Lewahadi inchilla' and the men seem to leave her alone. 'I walk alone, god be willing.' Poor horny bastards and some of them are so cute! Hombre.

Rosa has come out of herself in the time since the iDod showed up. The quiet peasant girl in the picture is now replaced by a firey young lady, and she doesn't like being a hostage. The worst is in the evenings when the generals come and they play military simulations together.

It is kind of scary how the iDod always wins, in simulation. Defeating the best military minds around.

On one of these evenings a general uses her iDod to communicate with the Tamil Tigers. It turns into a conference call and the Kurds and the Bosnians jump in. Then it turns into a brawl, with everyone fighting. Clearly some of the members are ok with human casualties in their actions, while others aren't.

Rosa knows her iDod will record it all. She imagines the report that she will assemble later that evening.:

Crack in the NWS Wall. There is an internal power struggle going on. Some of the members are OK with casualties but Snarquis the Quebecois pacifist refuses to do harm to human life.

## Chapter 38

Bonk calls snarky on the phone

Bonk: Hey sup

Snarky: Just the world exploding from a death ray from outer space, nothing much.

Bonk: I'm in Vancouver, with Laughing Cloud's girlfriend, Stacy.

Snarky: Hope you find him.

Bonk: No my feeling is that this site is going to be tough to solve, When I look at picking up one of the five, I think Willox in Chechnya is the guy to try. But I need a budget to fly over there.

Snarky: I wonder if I could get some Manzana money.

Bonk: You know I was thinking, it would be good for these NWS guys to have someone on the inside at Manzana.

Snarky: Interesting.

Bonk: The whole thing being so sensitive to timing, you would really need to know about release dates, and shipping schedules, to sych up your, uh mass destruction.

Snarky: Huh.

Bonk: Your name Snarky sure sound like this Snarquis character up in Quebec it's almost like you're related.

Snarky: He's my uncle actually. You know I can give you free travel right now! Ill just call my travel agent, and set it up, so you can put everything on my tab.

Bonk: Excellent idea. I'll call you from Russia.

Snarky: Don't bother.

## Chapter 38

The second demonstration of the ray.

Anchor: In a stunning display of power the revolutionary group called NWS have destroyed 5 city blocks, on 5 different continents.

For more on this we go to Norm Normanson in the control room.

Norm: What I've got assembled around me are five video screens, and each of them has a live video feed from one of the sites. NWS made these live streams possible and there are highlight collages all over youtube. Buildings blowing up in slow motion gets a lot of hits.

Anchor: And what's your impression compared to the first demo?

Norm: Much of the same fare. Demolition sites and condemned properties, I think the interesting thing to note is that it didn't go off without a hitch. The site in Italy was apparently a hundred feet off target and a street and a neighbour's lawn were singed, with a pet animal dying as well.

Anchor: and that's where the picture we see time and time again came from.

Norm: The singed bones. What was apparently a pet cat that got fried by the energy pulse?

Anchor :Yuck. Have the NWS made their demands?

Norm: We'll go to that press conference live in just a minute.

Anchor: So australia, italy, Rio di janeiro, quebec, where else?

Norm: India. A block of Calcutta was leveled and nobody noticed.

Anchorman: Looked the same.

Norm: Perhaps a small improvement.

Anchorman: I know some blocks here that could use this treatment too.

Norm: We're trying to maintain our levity in times of great stress.

Anchor: Telling jokes with a gun to my head..

Norm: out.

Anchor: out.

## Chapter 39

The village of Frontenac , France 1604

scene 1: in the enclosure at the chapel.

Cardinal Snarquis: Rome has ordered that our lands be delivered to the local people.

Minion: Including the vineyards around the monastery?

Cardinal Snarquis: Well not those I hope, but the decisions are all made by other people than me.

\*\*\*\*

scene 2: At the vineyard.

Cardinal Snarquis (rides up on a horse)

Cardinal Snarquis: Hey there, a beautiful day isn't it?

Gerome Bonque: Yes it is sir, and you're welcome on our new property, to ride and hunt.

Cardinal Snarquis: Very kind, so you're the new owners of the vineyard. ?

Bonque:The church gave back all the land that they stole during the war...

Cardinal Snarquis: so that's how you see it.

Bonque: I see it how it is.

Cardinal Snarquis: not how it shall be.

\*\*\*\*\*

scene 3 (2 years later) at the vineyard

Emily Bonque: Repossessed! !how could that be.

Emile Bonque: the notice says by order of Cardinal Snarquis the vineyard is to be turned over to the church.

Gerome Bonque: We'll challenge it in court.

scene 4 (in the street) a few weeks later

Cardinal Snarquis: (on horseback)

to Gerome Bonque (who is on foot): Sir who is the rightful owner of yon vineyard?

Gerome Bonque: some say it belongs to the church now, but I've heard otherwise.

Cardinal Snarquis: It belongs to the church.

200 years go by and the bonque family finally wins the case in court. The vineyard is turned over to them again.

200 years later in outer space another drama unfolds between the 2 families.



## Chapter 40

### The Big Fight

In BC Laughing cloud has a gun to his head.

Thousands of miles away in Chechnya, Willox has a gun to his head also.

They are being forced to play a video war game together, on the internet. To the death. On their iDods. With expert artificial intelligence assistance.

NWS has a deadly fracture. Kpinski and the hawks are committed to using the space weapon to destroy state administrative centers all over the world. The white house, and most houses of parliament are targeted.

Snarquis and his followers are against this. It comes down to a duel. iDods across the sky.

Willox is at the old farmer's place that he came to after his nights in the Russian forest last week. Feasting on black bread and yogurt until the old farmer alerts the authorities, and Willox and his iDod are under arrest. It is the police officer, Field Marshal Charinof, who has the gun to Willox's head now, taking orders from the military.

Meanwhile, across the planet in BC Laughing Cloud has been taken to a deserted ranch somewhere up the Fraser Valley. It is set back in the woods on the hillside and has a view over the lights of a small town. Chilliwack perhaps. Like Willox, he has a gun to his head, and is being forced to do battle. To the death.

At the two ends of the battlefield there is a target, like the flag in capture the flag. Except in this case the flag is Willox or Laughing Cloud. Around it are perimeters, a band of lines to cross as your army penetrates the enemy's territory. Along each perimeter are bases, where groups of soldiers congregate. Often progress is made by taking bases...but other times it's a more spread out and individualized combat.

Willox commands his men to move to perimeter two and they are attacked and sent back by LC's men .

"It's odd", thinks Laughing Cloud," but when I shoot a gun off in the video game I hear shots outside a few hundred metres away?"

In Chechnya Willox is noticing the same thing. Sounds of gunfire and battle outside the door of the old farmer's hut. Willox shoots a text message to LC.

"This is real, Cloud. There really are soldiers directed by you and me, trying to reach the targets and kill the enemy. I can hear them shooting outside the fucking door. This isn't a video game it's a murder ritual. "

Willox wrote back:

"NWS has split into factions and these guys are at war with each other. We are trying to eliminate each other because these iDods are only special for a couple more days and these guys have to work out their disagreements and get their work done."

The iDods make all the calls. Willox gets detailed advice on where to send his men. Who they should attack, what order they should do things in...Strategy in this battle has a lot to do with attacking from more than one angle at once, with multiple coordinated teams. The iDods are masterfull quarterbacks, calling the plays and seeking their targets.

Each of them is in charge of 60 soldiers and there are 60 defenders at each site too. The iDod moves soldiers like chess pieces trying to outsmart its opponent.

Each of the soldiers can hear the computer calling orders to them through an earpiece. A voice like HAL directing men towards killing.

Bonk and Stacy caught a flight into Moscow yesterday and spent today on connections to Chechnya. Now they are approaching the old man's farm and they are in contact with Willox. He is a prisoner. There is a roadblock at the farm's gates and they are turned back.

They park on a dirt track nearby to think it over. Then they sneak in, through the woods and find themselves in the middle of a gun battle. Willox said he thought the game he was playing had a direct effect on the gunfire he heard in the actual world. Now was the time to test this. They contacted him and asked for a diversion and all the action suddenly moved to the other side of the field. Excellent.

Then they were able to get to Willox. He was deep into his game with Laughing cloud and in fact he has broken through the final perimeter and was about to reach him. He had a gun to his head and if he didn't kill Laughing cloud he would be killed.

"Stop " shouts Stacy, as Bonque wrestles with the Field Marshal and removes his weapon. "Willox, you were about to kill Laughing Cloud." says Stacy.

"Forced to do battle," Willox answered, ashamed.

"We're' gonna get you two out of this," she said.

"Stacy you got here in perfect time" said Laughing Cloud over the iDod.

Somewhere a bet got paid off. The native kid didnt kill the African..and the African didn't kill the Native kid. The bet had been over how to use the beam in outer space... It meant a lot.

## Chapter 41.

The press conference takes place.

Anchor: Welcome ladies and Gentlemen to today's historic press conference by Nations Without States the group that recently displayed their immense power by demolishing properties all over the world from outer space..

Today's Proceedings are linked together over satellite, as the NWS spokesmen are in remote parts of the world hidden away. I suppose if they were apprehendable, they would be apprehended.

On the screen Snarquis enters the room and sits down.

Snarquis :Good Evening citizens of Earth, it is a great honour to address you today. I apologize for the crude display we used to get your attention, but you are paying attention aren't you?

Let me begin by putting your minds at ease, today is not Armageddon or even anything close. Our ray is in a decaying orbit and will soon fall from the sky, and life will go back to normal. We take our relationship with the public very seriously and we don't want to scare you or inconvenience you in any way.

Of course we do need to show that we are powerful and that we have literally been waiting for centuries trying to find justice.

Of course there was a faction of our group that had some more aggressive targets in mind, but what we are proposing is some harmless demolition in one week's time.

We propose to demolish the UN buildings.

We also propose to donate 200 million dollars for the creation of two new buildings: The assembly of Nations and the Assembly of States.

He plays a slick video on the assembly of nations:  
“A place where cherokee and basques have a chair, where eskimos and maoris talk as equals”

The UN is evacuated the next day

It is revealed on the news that expert analyses has proven conclusively: the reason the shot in Italy was a little off, was that there was a physical struggle at the console...

Internal conflict in NWS is publicized hopefully.

## Chapter 42

Kelly had been promoted.

Kelly had been promoted. The new international bureau, as if North America had just realized there were other countries. He had a new shiny desk and a big office way up on the 33rd floor of a government building. On the wall he'd pasted photographs of the 5 iDod kids. He had a line connecting the pictures and leading up to another picture. He got to bring along 2 of his flunkies so he was up there with Bryce and Brogue trying to save the world.

"I've contacted the military and they're sending someone over for a meeting," says Bryce looking up from a laptop.

"At least we asked," says Brogue

"Just thought i'd mention. There are bad guys with a laser beam up in outer space, trying to blow up the world, and I was kind of just, uh wondering if there were any counter measures being mounted," says Kelley.

"A plan other than we could all just die," says Brogue.

"That would take intelligence," sergeant Striker of the 10th division enters the room.

"military intelligence," says Brogue.

"I think that's an oxymoron isn't it?" says Striker.

"Some kind of moron," says Kelly.

"So what do you guys know?" says Striker getting down to business.

"It wasn't a surprise to us when NWS demoed the ray," says Kelly.

"We've been tracking the iDod devices from the very beginning and there were some signatures on a few web pages, some small traces that led us to believe that NWS was using the iDod for planning it's moves in some kind of huge scheme.

"We got to the same place as you but not by tracking iDods. By putting together the 20 year trail that NWS left in getting parts into outer space."

"Seems like an obvious place for tight regulation," says Brogue and Striker rolls his eyes.

"Unclear whose job that was, to keep track of all the parts going up into space."

"Snarquis probably hid it brilliantly," says Kelly  
"Well regulations would have been nice, but now we have to deal with the fact that these guys are going to take down the UN buildings."

'We do have a counter measure in preparation,' says Striker.

"What could shoot down a satellite?" asks Bryce.

"We're looking at a variation on one of our unmanned drones" says Strker.

"Space drones," says Brogue.

"Ya, that sort of thing," says Striker.

## Chapter 43:

A TV news anchor.

Anchor: So Malt what are we to make of that news conference.?

Malt: If we were to listen to Fox tv like I just was, we might think the sky is falling...

Anchor: I thought the sky was falling.

Malt: We're talking about terrorists with public relations videos. It's a new kind of clean and professional terrorist.

Anchor: Unless the other guy grabs the wheel again.

Malt: The expert analysis is that in Italy when the target was missed there was a struggle going on..

Anchor: Can the pacifists hold out?

Malt: Snarquis is a smart guy. But Kpinski, the other guy is harsh and dangerous. It's all going to fall out of the sky next week anyways.

Anchor: Right after they demo the UN.

Malt: Probably, unless the military shoots them out of the sky.

Anchor: That would be cool..

Malt: Probably won't happen. I hear it's doable but it would take 6 months to put it together.

Anchor: We have uh, 6 hours.

Malt: The sky isn't falling

Anchor: But probably one of the largest institutions on earth will have its concrete basis blown off the earth.

Malt: I never liked that building anyways.

Anchor: But we'll never build his design. We're not to be held hostage.

Malt: I think it's foolish to believe that there wouldn't be repercussions if we failed to build the assembly of nations and the assembly of states design.

Anchor: Wimp.

Malt: I like Eskimos.



## Chapter 44

### Wartech released for iDodecahedrons

Any advantage held by the first 5 users of the iDod in strategic matters has now been lost.

Today marked the release of the industry standard Wartech app which does all the artificial intelligence command decision making that the first 5 i'Dod users enjoyed. Perhaps those hostages will be set free now, that anyone with an iDod can pretty automatically acquire these skills.

I t's speculated that NWS used this app on the iDod to orchestrate their current reign of terror over the world. Today those tables are once again balanced.



## Chapter 45

### Stacy in Hawaii:

Stacy was doing like Laughing cloud said and staying at the Hilton in Waikiki. Fancy clean room with a view out over the beach. Maid service. Room service. Awesome.

In the evening she'd sit in the bar by the pool and let men try to hit on her for fun.

“Ya he should be here today or tomorrow. I talked to him last night” she would tell the guys.

“His name is Laughing Cloud, you might have seen him on the news in the last few weeks. “

They all knew who he was, and about his epic battle with Willox.

“This is the opposite of fighting to the death” one of the guys said about the beach life.

They knew who she was too. How she fit into the huge story that had just happened on the news. The guys were really cute and the atmosphere was really sexual . Laughing Cloud arrived just in the nick of time.

Stacy was glad to see him.



## Chapter 46

Sook yin was captured

Sook yin was captured that first night and given LSD and shown the statues in the roof at chicken foot mountain. It was there that she saw the five reaching for the light that flashes. In her dream later, she saw the burly man with the nws tattoo carrying the light scepter away....

In the weeks that followed she was taken on a weird odyssey through Burma, Cambodia, and Nepal...a kind of search for the Asian revolutionary spirit, for the counter culture of the Khmer rouge, the Tamil tigers, the Viet Cong .A study of non conformity in that most conformist of continents.

And in China the producer, that's what she called the fat guy who took her around, took her to a rock concert. And she met the band and she felt the international teen spirit that the young, long-haired europeans back at the hotel in dali used to project.

The producer was trying to sell her on rebellion in general. As an aesthetic. Sure she had to use the iDod for a few hours every night with their friend the banker, but for the most part The Producer was exposing her to rebel lifestyles. Building up her rebel spirit. He wanted a wild animal that was difficult to tame.

He introduced her to the notion of NWS and they looked at how the Bei people fit into their work. Then after a short flight she met Chan Ye, and the Sunwatchers.

There was a man called Kwaii there.

“Tell Kpinski there was not enough time. We have created thousands of wealthy mobile peasants , but they are not ready to act against the central forces.”

Sook Yin thought that there hadn't been enough time to brainwash her either. She wasn't a rebel yet.

## Chapter 47

Kpinski and Snarquis are out for a walk

Kpinski and Snarquis are out for a walk on the dock on the island that they are living on in the Caribbean.

Kpinski: Just got the message that there was not enough time. There is a faction in NWS that was going to put a large plan into effect. I work with the sunwatchers, and we were going to spread change over the planet like a virus.

Snarquis: I was aware of your plot to overthrow my power, But no, plan A will go ahead as scheduled, the non-violent demolition of the UN.

Kpinski: That's enough that I'm still proud.

Snarquis: Me too.



## Chapter 48

### A TV News Anchor

Anchor: What we're witnessing through the long distance lens on the Swedish skar satellite is extraordinary. For a few days NASA or someone else has been trying to remove the NWS satellite from orbit, sending doomed drones that were inadequately retrofitted for outer space, and then yesterdays a small 1 man craft that got close enough to touch the beam and under normal circumstances knock it out of orbit.

Dr Raminof: The NWS satellite demonstrated an unusual elasticity to it's orbit, that is when we knocked it three meters one way it auto corrected to three meters back. Also when we tried to open it, we found it was locked up very tightly in a manner that was going to be non trivial to crack.

Anchor: So the plan is to mount another mission and take good safecracking gear.

Raminof:It could be more difficult than that. Snarquis is a very clever fellow.

Anchor: Yes I wouldn't want to engage him in a battle of wits.

Raminof: That's exactly what we're doing. And we have 23 hours to save the UN buildings

## Chapter 49

### A job interview

Bonk: I'm just back from Russia where I was doing a little uh, freelance work on this case.

Kelly: Glad we could reach you then, we've got an unusual position we're looking to fill and because of your history we thought you might be our man

Bonk:I've been following the story on the news. You're interested in my history with Snarquis?

Kelley: Our scientists say we're not going to be able to crack that bird all that easily. They say Snarquis has the best knowledge of the nanotechnology involved in making a really light really hard alloy. They say it could take weeks to crack and I should put as much energy as possible into the semantic solution. Trying to figure out the combination to the lock that opens it up..

Bonk: Our families both had land in France 400 years ago.I am a Bonque, proud keepers of the vineyards at Frontenac. There was a feud that went on for a couple hundred years between our families. Then my Grandmother married a Snarquis. So now, relations are better. I meet one of the sons at the hockey game all the time.Say hello. Don't know how this could help come up with a combination.

Kelly:We're not even sure what the input is. It's a video input of some sort.

Bonk: Hand signals I bet. They have a secret handshake and a bunch of other stuff passed down from their days in the castles. I know a bit of it.

Kelly: It's a long shot but you might be our next man in outer space.

## Chapter 50

### Bonque in Space

Bonque: So at first I was talking to an ai version of you Snarquis but now you seem to be realtime on the radio.

Pause.

Snarquis: Well with a few seconds delay it is realtime.

Pause.

Bonque: I guess it's a satellite feed.

Pause.

Snarquis: literally yes.

Pause.

Bonque: I meant a cellphone satellite.

Pause.

Snarquis: I know you did but you are overhead now so we go direct to you no middlemen.

Pause.

Bonque: So what do you want?

pause.

Snarquis; Deniability, you see as an orbit decays there is more and more turbulence

Pause.

Bonque: So you can't even be sure you're going to hit the UN buildings

Pause.

Snarquis: That's why I'm giving you the option to save the world yourself.

Pause.

Bonque: What you're giving me the right to redirect this weapon? Take out some harmless ocean, or maybe a slice of the Hudson river.?

Pause.

Snarquis: You will be supplied with a button. If you choose to push it the weapon will be redirected.

Pause.

Bonque: Saving the un but destroying some helpless strangers.

Pause.

Snarquis: It's your decision you have 5 minutes of oxygen left to think..

Pause.

Bonque thinks about it for only 30 seconds. Then as far as he knows, he presses the button.

## Chapter 51

### A Harmless Demolition.

And then on the date it was advertised to occur, the city block containing the main U.N. buildings was demolished. The aim was off by 30 ft which was really very good considering the turbulence involved in shooting from a decaying orbit. Bonque's button press to change the targetting apparently had no effect. Perhaps that's why it was 30 ft. Off.

No one was hurt. It was a violence only against property and the \$200 million was going to help pay for the damages. The media called it happy terrorism, and that's how it was supposed to be remembered.

Stacy and Laughing Cloud were honeymooning on Waikiki beach when it happened . They'd been married by a native hawaiian shaman and they broadcast it on the iDod. They contacted Litmore.

The blast was on the tv behind every bar, every hotel lobby when they walked up to Dennys. The pictures of the buildings blowing up in slow motion. Iconic like 911 this was history in the making.

Laughing /Cloud: I think the iDod should launch a counteroffensive.

Stacy: I mean it looks bad for Manzana all this global news making that's been going on .

Litmore: VAre you kidding? There' no publicity like free publicity.

Rosa was on a flight back from Palestine when the airplane entertainment system picked up the breaking news story. Willox was on a plane too home from Moscow. It was Aeroflot and it didn't have news but some of the Russians turned their cell phones on mid flight in blatant disregard of the rules and got the news. Sook Yin was home in Dali and Chang Ye also was hiking to her family's home on tiger leaping gorge.

Litmore and Angela were at their house up the gorge.

All of a sudden everyone knew that this was real and something really terrible had happened. I mean no one was hurt but the iDod had thrown the whole world out of balance for some days, and it was going to take a while to recover from it.

## Chapter 51

### Across the land children wept

Across the land children wept. Grown men with memories of the fallen edifice took heart in the fact that new seeds had been sown for a more peaceful future for everyone. In the tragic crater a double flower bloomed that spring, and plans were laid out for new structures. An idea took root and it was drawn out and considered.

The Assembly.

“The Assembly of nations should be built because it's a good idea not because they tell us to,” said the politicians. And UN letterheads and business was directly transferred over to the new Assembly of States. Really it was exactly the same but with a new name.

Beurocracy at the new Assembly of Nations was a problem. And 3<sup>rd</sup> world gurus who thought they might take over the world. But it prospered and did some important work. Culture. That was their thing.

So, that was the story of the beam from space and the dung beetle that fought the cloud.

It was how Sook Yin dreamed of the man who stole the light, and how Rosa found the crack in the NWS wall. It was an iDod story. How Litmore gave away 5 magic seeds and the wonderful and frightening things that grew.

Across the land the iDods had troubled dreams as the darkness fell that night. The hopes were still there, but there were shadows too. A plus and minus equation.

They all sorted through the day's images efficiently and dreamed of a world that they hoped would arrive. Also they worried about the world they now knew could arrive. Whatever the case, the iDods would be there.

## Chapter 52

The 5 meet in a restaurant in California, flown in for a Manzana meeting.

Rosa: All these iDods in the middle of the table . We could use them as some kind of bricks.

Willox: Build a wall.

Cloud: If we let them all go to sleep their dreams will sync up.

Stacy: I like it when they flash pictures at night before they go to sleep.

Sook Yin: You can watch the images that it caught for the day and compare them to the images that you remember.

Litmore: Who would have thought that watching sorting would be so interesting.

Cloud: The point of view from the bookshelf.

Chan Ye: from the straw above the pig shed.

Willox: From he cupboard by the door in my new swank apartment.

Sook Yin: Nice, finally some iDod money paying for some luxury.

Chan Ye: We put running water and internet into every house along the gorge.

Rosa: We got running water, internet, cable tv, tractors, automatic wheat grinder thingamajigs...

Willox: In the new town I live in down the lake I'm paying for a new sewer system. And a music festival.

Cloud: Ya we're putting on a music festival.

Litmore: Have you guys seen the 'artist's response' web site?

Rosa: Ya, some nice stuff.

Chan ye: I liked the song about the UN blowing up by Shester.

Cloud: She's playing at our festival.

Stacy: You just think she's hot.

Willox: I think she's hot.

Litmore: I think she looks like one of my friend's daughters.

Stacy: You gotta meet that girl Willox.

Willox: (looks at Litmore): Sounds like I'm gonna come over for dinner.

Litmore: Ya I can set it up...

Willox: Excellent.

Rosa: On another topic I like Angela's new ad.

Chan Ye: iDod peace offensive.

Cloud: kind of hippy stuff.

Willox: Hope it works.

Cloud: The iDod index is only earning extraordinary returns.

Sook yin: well when everything is done legally and with taxation in mind, the profits decrease.

Litmore: It's kind of cool that it makes money at all.

Chan Ye: Keeps the whole Sunwatchers crowd afloat.

Litmore: and that's a lot of people.

Sook Yin: The iDods are doing good.

Litmore: Ya maybe...

The End.

# A Secret Democracy

By Bill Meikle



### *A Secret Democracy Intro*

*I found this story hand written in a diary from 1993. I was travelling through India writing on trains and in small cafe's. I bought a world Almanac and carried it with me. I was amazed by the population of India.*

*It was before the internet and handheld computers and before google who the pacifist captors resemble.*

*I tried to finish it, because only 9 chapter are written, but it seemed wrong. The important thing about this story predicting events between 2010 and 2020 is **REALITY IS BETTER**. This makes the future look dark and foreboding, more than it is.*



1. Everyman's Tale.
2. Abduction
- 3.. the wakeup room
4. Global jury duty
5. George
6. Escapism
7. Politics evolve
8. Our captor's arrive.
9. A modest proposal
10. Parliament then freedom
11. A secret world society
12. Lobbying
13. family woes
14. the reality engine
15. a secret abduction
16. an immodest proposal
17. plot mechanics regarding big real and how they find out where new Athens is.
18. a chase scene with george
19. violence sex and retribution
20. the big vote
21. democratic fugue.



## 1. Everyman's Tale.

That was the time when the world was split in two, between the oncoming decentralist forces, and the ancient hierarchical ways of Big Power. I was a peon in a tower; a worker bee, spent my days droning and my nights dreaming of a way out. It wasn't a bad life, but I was shallow and lost as hell, and a junior accountant in BIG SALES...

I met Lucy, a junior lawyer in our firm, and for some reason she liked me...maybe it was the easy way she could manipulate me...Lucy has an excellent way with passive/aggressive manipulation. We were a couple made in BIGSAFE Ltd. 'Meta-insurers to the world'. What is meta-insurance? It's where smaller insurance companies take out policies...BigSAFE was the end domino in a great big pyramid of dominoes set up against disaster.

Lucy and I together were far less than a molecule on a dot on that final domino. BigSAFE was large like Holland.

And of course the decade between 2010 and 2020 had been disastrous and bountiful for insurers. The people in claims had become involved in hundreds of legal battles. It was climatic shifting creating strange weather: floods, droughts, cyclones and wildfires. Many of our client companies went broke. For Lucy, this meant lots of work. But it was an unstable time.

Huge corporations were teetering on the brink of disaster everywhere...The holy trinity of Big Oil, Big Arms, and Big Automobiles was breaking up, as oil ran out, and big wars became obsolete after decades of small guerrilla skirmishes. Stocks plummeted and soared. Mergers and acquisitions were

trying to be monitored by the U.N. but nobody listened to them so BIG things existed in a state of seething anarchy...

In a bold move the **BIG ECONOMIC NETWORK** was formed... consolidating almost everything...When Bigsafe got the meta-insurance job for that network, we had a company party. Bankruptcy of our own company had been averted. Globalism reached a zenith as a few big companies took over everyone else...and we were on the inside!

At the party I didn't schmooze very well. I am a minor number cruncher in sales, far from the front end. My office is on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor, hidden away. Lucy was trying to get to know some people from the 32<sup>nd</sup> floor, so she left me with my geek friends in a corner to talk computers and virtscenes.

I don't make people tingle when I mingle.

At midnight there was a big raffle sponsored by the Central Unit. They were giving away one month's holidays and a trip for two around the world. To my great surprise, I won!

That's how it all began for Lucy and me...A trip around the world on Big Brother's tab..

Go figure. .

## 2. ABDUCTION

Lucy is a wonderful girl. She's from a princess past...Her parents make a lot of money at the executive level of BIGOIL. I don't know what she sees in me. She's clever and sweet and charming all at the same time...and when she gets after you in a courtroom, lookout!

My parents on the other hand are poor and senile. Some people are living so long these days that my grandparents just died at 112. Dad's 84. Mom's 82.

The trip I won started in March. I worked a deal where we could tag our two weeks annual vacation onto the month... Six weeks away from the strange land where people sit in cubicles all day!

Yee ha.

We were to go from our home on the fringe of Chicago, to London, Paris, Venice, Rome, Moscow, Cairo, Addis Ababa... a few more stops in Africa, then Asia and Australia....

But in Nairobi it happened.

We were kidnapped.

Let me just tell you about the beginning of our trip for a moment before I get onto the adventure. Lucy showed up at my door dressed like a gorby and we headed off to the first flight without incident. London was kind of like a honeymoon for us, we stayed in a fancy hotel and visited the sites holding hands. I guess I noticed that my voice got softer over there and Lucy's got LOUDER, but I didn't let it bother me. We were young lovers, off on a great adventure, and we were happy.

In Paris I practiced my French, and Lucy didn't, which didn't really matter either. I mean what a romantic place!

Walking along the Champs Elysee, looking at art in the Louvre, riding that elevator up the Eiffel Tower. We were kind of a backwards couple in a way, I go for romance, Lucy kind of rolled her eyes at some of the French ways, but we were young and in love and in Paris, a lot of things could be looked over.

In Venice even Lucy got into it. Something about riding along the canals with a bottle of wine I stashed, music filling the air...this was it!

In Moscow we had a little argument. It was a lot of moving around, a lot of time together, I guess it was natural. From there we popped down to Addis Ababa, the capitol of Ethiopia. This wasn't really a recommended stop but Lucy had a family friend who had moved there and dedicated her life to working with the poor there, so we added it to our itinerary. Her friend surprised us by picking us up in a chauffeur driven limo, and taking us home to a mansion full of servants. I guess she was working with the poor while living in style.

Then it was Nairobi and kidnapping.

When I woke up I was blindfolded on a traincar to Mombassa. Or that's what I guessed since I could smell ocean on the air...Of course, this smell could have been caused by fish in a forward compartment...

My hands were tied but by groping I could feel that Lucy was beside me. I could picture her devising litigation against our captors.

Some hours went by with the repetitive clicking of the old tracks...I fell asleep. We were transferred out of our cargo car onto a boat. This was a sailboat I think, with fiberglass sides. They felt fiberglass. It was going strangely fast though.

I mean we're talking about long hours, sitting doing nothing. Blindfolded, with not much to do. I began trying to assemble events...

All I remembered of my capture was a quick struggle with a rag of ether that was placed over my face while I was sleeping...

Hostage takings were not completely unheard of in 2020 I assumed it was the radical faction of a group called 'Nations Without States'. They were LOD, a violent rap-music based subculture coalition of the warriors from 50 different nations...Palestinians, Navajo, Basques+Quebecois, Tibetans, Nazi, Northern Irish+Kashmiri...I mean when Nations Without States first got together they were a pretty violent group, but they had mainstreamed, and even had a seat in the U.N. now...It was LOD who were the extremist fringe who still used violence.

We were taken from the sailboat onto a helicopter and I was secretly allowed to look down on the scene below.

We were hovering over a turquoise ocean near an exposed coral reef about 3 feet below the water. It was just like virtscenes you're in that are set in the caribbean, or the Indian Ocean. Into the corral had been built a city of those geodesic domes on stilts like oil rigs I've seen. They seemed to be growing corral in vats in one section, and in another place there were huge gardens. A walkway raft surrounded the community with windmills and hydraulic breakwalls that use waves to create electricity... I've seen those on T.V. documentaries before. The kind of things that have been promising for about 60 years that there was a way that mankind would get off oil and use the new stuff instead. A future that never came.

I didn't notice any stores or restaurants but there was a mangrove swamp being built on one side. In another place I saw a junk yard with immense floating bins of plastic milk bottles. At the end there was a meeting place; a stadium or something.

We stopped and gassed up. My blindfold was hurriedly put back on. Nothing was said. The door was closed and my upper body yanked back inside. I thought they might have been trying to throw me out!

Lucy had never been shown the sea-colonist community. Just me. Later this would become a bone of contention that would threaten to drive us apart.

Then there were hours of boring flight. It was a clunky old helicopter anyway. I could tell by the sound of the engine. I listen to engines very carefully.

Lucy would recall only the Nairobi Hilton and how pleased she had been with the surroundings. We were going out to see the elephants and lions the next day. Then she was with me in the wakeup room.

For me, there had been a slight foreshadowing in Nairobi. I had ventured out into the African evening air in search of a little adventure that night. OK, the idea of being away from Lucy for a couple of hours wasn't completely unattractive to me either. Nairobi was a teeming cesspool of out of control growth, 5 or 10 million people sprawled against the sides of the U.N. game parks, in some of the largest slums on the planet. I mean there were probably really nice areas too, like that woman's neighbourhood in Addis, but all I saw were slums. Everywhere.

I wouldn't have gone out, but even a guy from accounting can start feeling a little cooped up. Being whisked

from global capitol to global capitol, being shown only the tourist-friendly, sanitized bits of the planet.

Luckily the front desk sent a bodyguard out with me or I wouldn't have made it. A hundred beggars cornered me by the time I was a block from the hotel. Lepers grabbed my arms, legless kids on skateboards grabbed my legs...

The hotel guy paid them off and helped me find a local bar where I could watch reality from a safe distance.

Rich Kenyans sipped 'Tusker' beers with gorgeous Nilot dates, a couple of techno-hippy travelers from Europe made travel plans on pocket computers in the corner...

I met a musician. He was in the schmultz band that played there. His name was George. After talking to him for a while I noticed a Sikh trader in the back watching us very closely. That should have been my clue. I figure he was one of our abductors.

Anyways, back to the trip as a hostage, my blindfold was taken off two more times before we'd reach our destination. The first time was in some mountains somewhere, I guessed the Himalayas. We had landed and been ferried onto a quieter aircraft of some kind, maybe a jet. I was shown a glimpse of the place, about two minutes after takeoff, and it was amazing.

Somewhere in a snowy valley high on a glaciated plateau a high-tech city had been carved in ice. Complex buildings, like city halls and hotels seemed to have been built entirely out of water. You could see through some of them to a space age insulating layer that kept the inhabitants warm inside.

I was thinking that these people were powerful. Not only did they seem to have cities secretly built into strange niches around the planet, but they must have a way of blocking them from detection by satellites or flights passing by. The plane seemed to have about a hundred people on board and it

sounded SO quiet, must be electric. Also how could it have taken off in such a mountainous area? My guess was it was some kind of helicopter/plane hybrid and that was expensive.

The second time I was unblindfolded I wasted time trying to turn around and see who was freeing me. I was grabbed by the hair and forced to keep my eyes facing out the window. We were over ocean again, I had no idea where. In the distance I could see some tropical islands, maybe 50 or 100 of them. I got that we were still going east though, so I thought we might be somewhere over Indonesia.

Didn't have time to worry about it for long though because before I knew it, I was gassed again. This time it was a long, dreamless sleep, and I think I enjoyed it. I'm not really cut out for this level of stress. Even at tax time.



### 3. The Wakeup Room

I woke up with a splitting headache. Lucy was there beside me, already up and playing with the buttons on a little handheld computer. There were lots of other people waking up all around me, hundreds of them, and we all had a neat little pillow under our head full of goodies.

It was a stadium of some kind, not all that big, maybe 1000 seats, and we were all lying on the playing field. I stood up and I could see people from all over the world. Africans, Chinese, Indians, Americans. Everyone seemed to have a headache and a lot of dizziness. Some people were heading to the stadium washrooms off to the sides, others were rummaging through the little duffle bags they had woken to.. Some of the Muslims seemed to be doing their morning prayers, but there was disagreement as to which way to face Mecca. Were we in the northern or southern hemisphere?

“This is a very impressive little handheld,” said Lucy, fiddling with her gadget. “Do you have one too?”

I looked in my bag. Toilet kit, Inflatable sleeping mat, change of clothes (sized to me!) sleeping bag, yeah there it was...

“It seems to be able to translate,” she said, pointing at the fortyish lady speaking something like Russian who was sheepishly starting a conversation with another lady in a silly bowler hat. From the highlands of Peru or Bolivia I guessed. The computer listened to what she said and apparently translated, Spanish or Quechua I couldn't tell...

Lucy and I went over our abduction. I didn't tell her about my blindfold being removed on the way. She had no idea where

we were, or why we were here. An Argentinean guy came up to us.

“Hello, do you speak English?” he asked.

“Yes,” we replied...

“Well if you need to speak any other languages you touch the little picture of a mouth in the top of the screen here,”

“Do you, ah work here?” I asked him.

“No! no...I just woke up here also. I was abducted from a business trip to Santiago. I am a professor of statistics,” he said “My name is Cervantes.”

“Do you know where we are?” Lucy asked him.

“No, but I met a Chinese professor of geography who is working on that problem. I’m working on WHO we are...” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I am taking a quick census to find out who is here, I have one representative from each continent searching for all it’s peoples... except for North America.”

“We could find you some North Americans,” suggested Lucy.

“That’s what I was hoping you’d say. You’ll notice the computer has a notepad and clock. I’m collecting stats on sex, occupation, age, home town, and abduction stories. Meet over at the restaurant in two hours,” Cervantes was very businesslike.

I hadn’t noticed the restaurant. I didn’t trust anyone. Maybe they were just pretending to have been captured like us. Maybe some of these people were our captors. Or surely, our captors would be showing themselves soon, telling us what kind of global concentration camp slaves we had become.

In the meantime I helped Lucy with the poll. It was harder than we thought. Even including Mexicans, there was less than one North American in twenty five people. The room was

informally splitting into regions, with all the Asians on one side, the South Americans in a corner, the east Europeans in another place and so on. By the time we checked back with Cervantes it was clear. There were people from everywhere here, but more from Asia and Africa than from Europe or North America. I was sure it was disproportionate.

I figure this was because we were going to be indentured labourers of some kind, we'd have to build another way-out city out of ice for these madmen and the third-worlder Asians were cheap labour.

As it turned out this was my racism showing. Cervantes added things up and did a few calculations. He conferred with the Chinese geographer and a Swiss doctor who had worked in population or birth control or something. Then he made an announcement. He spoke in Spanish, so most of the room held their computers to their ears like old transistor radios.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, we have come to the conclusion that we are an exact scientifically random sampling of the Global population. There are exactly 1000 of us in this room. 520 of us are women 480 of us are men. 250 of us are Chinese, 250 Indian er, that is, including Pakistan and Bangladesh, a further 180 of us are from south and north east Asia. Of the remaining 380 non-asians, about 100 are from Africa, 110 from south and central America, and the rest, 80 North Americans, 80 Europeans, and 10 austro-pacificans. That's all the continents.

Now I'm in no position to theorise as to why we have been brought here, but the fact that we are a careful selection of the world's population gives me hope. Perhaps we are on a kind of global jury duty, brought together by the U.N. to

vote....Professor Mishra a computer scientist from Bangalore, has some evidence to back this up.

#### 4. Global Jury Duty

“Namaste” said Mishra to the crowd.

“A little technical information to back up Cervantes hypothesis. Firstly, you will notice that you can all hear me speak rather easily, even though I have no microphone. This is not a function of the good acoustics in this room. It is because of a feature in my little handheld computer that projects my voice through a number of small speakers around the room. So I, in fact, do have a microphone, as do we all.

The icon looks like a phonograph speaker if you would like to try, but you will find that only one person can speak at a time.

I don't think that this would be that technically difficult to achieve, but there are a few things here, wave manipulations in audio space, that I have never seen.

There was a pause while several people said their hellos and moshi moshis and vigates and jambo and ola and ni hao.

“Now I have yet to test the large video screen at the end of the stadium but my analysis of this system suggests we should be able to access it somehow. “

He pushed a few buttons as did others. We discovered a video camera over by the restaurant focused on a chair. If you sat here your image was projected onto the screen. Then we discovered another mode. It was a voting display. Trial and error taught us the first way to use it. We held simple votes:

“Do you think that dogs are friendlier than cats? “ Each person voted yes or no. Each yes was represented as a dot on the screen . We could see the results instantly. 70% yes, 47% yes, etc.

We found another mode full of complex hieroglyphics but gave up trying to understand it. A couple of days later a guy who runs a noodle shop in Kyoto worked it out. It allowed votes to be

held on scales. Like on a scale of one to 7 how much do you like rice? (this got a resounding global 6)

Anyways Mishra sat down and we got to hear from Dr. Wu, the geography teacher who was working out where we are.

“We’re between Malasia and Madras in the bay of Bengal” he said conclusively.

“ Unless our captors have gone out of their way to trick us, then everyone’s travel times and intuitions point to this. I would say this Island is one of the Andoman and Nicobar chain.”

I was waiting for someone to say they had seen the secret cities, that their blindfolds had been removed, but no, it was only me apparently who knew that whoever our captors were, they were not the U.N. and that they pulled your hair if you messed with them .

I held back mentioning it because we were probably being watched by our captors and I didn’t want to give away the dissenters among them. Thosr who removed my blindfold.

A cabbie from New York said he thought we were being held hostage by a big corporation in some kind of neo-nazi twist on a market research group.

We would be forced to vote on cornflake brands and hair spray until we went insane.

Someone else said it was Big Business. They were experimenting on people, trying to figure out how to make Big Deals.

Me I leaned towards some kind of secret society and from the look of the technology, solar power, alternate niches, I was thinking radical ecologists.

Whoever had us though, they were in no hurry to show their faces.

“ By the level of innovations in this equipment, things I’ve never seen before, I guess we are being held by an alien race” guessed Mishra laughing.

“ It is quite clear that we are being watched and listened to, even as we speak. What’s more, the camera work locations is quite sophisticated. For example when someone speaks, one camera always zooms in on them from somewhere in the stadium. The close up. A master shot is also available as are some weird angles. They watch what we eat especially. Many angles and possibilities...”

“I think we should hold a hunger strik” said a Chinese man “we demand to know who you are!” he yelled into a camera.

The scoreboard changed from a vote readout to a single word “PEACE”

“They’re communicating with us!” I thought

“Now we’re getting somewhere.. It’s like E.T. “

## 5. George

I met George on the 5<sup>th</sup> day. He's the African musician who was playing in the lounge the night I was abducted. It was statistically a very slim chance that I would already know one of the people in the stadium. But logistically it made sense. It all went back to the Sikh guy I saw watching us in the bar a Nairobi.

“Jambo Habari” I told him and he remembered me only vaguely. After we'd talked for half an hour or so, I saw something we had in common. Alibis. George had received a job in Spain playing drums with a band. They had never contacted him in Kenya and didn't even know his vizi number. He had sent his demo and then pestered until he got hired. George said there was 100 guys applying for the job and if he didn't show up they wouldn't for him. His family however would assume he went to Spain and wouldn't think anything of his absence for at least a month...

Our alibi of course was the trip, we could go at least a month without being seriously missed.

That was the same with everyone, a collage of business trips holy pilgrimages, ‘visit to my brother who doesn't speak to the rest of the family’...

Incredible feat of global inside information to know this about so many people. I mean hacking travel agents computers is one thing, but to know the nature of each trip, and who is to be contacted when...

Of course there were a few people there who were just disconnected. Travelling loners and wealthy eccentrics. But most of us had to be home in a month.

George and Lucy got along really well. He came over and spent time with us, talking drumming, guessing what we were supposed to be doing here. George gave me his address and said that if we got free we'd have to stay in touch, maybe chase down our abductors. This was ironic later...

## 6. Escapes

Ironic later Days were going by. Progress was slow but we were figuring things out. We had two more hints from our abductors as people hacked their way through the handheld computer. The first opened about ten luxury suites at the top of the bleachers to us.

A Swedish fellow had been playing with the ‘map’ game in the computer, a previously misunderstood page in the software that allowed one to move graphic shapes around, boxes, triangles, and architect’s symbols for trees and lakes and such . This is why he called it the map game page. We had assumed until then that it was a familiar paint program like the ones on most people’s vizzys at home. But he proved differently.

At our evening meeting he gave a demonstration that showed what it really did. He activated a mode we hadn’t seen that put the map page up on the big screen. Then he got some of us to put a box in the centre of our screen and another group to put a circle. The big screen showed a “boxy “ circle. If 500 of us put 6 lines on our handheld’s and another 500 put 2 lines, the big screen showed 4 lines.

“It makes the different pictures into an average” he pointed out.

Someone else got up.

“This would be very useful in the political process, I was once an alderman in Costa Rica, and I spent years arguing about where a statue should go, where a new plaza should be

built... With this, everyone could draw their map of a utopian city and the computer could merge the visions...”

“Like a composer blends musicians” said an Italian.

“Or a cook blends spices” said a Thai.

I stood up. “But doesn’t it give the computer a bit too much power? Sometimes blending ingredients makes soup, sometimes it just makes garbage...”

It might have been a function of our boredom that we discussed it for hours. Finally an American woman from California stood up. Her name was Linda.

“Look, it’s obvious to me now that we’re going to be used to vote for something here. If we were slaves the food wouldn’t be so good and there wouldn’t be clean towels and Laundromats. So lets try to please our captors and get out of here. Let’s practice designing some stuff. Collective design is something people should have worked out years ago anyways...”

But first we had to spend a few more days working out the program. Some people got obsessed with this while others worked on hacking the physical space. Mysteriously doors that had been previously locked now opened. The first was a room that showed the workings of the kitchen. We couldn’t get in, but now we had big window to watch the food being prepared.

To us it had until then been a very high quality free vending machine. Now we could see how complex the machine really was. Robot arms moved plates and bowls to collect food from dicers and bakers and fryers. Huge refrigerators yielded foods from every culture on the planet. Oddly things seemed rather fresh.

Another door had a honeymoon suite. It seemed completely without sensors, hidden cameras and such. A place for couples to have some privacy.

The map game turned out to be able to run complex simulations. While most of us sat around chatting or worked out in the newly discovered exercise room, or explored for more open doors; some people had laboriously worked out the software. In a demo given after dinner on the third night a map of a small town was drawn, fields and crops were added, imports and exports listed. Depending where the villages were put on earth, different weather happened to them.

What we noticed though, is few of our villages thrived. I mean most of the good land on the planet is already populated, so this was a game for fringes, and a lot of them aren't viable I guess.

As a group we put a village on the north of Scotland. The land proved too poor and the population dropped from 1000 to 50. we tried one on rich soil in Brazil, but our village was attacked by ecologists angry at us for clearing the Amazon Rainforest park.

While a small village we put in Australia in the Northern territories survived at 100 people, a village with 1000 was attacked by rednecks and burned. Same went for Canada and Argentina.

“This is complex simulation softwear” said Mishra

“Someone has spent a lot of time trying to teach us the realities of our planet's population problems”

“Or have us teach ourselves” said Lucy.

Then I got an idea. I thought of the abduction, of the ice city and the coral city in the middle of the ocean.

The next day I joined the group of 25 or so really keen hackers who sat hunched over their handhelds all day figuring out the system. I talked to the Swedish guy who had started this fad.

“What do you think the goal of all this is?” I asked him.

“I found out exactly this morning” he said. “ first Joseph Mbala showed me the first text we’ve found...up until now it’s been all icons.” This was quite incredible. On an advanced page I didn’t know how to get to on my own was a lot of writing. On mine it was in English on the Swede’s it was Swedish.

“It’s learning about us and personalising,” he explained.

The main gist of what it said was that when we could build a village that provided for 1000 people for 100 years we’d get our first reward.

“What’s our best score so far?” I asked.

“I’ve got 400 for 500 years” said Anders.

“But the group has only managed 50 people for a while so far...”

“This is what I’ve wanted to talk to you about” I said...”I’ve had certain, um, intuitions about what we’re meant to be designing here...” I didn’t want to be too specific. “Are there any infrastructural icons we don’t understand yet?”

“It’s funny you should mention it” said Bjorn “as we’ve gotten higher scores more possibilities have become available. For example when we first beat 200, electric trains were added to the list of things we could put in our towns. This morning, a whole bunch of new technologies were added, but I haven’t figured them out at all...”

So Anders and I played video games all day while imprisoned in the middle of nowhere by god-knows who. The first thing I tried was a glacier city like the one I’d seen in the Himalayas. After a lot of tinkering I scored 600 on this and gave up... Worked out the icons for zodiac type rafts and tried a floating place like the one from the helicopter. 800. In both cases there were missing technologies, things I didn’t know how to add.

Dinner happened. Lucy said a new door had been opened. It held clothes from all cultures, huge wardrobes and a vending machine that seemed to be able to make new ones from designs one drew on their handheld. She had spent the afternoon exploring it. The muslims chanted their evening prayers and we all settled back to an evening's guess game. New knowledge disseminated quickly, but there was disagreement on fundamental issues.

“Why are we trying to build these villages? How truthful are these simulations?”

Several third worlders reported that when they drew their own villages from home and supplied the relevant data, the computer deemed them habitable for 20 years or less. So the aim seemed to be to supply a lifestyle that went way beyond subsistence.

Another group had been drawing wilderness reserves. This was news to me. The same program could be used to predict outcomes not only of human populations but of other species. All the predictions were dire.

“Obviously, we're eventually supposed to learn possibilities of modern design and then they'll have us draw a whole planet with working systems” said an American Librarian from Boston, and she wan't having any of it.

“What they don't realise is that even as a randomly selected representation of the global population, eventually designing a working planet, we are NOT the real political world of 2020. North Americans, North-east Asians and Europeans still control this planet, we use about 75% of the resources, and although we're out-numbered we'll never build a system drawn up by a bunch of mindless un-educated peasant farmers from China and India, no matter how much we might rave in the press about

democracy and ‘one man one vote’. What we really mean is ‘one man one vote, if you’re from a rich country!’

“I am not sure that this is the goal” said Mishra “We do not, for example, have access so far to the relevant global data for the real world All we’ve been asked to do so far is together dream up a place that 1000 people might make a living in...”

“And the village is the model of the real world!” countered the librarian.

Linda the peacemaker from California broke in.

“New technology...” she said “It’s all got to hinge on some new technologies that this group has access to. It’s like they’re saying ‘What if we could take fucked up old planet, run by BIGOIL, BIGARMS, BIGFOOD, BIGAUTOS and the like, and actually run it at its potential rather than the dinosaur systems level that is most profitable to big corporations”

“That’s what I think” said Anders. He showed us an 835 person village that he had designed in the Namibian Desert that lasted 100 years in simulation. Each design had a budget, and this one was based on a rather inexpensive solar panel made from local silicon.

I suddenly remembered a huge mirror reflector I had seen at the coral community. It must have been focused at a boiler to make fresh water out of salt water. I searched the menu and grabbed the appropriate icon. The village was moved near the atlantic and the simulation ran. 100 years later 935 people were still around.

A buzz went through the crowd.

What would the reward be if we reached 1000?

We all drew again. The Chinese farmers, who over-ruled most things if they drew the same picture, moved the village along the coast to some mountains. They planted forests along the edges of the fields and created a zone of transpiration. They let the rich soil build up in the valley bottom.

But they wasted all the community's money on more and more irrigation/desalination trying to grow rice. Our next score was 972 for 100 years. Political instability also cost us.

The pompous Boston librarian stood up and said "I've disconnected and scored 1096 for 100 years. But no miracles occurred. We weren't set free, to sue our captors for example," she sat down.

Mishra did a trick none of us knew was possible and flipped the output onto the big screen without her permission. She had built the same community as the group, but in an arid deserted region of Mexico.

We grew halyophytes, and micro-irrigated wheat, used the same tricks of mountains and ocean to create a moisture trap... and the simulation ran: 1050 for 100 years.

We heard large clicks as latches came open. New doors opening. One of them lead out of the stadium., another strangely opened up ten luxury bedrooms at the top of the bleachers, another lead to a room full of virtual reality equipment. A final door surprisingly lead us to what was apparently a large indoor multi-layer food farm that took us a majority of the indoors of the building.

The scoreboard said "good work" and it strobed between 100 languages. I was one of the first to the exit door. Escape! From the stadium at least...



## 7. Hierarchy, Virtuality, Self Sufficiency...

I hadn't realized how claustrophobic I had been feeling but as I burst out that door into the sunlight I realized I hadn't even paused to find Lucy. Bright natural light made me shade my eyes after the gentle roar of the indoor lighting system. .

I looked in front of me as a stream of people came up and stood beside me. I was on a paradisaical tropical beach, complete with changing rooms, showers, and an equipment room full of masks and snorkels, air mattresses and such.

I turned into the jungle to explore some more. Within a half hour I had circled back to the point where I began. It really was a very small island. .

There were a few things. A tree fort in the dense forest was full of books on birds and fish. These were in English. .

Near a lagoon, there was a temple. It was a beautiful modern simple place and seemed ecumenical.. I wasn't sure if these were specially placed here for us to discover or were relics from the people who had built the stadium. Anyways it was clear now that it wasn't really a stadium but really a clever high tech greenhouse bioshelter thing disguised in the reassuring shape of a community soccer or football pitch.

Plus it was an object lesson in what was possible in the map game when it came to feeding and clothing 1000 people in style. Between lounging on the beach drinking lemonade, working out in the min-gym, and exploring the increasingly fascinating intellectual challenges available to us in the computer worlds, almost 50% of the people there agreed that this island was a step up materially from their everyday lifestyle.

But of course life for most people on the planet has very little to do with material comfort or acquisitiveness. Community, Social bonds are most important to most and these longings for home were evident at a campfire that night where a lonely Samoan sang drunkenly (the food dispenser now had cocktails in the evenings) with a Maori and Kurdish peasants howled the moon remembering wives, husbands, and children far away.

There was the inevitable talk of escape, building a raft, and sailing away. A group of 25 or so began felling some trees with primitive tools, but another equally large group spent time trying to have their actions outlawed as the rainforests of the Andaman and Nicobar islands are ancient and unique and endangered and it is a very long sail to the mainland.

This conflict brought up two interesting points. Firstly we were forced to use the ‘democracy machine’ for something that actually involved politics. This led to the election of judges (who by the way were given the ten luxury suites upstairs—this creating our first hierarchy) and a lot of other bull that I wasn’t in favour of...

See, first we voted “should the raft builders be allowed to cut the forest to help us escape” but a lot of people abstained. They said “If we build an escape who gets to go?” and “Perhaps the rest of the Andaman and Nicobar chain is also controlled by our captors can we know?”

This last one was interesting. Apparently the islands had belonged to India until 2012 when it had succeded the help of L.O.D (Liberty or death) the radical faction of Nations Without States. Since then it was a known stronghold of separatists and bio-regionalists from all over the world.

This was news to me.

At first I had been in favour of the raft builders even though in 2020 with all the weird weather even right wing extremists voted against felling any trees, anywhere, ever. But when I realized they would have to get a couple of thousand kilometers to the nearest land I said nix.

Whatever the creation of our supreme court also led to the creation of an 'enforcer' class, who built little suites for themselves in the bleachers by tearing out the seats and using the pads with clothing from the farm machine to make little curtained off apartments. Here these dominant monkey male types shackled up with women from aggressive cultures like Zulus and Russians and Columbians who like macho men.

In fact sexual politics were becoming important also as we finished 3 weeks in captivity. The 'fun hut' as the mating suite was called, was in constant use, as was the tree house, and any other private spot on the island. Lonely people seek allies and allies of a similar political perspective are reassuring.

For example, the conservative status quo group in the house was led by the librarian from Boston, Martha Whitely. She had recently started an affair with our only millionaire Chang Xiu, a refugee from the old colony of Hong Kong who now drifted about the planet moving money to profit centres like moths move to light.

They were both employees of the BigNet, and had little time for what they saw as their captors' affiliation with "fringe" political agendas.

By this they meant green agendas which controlled about 35% of the vote the world over but formed a majority almost nowhere. In our stadium, Hand Guter, a German, was probably our most enthusiastic backer of the map game.

“A global citizen’s democracy meets for one month and spontaneously, without prodding from captors draws a world in a computer without starvation, extinction or any of the other nightmares that plague mankind today” he would say ,  
“It’s brilliant!”

Some of us were sure he was a spy planted by the captors.

But with regards to the computer models, they were now quite incredible. The VR room allowed us to not just draw maps of communities, but then to walk and fly around in the new places.

We were playing the “global” map game after dinner now, building factories to make electric cars, making the world’s deserts bloom, populating new areas and creating wildlife reserves in some areas presently full of people...

At least half the people there, aware that for the last 50 years our Planet had been teetering on the brink of self-destruction, were caught up with a sense of historic import in their actions...we played hard because we wanted to make the possible change seem easy and cheap when people looked it over.

See most of us thought that we had the whole thing figured out. We’d be returned home and the word would get out, probably with a press release from our captors, that a modelling language had been designed (not to mention the hundreds of new technologies it modelled with) that was so easy and convincing that it proved beyond doubt how easy a big switchover to environmentally friendly, decentralized systems for our planet could be.

It was so easy that 1000 untrained strangers picked at random from around the world had drawn up a feasible, inexpensive utopia in a couple of weeks.

Little did we know how wrong we were.

Our captor's arrival:

What you don't understand" said Mahatma Ghandi "is that this not a simulation..."

Martin Luther King broke in "we are sure that as a group we can take over world and force people to follow our decentralized ecological agenda.."

"What we want you to do is vote on whether or not we should" said Petra Kelley.

## Bicycle Subways

It was the last few days of university and for the first time, I was going to actually be free. My goal was to live some days without an outline...no schedule, not know what was going to happen when I woke up.

But for now I had to answer the screaming alarm, get up and out of the dad-cave and meet Julia. Sometimes it's odd having a dad who's an architect. We live in the oldest house built right into the rock at the bottom of Grouse Mountain in Vancouver. Now there's plenty but when I was a kid in school I was the Caveman. We have windows on the front and a nice view of the harbour down below but this place is a sheer face, the house is inside the mountain, not on top of it.

Mom's an artist, and I grew up messing with her paint, drawing on dad's pads. Now I play some music.

Grabbing a bite as I spin through the kitchen I fall onto my bike seat and start pedalling. Our bike railways around here are famous. It's just a 3 foot pipe that you can pedal a prone bike on a rail inside, but the

places it goes! We have a branch that comes right into the den so I park my bike right there and take off from inside my home each morning. Airlock on the way out keeps things warm.

The part we're famous for winds though the treetops, with windows cut out so you can see. Just took one chase scene in a hollywood action adventure to get that on people's radar.

Mostly it's a subway though as I drive down the hill under Capilano meeting up with Marine Drive and some traffic ahead of me.

On our railway everything is single file. You come up behind another bike and magnets link you up creating a metavehicle. A vehicle of vehicles. On real school days, not the loose time we're in now, you'd get a train with 100 people linked up heading out to UBC. Singing rowing songs.

It drops underwater a couple clicks east of the Lions Gate Bridge. This part always gets in the chase scenes too. The pipe goes underneath the harbour, heading to downtown, with lots of plexi windows to look out and see fish and stuff. Pretty swank.

Julia was in the observatory underwater when I got there watching the feeding. There's a big place to stop, car tunnel stops too...and you can walk around in the big glass bubble and watch under sea life on the outside.

Every morning scuba divers do a feeding, and they attract seals and mudsharks to grab a bite. Once a killer whale showed up and another time a grey whale swam by...It's a tourist trick really. Probably not a good way to interact with wildlife.

Still I'm proud to be from a place where people feed dogfish with rubber gloves that reach through thick glass on the way to work...

Julia's a biologist. She like this kind of thing. Myself I study anthropology, I want to be the next Wade Davis.

We got on our bikes and pretty soon we linked up with the big wagon trains of cyclists on Broadway heading out to UBC. Were there some people who didn't peddle but just read a book? Yes. Were there some people who used it as a workout and peddled hard enough for 3? Yes.

Really I didn't know if 2 weeks was going to be enough to truly move beyond 20 years of structured learning time. Julia and I were on our way to India. We were going to start in Calcutta and work our way down the east coast to Madras. Trichy, and then up the west coast Mysore, Bangalore, Bombay, Rajistan, ending up in Nepal. It was all booked ahead though, preordained. there was only these 14 days without a format.

Freedom.

So the day went by pretty normally. Marsten taught his final anthro 328 lecture in the native long house at the museum of anthropology. Cultural relativism and the dangers of ethnocentricity.

I ran into Lenny while crossing the campus and he had some tickets he was giving away to hear the Rot a band from San Francisco. I grabbed them and gave Julia a ring telling her about the free tickets for that night.

It seemed like only a moment later when we were grabbing some sushi before the concert downtown. Julia had a rash. Something had blown up on the news.

The band was pretty average really, good bass player, drummer was a machine, no feel I thought.

There are 2 kinds of drummer. The ones that play a melody and the ones who play a groove. There is no true groove without melody.

I smoked a joint in the lane with some musician friends I know.

"There's a party at the Nose" said Anton, a buddy of mine with a scratchy voice.

Julia and I showed up for the anthropology. The Nose was a warehouse building in the old/gentrifying warehouse district on the east side of downtown near the docks. For decades a hangout of artists and punks in Van. You could step out of the all night parties and buy Chow Sue in the chinese groceries to ease your munchies.

It was in the moldy basement where I met Cortez. One time I went to a party here where there had been a flood and the whole crowd was standing in three inches of water listening to a band. The band was on pallettes so the amps and other electric gear was kept 3 inches above the water, but I was just seeing the whole crowd frying.

Cortez was a good friend of some of my friends who hung there and we got along great. Turned out he

was a refugee from Ecuador living in Van on asylum. Mushrooms were consumed. Things I don't remember took place.

In the morning Julia woke me up on a cargo plane. She said I'd been getting all Wade Davis on people at the party and Cortez was flying us into the amazon to do some ololiuqui,.

"Jeez it's amazing how often I meet rich bohemians at the nose" "Ya we got flown down to Quito on a plane he owns.."

"Alternagencia" I said.

"Revolution after cocktails." Julia said.

There is a runway in the missionary station where we land.

In the village we sat in a dark hut on a hardened mud floor. It was surprisingly cool in there, compared to the hot and buggy world outside. There was a large ceramic bowl full of cool water too, and as we drank a few bowls of this kava-like potion we drank water to ease the incredible dehydration it caused.

I don't know where you stand on the existence other dimensions. That day, and it was still daylight, I

experienced alternate reality with a clarity and precision that's difficult to describe.

I was on another planet I think. All sci fi and chrome but with moss. Julia was there too. We were on some kind of a mission to buy peanut butter. These natives hadn't really got into eating mashed root crops on bread so we were failing.

"They probably don't like how it sticks to the roof of their mouth," said Julia and her audio had a digital delay on it and a flanger.

That was when things got weird. I mean alien peanut butter shops was one thing but the street just kind of opened up and a huge purple and red vine came out of it. We fell down the hole and started floating in thin air.

"Defying gravity" I said. "This is a 3rd stage hallucination" "Lucid self reference" said Julia "that's 4th stage isn't it?"

I couldn't remember Julia studying the anthropology and psyche texts I read but on this trip she was a colleague.

There was a man there.

"You were sent by Cortez" he said.

"Are you ololiuqui?" I asked.

"The root remembers all" he said. "You will not. I am the guardian"

I was sent cruelly on a tangent rifling through the notes I'd taken on ancestral memory, morphic resonance, objects that learn.

"wo you spaced out in a hallucination!" said Julia from echo land. "Nested dreams.."

When I looked up the guardian was gone. Everything after that is beyond my recollection.

It was an interesting experience seeing Cortez again back in Van. We were out listening to jazz when we ran into him.

"San Cristobel? He said looking at me strangely.

"Lo siento" an involuntary voice that came out of my mouth said.

"so you met the guardian.." Cortez said. This was new to me. It was like speaking in tongues.

I was fairly sure that the man I met was the guardian. Random hallucinations are one thing but repeatable mental structures inhabited by characters that ...I suppose that is what myth is. Most cultures

have stories that bind them, things that tie them together. Lies they all believe. Did Cortez and I form a culture that fast?

Who was that talking through me?

“It's real shit,” he said.

“Not magic. The natives have been meeting the same man and the entering the cloud for hundreds of years. You don't remember what happened after the guardian but if you could, you'd be amazed. Your journey probably lasted a few weeks, and took you to far off places.”

“So the goal becomes learning how to remember....” I suggested.

“How not to forget,” replied Cortez...

The next time I was with Cortez down in Seattle. There was this amazon Indian had a little farm north of the city. He looked funny in a cowboy hat and blue jeans.

It wasn't the same plant we swallowed. It gave a different journey.

“You think you know form you think you know matter,” this thing was made out of some kind of liquid or gas. It seethed and rippled.

“I am aware that this is a hallucination brought on by a plant extract, an ancient potion from the Incans, saved by the tribesmen of the amazon,” I spoke with respect.

“This is well after the guardian”, said Seething Guy, “I dont think it would be categorized as a hallucination. For example when you prick your finger, do you not bleed?”

I closed my eyes. The scene needed to go away

“ It is the nature of several spirit beings that they will try to convince you that you are in the real world.” I had read.

Then it was steel and wheels. Instantly.

..Am I by the highway? Neon and LCD's, fog and a drum beat.

“These aren't tribal images, this is the modern world..” I said out loud, half expecting someone to answer. Now I was on the sidewalk and the steam was coming from a manhole cover, the lcd's from a clock store on the corner.

“Hello?is there any kind of guide in this?”

Silence.

I looked up at a billboard on top of the nearby building.

“Try Jiffy!” it said.

I wondered if this was a message...

I walked down the darkened street and I could hear my shoes clicking against the pavement. I had been barefoot when we'd gone to the Indian's basement, now I wore city shoes, hard heeled and shining.

“So before the visuals were designed by others, this seems to be coming from me,” I said out loud.

I was in that place for about a week. People couldn't talk but I did see some zombie-like humans walking around. I stole a car and drove around for a few days. It's not really stealing when nobody can say anything. It's peaceful.

And then I came to a clearing in Montana. I'd been checking out Yellowstone for a day or two...so I was close-by.

“All walls will come down.” It was a little message written on a board lying in the clearing.

Walls? I thought of Jung and symbols and how this one had been used in dozens of cultures. I thought of Pink Floyd and “all we are is just another piece in the wall.” I thought of the fourth wall in theatre which stands between the actor and the audience.

“Your proposing direct communication, between yourself and the author, my creator, who animates us both with these words.”

Nothing came as an answer. I somehow just knew that this structure would crumble, that the world I was standing in would disappear.

It's not like there are any rules. I just write and try to keep going in a line. Tell a story. This one's gone a little funky because I'm a character in it now. Hello world. For some reason this voice echoes a bit... The wall separating fiction from objective reality has been shattered. If this is a story, I am living it. My camera just got lost in a fedex mixup. There are snowbanks on my lawn. Too vivid as Robbins would say, too close to the bone.

I wrote a paper on recursion in literature while at university. To me this was when an author would show up in the story...Philip Roth in the 60's I think, and

Chaucer in the middle ages. Vonnegut, and Robbins... The use of the first person narrator, is taboo for much of literature. It's bad style in essay writing to say 'I think x' .But in modernism and early playfull work like Chaucer we find the author sneaking into his text. Hear an echo though...

I had to stop doing weird potions from the amazon, at least for a few months. Julia and I went to a street festival on commercial drive and I bought a sombrero.. It's not like I was prickling with electricity but I almost expected it when we ran into Cortez. The belt of coincidence runs deep at such times. We went and sat in a park and ate some falafel we'd got on the street.

“I think he talked to god” said Julia to Cortez nodding at me. “The creator. The one who tells our story..”Cortez guessed.

Julia studies the branch of biology called ecology. I study cultural anthropology, as opposed to physical. As an ecologist she tends to see patterns and groups in populations that I miss. I tend to see culture and it's effect on economies, food, art...On the plane she told me the story of wolves in yellowstone. When they were gone the elk got brave and overgrazed a valley. When

the wolves came back, the elk were too scared to graze out in the open. Plants got a chance.

She notices things that build up and things that run down and how that effects the whole system. . Maybe that's how she could see a run down look in my eyes...

"Your done with the shaman for a while?" really she was good about not lording over me. I just let this one slide.

I wasn't following the plant path from the amazon these days. Hell it had only been 6 days since we graduated and I'd already spent weeks of subjective time off in la la land. Time to use my objective time in my own objective way.

We were on a flight with an 18 hour layover in Bangkok. I just got to taste some lemon grass soup, some galanga root, and we were gone. That sweet and sour! On to heavier curries.

Calcutta was calling.

This story is called 'no outline' not 'no rules'. There were supposed to be 14 days before the trip to India. In fact that was the whole idea, how this kid with 2 weeks of freedom goes off on a spectacular journey that appears to take months. The longest 2 weeks of his

life...You just got lazy and went on the earth trip too early. Its easy to spend some time remembering India. Shit and magic. Lhassis and Momu's.

Cop out. Too lazy to visualize the intricate journey that Steve went on that final time with the amazon. The hallways and Incan pyramids to climb. The howler monkey on the crumbling rock. The jungle growing through the gates of the city. The long journey across drylands in a land rover. The melting clock and the Salvadore Dali room. The city of Lemurs, wearing suits and ties and fancy dresses. The hilarious joke the shaman told you. Things too weird to describe involving shrimp.

Time clearly has a crimp because this is day 7 after uni as I write. There has been a volcanic eruption down in Ecuador. Since Cortez appears to fly free I go with him to check out things down there.

Crumbled buildings. Dirty water.

After 3 days in Quito we head for another small village he knows in the Amazon. This one seems to be in Brazil, but whatever. The shaman wears a t-shirt that says "Dallas Cowboys" and his wife has a blond wig. This could get weird.

“You have to understand the guide was a shared character that we could all meet. Under Huascatha we will share architecture. Streets and valleys.”

“Who does the design?”

“It comes from us.”

And so we spend days in some kind of shared hallucination. Cortez clearly has read a lot of science fiction. I clearly have read a lot of anthropology. Our world is not star trek, with cheesy tribals, but more detailed, textural than that. We are there for about a month of perceived time.

It was the last few days of my 2 week freeform period. My goal was to live some days without an outline...no schedule, not know what was going to happen when I woke up.

Julia and I were high school sweethearts. Skin mates really, we were bonded at the hip in those days. Now we both slept in our parents basements. Self contained suites really, not so bad, and cheap rent! On the day in question she was more playful than usual, perhaps because she knew I had a care package from Cortez in my bike pouch.

We rode the hill down to the water, and we stopped at the observatory under the harbour. There was an area

of track that was sort of roped off, that's where we sat and chewed the potion.

To share architecture with julia was so beautiful. First I saw the small cabin we would start in then things got more ornate..more elaborate. We walked down the hallways of a house where children were playing(ours?), we walked through a place where some kind of biological knowledge of Julia's was meeting with my smattering of architectural knowledge to make some kind of living home, walls that breathed and grew.

And then we walked past our deaths into some kind of profound and indescribable place. Julia and I have known we are soulmates for a long time. This just confirmed it to me.

Of course looking out the windows at the creatures under water was fun. We used to smoke a joint and hang in the aquarium when we were teenagers. This was similar.

“Wild journey huh?” I said...

“I don't know what you see, but maybe I kind of do...”

We got on our bikes and pretty soon we linked up

with the big wagon trains of cyclists on broadway  
heading out to UBC. Just another day in Van.

## **Opera for GI Joe, Barbie, and Youtube**

**(visually this is just a video of some dolls,  
the sound track is quite elaborate however)**

**(anarchic rock)**

**reconstituted entropy  
perhaps a new myopathy  
a thousand rhyming couplets  
the things he wants the things he gets**

**precision that is loose and free  
the things you'll want the things you'll be  
a search for all that's blank and zen  
in desperation grab a pen**

**I dreamed an operatic file  
the things we want we shall compile  
a GI Joe a Youtube stage**

**escaping from a locked cage**

**libretto and a melody  
open it and set it free  
what is it now  
what can it be?**

**reconstituted entropy**

**(melodic we meet our gi joe marching  
through the desert)**

**Im just an ordinary man  
do what I shall, do what I can  
As the story starts Im off to war  
get in the plane get in the car  
Im just an ordinary man  
do what I shall, do what I can**

**and she's sitting at home  
she is using a comb  
she is putting on makeup**

**as she talks on the phone**

**we're together somehow  
like she's just next door  
she is with me I feel  
in my my quivering core**

**so I'll make it.**

**Im just an ordinary man  
do what I shall, do what I can**

**( we see our gi riding a truck across a  
foreign land.staring out the window)**

**You just think  
cause you rode a lot of buses  
stared out a thousand windows  
that you've felt like me**

**I am not a killer**

**I am not the man they asked for on their  
posters  
back at home**

**so even though I'm staring at the  
golden tower passing by  
Im not here**

**Im before a jury.**

**The judge is me when I was 6 years old  
and I decided that soldiers  
were killers for money  
and that wasn't me.**

**I stand accused.**

**(we flash to a scene at home. Barbie is Gi  
joe's wife)**

**Barbie: (country n worstern)**

**How the hell did I fall in love with a grunt?**

**got to go for the homer should have gone for  
the bunt**

**He's so far away now and his life is in  
danger**

**I am left with a song I am left with a  
stranger**

**O oh uh o o**

**(back to our gi)**

**(heavy metal, our gi is in action)**

**killing for money that's not against the law  
the things you throw and the things you  
draw**

**send up a message to the plane above  
a puff of smoke, a dying dove.**

**civilians in the line of fire  
a crater that's behind barbed wire  
I try to do telemetry  
in the surging entropy**

**(Instrumental, scene of battle and war  
music gets wilder more chaotic)**

**duet:**

**(barbie at home) How the hell did I fall in  
love with a grunt**

**(gijoe at battle) killing for money that's not  
against the law**

**(barbie)had to go for the homer should have  
gone for the bunt**

**(gijoe at battle) the things you throw and the  
things you draw**

\*\*\*\*\*

**RAP TUNE**

**gotta tell you bout the story**

**up on handy ridge**

**past the checkpoint and the roadblock**

**and the bailey bridge**

**we were underneath the radar we were  
undetected**

**A german a canuck and I may stand  
corrected**

**there were 4 yanks there I was one of them  
We were all black men even stan and klem**

**(rif)**

**and we had a draw  
on the dragon's paw  
and the things we saw  
kinda broke the law**

**and the reason we were out for some r and r  
In the dark of night in that borrowed car  
was that we had done some time at the  
ragged front**

**we had understood the reasons that the  
captain was a cunt**

**so he set us free  
not a bad shit he  
in this entropy....**

**and we had a draw  
on the dragon's paw  
and the things we saw  
kinda broke the law**

**I mean you see some bombs  
in the afghan night  
you hear a blast  
see a flash of light**

**but I had some shrooms  
in the hash pipe fumes  
and I heard some tunes**

**from the afghan moon**

**and the things we saw  
kinda broke the law**

**there were 4 yanks there I was one of them  
We were all black men even stan and klem**

**gotta tell you bout the story  
up on handy ridge**

\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*

**(back at home barbie is being wooed by ken,  
a lifeguard at the pool)**

**barbie:He's so far away now and his life is in  
danger**

**I am left with a song I am left with a  
stranger..**

**ken:**

**Kens the name  
and Ive got no brain  
a good complexion  
and not to be profane  
but the bod is solid  
that's what Id call it  
a body of work  
in being a jerk**

**Barbie:so far away now and his life is in  
danger**

**I am left with a song I am left with a  
stranger..**

**would you partake?  
in a harmles flake  
if your paths crossed  
a line and you met him?**

**I am left with a song I am left with a  
stranger..**

**gi joe from afar:**

**I am not a killer**

**I am not the man they asked for on their  
posters**

**back at home**

\*\*\*\*\*

**(images and instrumental)**

**gi joe has a day off**

**he heads out to a village outside town**

**where they are set up for r and r for soldiers**

**he finds himself in a crowded tent full of**

**belly dancers and people playing dice on the  
ground**

**After winning a dice game he is taken to an old wooden door, where he is shown a swirling star**

**He is transported to another dimension**

**at the same time 6 other people see a swirling ring of stars from a ridge in the desert. 4 black guys and stan and klem**

**\*\*\*\***

**sings(choir)**

**wo weve been transported to another dimension and now that you mention its really quite odd**

**do you see a gi ?**

**don't mean to be rude**

**but to walk through a star and to meet such a dude.**

**gi joe: What was I thinking when I followed that kid?**

**I just rolled a few dice a few bucks would  
suffice  
but he showed me a star  
now Im lost somewhere far...**

**the6: So far away or just sideways? There  
seems to be leaks between these 2 worlds.**

**Mr potato head shows up with gumby**

**so you went side ways  
and the way that it plays  
Im the head guy here so is gumby**

**we are waging a battle  
we've rounded up cattle  
all our men are all nervous  
and jumpy**

**gumby:**

**you can reach through and set up a portal...  
send a message to her  
drop a door in her mirror  
she will think that she's met an immortal**

**(gi joe puts a star in barbie's mirror, and  
barbie is transported to meet him. They hug  
in delight.**

**mr potato head: Theres about to be a war  
the gumbies are mounting  
there's really no use counting  
there a shit load of them**

**gumby: the potato heads are ready  
keep it strong and keep it steady  
we will settle this discussion  
by scalloping some frites**

**4 black guys stan and klem:**

**they are fighting over plastiscene  
a kind of tragic movie scene  
The french fries wrecked the temple  
at the sacred gumby zone.**

**getting chewed out is normal  
when you're gumby and informal  
but potato heads are out to blow a  
bubbles with these guys**

**we cut to barbie and ken on a hilltop:  
I like your world but its not enough about  
kittens  
we need shots of of fuzzy beasties  
or it's not a youtube flick**

**gi jo: I hope this rat will do er  
I found it in the sewer  
and maybe there's a chimpanzee  
they torture with a trick**

**DIRECTOR WALKS IN: (talks through bullhorn.) We need three numbers if we're going to really use this medium: Cute Kittens, zany pratfalls, and farts. Each can be a montage of you tube videos.**

**(jude is a huge linebacker type wall of a guy):**

**fuzzy kitten**

**I've been smitten**

**with your big cuteness**

**expressive muteness**

**fur ball rolling**

**me extolling**

**your charisma**

**it really is ma**

**huge round eyes**

**pathetic cries**

**a tiny mew**

**inside my shoe**

**I feel some nibbling**

**but I'm not quibbling**

**the cat is cool**

**but I don't like drool  
and litter boxes  
always toxes  
the room they're in  
the cat will win.  
fuzzy kitten  
I've been smitten**

**( Darrel is another of the four black guys)**

**before I try to find a feel  
bout stepping on a a banana peel**

**let me stop to wax historical  
bout conflicts that are allegorical**

**If you want to send a message call western  
union  
don't give me some noise about your opinion**

**it is what it is not what you want  
no matter how you jeer and taunt**

**so climb aboard of reality  
the truth we hope for, the truth we see**

**some dudes in suits far far away  
send men to their death in a casual way**

**and options don't present themselves  
when there's nothing on your barren shelves**

**think not of some utopia  
a boxer on the ropes yeah**

**just grasp the pain  
that drives insane**

**the anger the frustration here  
as you pour another beer**

**how everything's controlled by fear  
the dying of a trusted peer**

**the lesson from an evil year:  
you're driving fast but cannot steer**

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**(some kind of really fast polka )**

**its zany and its wacky  
its madcap and it's tacky  
you can use it as a punchline  
make it art...**

**a nondisclosure smoke bomb  
or the rumble that defeats calm  
make it loud, shout it out  
it's a fart**

**(bridge)**

**sometimes there is no one who will own up  
to the dirty deed that has been done  
and if the wind it blows  
toward your wary nose**

**a nasal warfare battle has been won...**

**so if that baked bean entree  
is gasifying up  
and the pressure it just pulls  
your cheeks apart**

**just say that it's a car horn  
or perhaps a burping newborn  
don't you dare admit it  
It's a fart!**

**(barbie and gi joe are hiking through the  
mountains in gumby land when they hear an  
eerie wailing)**

**joe: do you hear that mournful cry upon the  
nightfall**

**barbie: I can hear it but I know not where  
it's from**

**joe: a wailing woman's song is all around me**

**barbie: the chilling notes the beating of a drum**

**(they enter and meet an ancient gummy woman)**

**joe: she's singing to that photo of a soldier**

**barbie: perhaps she's lost a husband or a son**

**joe: the wailing woman's song it's universal**

**barbie: a message from the barrel of a gun..**

**there is a strange electric flash, suddenly**

**joe is alone in afghanistan patrolling a village, he enters a home)**

**joe: do you hear that mournful cry upon the nightfall?**

**(barbie back at home) I am singing to the sky I've lost my man**

**joe: a wailing woman's song is all around me**

**(barbie back at home) do everything you should not what you can**

**(the gumby woman offers an amulet to them)**

**woman: they say this is the key to ancient wisdom**

**barbie(takes it) we'll take it to the hills and find it's home**

**woman: the elders knew a way of resolution**

**barbie: the etching of a sacred elder poem**

**(they walk to the mountains and find a crypt. they insert the amulet in a weird stone lock. a chamber opens)**

**(at the same time joe is going through a similar thing back above ground)**

**these murals show a battle that is raging a thousand years of conflict in this land we must look into the wisdom of the elders at ancient healing ways the elders planned**

**(things get surreal- the chamber gets crowded with soldiers from both sides. They assemble in a tog of war)**

**we must turn the hourglass over start the contest**

**but balance is the goal not to win  
if the rope stays in the centre for the  
timeframe**

**then victory is what we shall begin**

**(the tug of war goes on. When one side  
starts winning a member of that team joins  
the other side...to keep the rope in the  
centre is the goal)**

**joe: do you hear that mournful cry upon the  
nightfall**

**barbie: I can hear it but I know not where  
it's from**

**joe:a wailing woman's song is all around me**

**barbie: the chilling notes the beating of a  
drum**

**(suddenly the amulet falls into a water hole,  
the door seals. people start fighting again )**

**there's got to be a way to regain balance  
barbie: it's weird I have this key but way  
back home**

**woman: we've got to find a way of resolution  
barbie: the etching of a sacred elder poem**

**he is sitting in an armchair in the homeland  
(she is talking about ken, watching the news)  
doesn't think that peace can find a way  
just an average guy he doesn't hear my  
contact**

**he doesn't hear a single thing I say  
(they reach through and put a star on ken's  
mirror)**

**(so somehow they talk ken into passing the  
amulet through the wormhole, flashes take  
place and  
balance is restored in the allegory and  
above ground too...)**

**ta da!**

**reconstituted entropy  
perhaps a new myopathy  
a thousand rhyming couplets  
the things he wants the things he gets**

**precision that is loose and free  
the things you'll want the things you'll be  
a search for all that's blank and zen  
in desperation grab a pen**

**I dreamed an operatic file  
the things we want we shall compile  
a g i joe a youtube stage  
escaping from a locked cage**

**libretto and a melody  
open it and set it free  
what is it now  
what can it be?**

## **reconstituted entropy**

## Planet Poem

"I slipped away," the interrogator looked stern.

"You mean you stole a ship and travelled to an unknown planet, for personal reasons," he corrected.

"And returned before my disappearance was even noted," I countered.

He had the monobrow. He had the monomind. He would never understand me, how I was motivated. He had the ham fists. Not since the neanderthals had the human gene line split into such disparate entities. I hadn't been around a man of this species for decades...This was going to be hell.

"My cross," she said and leapt to my rescue. My attorney had my heart, which didn't help. I fall in love with all women. It's like a rule with me...

"Could you tell the court a little about your background?" she asked.

"Went to art school," I said. "Nothing special...I studied the 20th century artist Christo."

"Wasn't he known for his earthworks? Sculptures that stretched for miles across earth?" she said.

"Ya, I suppose that's where I got the idea for the Planet Poem," I agreed.

"OK, let's backtrack a little. What do you mean by the Planet Poem?" she asked.

"Xax 3, is really just a large asteroid... hardly a planet, but it has no wind. Not enough atmosphere...I got the idea that if I wrote a poem in the dust there, it would still be readable centuries later..." I divulged.

"So like Christo, you set out to make some harmless planetary scale art," she concluded.

The beady eyed counselor jumped in: "I get the feeling you're trying to justify theft, absenteeism, and lying, under the heading of art," he protested.

...and that's when I knew I was living in the future. This was a time when over 50% of people followed the holy fire of their muse for their life's work. Weirdly the ham fisted, beady eyed lawyer was a noted painter in the impressionist style.

"You think I don't believe you, that I don't understand. No I get you, but I will still judge you," he offered.

"Meritocracy," I said.

"You guessed it. You can go out on a limb, but only if the work is worth it. We aren't running a society where people can paint a mural on a library whenever they want. We're running a society where 9 out of 10 people who'd try such a crazy thing are sent away..."

"But the one in ten who can make it work?" said my counselor.

"They're the sacred," the man answered. "They're the goal."

The courtroom erupted in a weird chant...

"DEMO DEMO DEMO DEMO"

And so that was it. I would show the pictures I'd taken with my cellphone of the writing, and if the court was pleased with my words, I was sacred, if not I was ostracized.

My lawyer wished me luck as I walked to the overhead. A lot of thoughts rushed through my head, ways I could alter the writing in realtime to make it work better for this crowd...then I surrendered. It is what it is.

\*\*\*\*\*

Travelers, arriving from distant lands, may come upon these etchings, and wonder about their origins. This dust was scratched by one Ethan Mondragon, youthful wanderer in a year you may not remember. It was a time when all young people had to do a year's service with the terraforming troops. Before the worlds all blossomed in green, before the time of plenty. When we still lived with strict limitations.. on oxygen, on water, on our dreams.

But dreams have a way of getting free. Spreading like a fire in atmosphere. While most dreams are written in green, a new O2 shunt for a struggling world, this one is made of dust. It's the dream of a planet that is a poem...a world that is a message.

You are receiving my dream in your walk. And like the nation of farmers that plants seeds of hope, these words should grow into something new. Something not predicted by examining the seed... You are their host.

So carrying the virus of this world with you you must leave here. But what will you have learned? How does this place change you?

(There is nothing else written in this area, the next shot is on the other side of some small mountains we can see on the horizon)

In this place there are phrases spread about in random patterns.

"This is a rose," says one...

"This is a Wildebeest" says another.

"A rainy morning, with clean fresh air"

"A windy mountaintop, with wildflowers and a scree"

"The surf at Makaha.."

"A giant Kaori tree from north of Aukland"

"A million daffodills growing by the roadside in Holland"

"A Komodo Dragon"

I walk behind another hill in my photographs.

It's not like I miss it. I wasn't even born there. I think I put these memories here because they need a place to live. True, we don't even know what became of earth. We are descendants of the escapists who watched so much of it crumble that it was time to leave. Blasting off with untested hardware, with no means to phone home, we have survived. My gradparents, and their

parents before them built a future for us out of nothing. We are lucky, happy, and alive. Only the memories of things I will never see haunt me. To roll in the dirt, dive in the water. sail on the oceans...

And so I scratch these words into my new world. "This is a meerkat" in a strange hope that somehow the universe will remember. And in remembering the words of the planetary poem perhaps we will remember the true poetry we have lost forever....

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"Hmm,' says the interrogator , "That it?"

"No, I covered over 300 kilometers with my text," I answered.

"But that was kind of an executive summary?" he asked.

"Kind of yeah, I tried to boil it down," I answered.

"So you walked all over the planet putting the names of things you wished exist?" he asked.

"Some of these items aren't even in the textbooks anymore," I said..

"And you think that's wrong? "

"I think that a lot of stories are just ways to remember... " I suggested.

“So you're trying to create a kind of historical monument...a planet that has a place for all the things that we no longer can accommodate. “

"I think the groupthink is that remembering such things is just unproductive...that we shouldn't sentimentalize the past,"

"Better forgotten," he added. "over-specialized species that couldn't adapt to the changing world."

My lawyer jumped in.

"Do you think it's harmful to bring up these things we can never have again?"

"I think that beauty is the only thing worth remembering, " I answered softly.

"pfft you are a recipe for a generation of whiners," said beady eyes.

"No, in fact I think it will take strength and courage for people to acknowledge the things we don't have, love them, and move on..." I disagreed.

"That's why you built your planet poem...to give the memories a place," said my lawyer.

The crowd was silent. Even old ham fists just looked at me with puzzlement.

"For remembering the things we forgot, and showing us we'll have to be brave to look back, I commend you. You're off the hook."

A cheer came from the crowd. I'm not sure that they liked the planet poem. They were just glad madmen like me exist....

