

Nothing

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# Part One

## Prologue

12944 woke up. It was 7:09am. It creaked up from its bed and marched its way out of its apartment. The room was bare, consisting of only a bed, a toilet and a showerhead contained in grey concrete, but 12944 didn't mind at all. It was the same room everyone else had, and it was everything it could ever want or need.

12944 passed through the hallway, its stride excited by the cold bare floor, and made its way down five flights of stairs to the communal canteen. The canteen was designed as a large hall; symmetrical, with singular desks accompanied by singular chairs evenly spaced across the room. At both ends, where the staircases led from the apartments, there were dispensers where breakfast, a mixture of vitamins and minerals suspended in a thick concoction of water and grains, was served. 12944 picked up a metal bowl and metal spoon and realised how hungry it was. It stood in front of the dispenser and after a healthy serving of the gloop squeezed out of the pipe and onto its bowl, it made its way to its table, next to 12943's table and behind 12934's table. Five mouthfuls into its meal, 12945 sat down next to it and began eating as well. The gooey mix was delicious, tickling 12934's tastebuds as it slithered through its mouth and down its throat. The room, though there were a hundred or so people eating in it was silent as it was every day, apart from the scrape of spoon on bowl and the rhythm of the footsteps of those descending from the stairs above. No-one said a word. No-one ever said a word. 12944 finished its breakfast, placed the bowl into the square chute which led into the washrooms and made its way to work, its hunger satiated.

Today was a big day for 12944. It was a day for both the implantation of the babies and the end of its own life. At its workplace in the hospital, 12944 made its way to the incubation room on the third floor. There, it opened the glass lids of the incubators that sat on table, and took the babies out one by one. 20 millilitres of anaesthetic into each of them, and their cries were silenced. They were placed gently on a conveyor belt that swept through the centre of the room on which they were moved through to the implanting room. At 1:09, 12944 ate its lunch in the work canteen on the ground floor, then began its shift as a watcher in the implanting room. Its duty here was to catch any problem, any mistake that occurred in the implantation process and fix it. With everything running with quotidian smoothness, 12944 was not called to action; for most of its shift it sat and stared at the precise dance of the arm and the penetration of the babies by the needle. There was nothing that needed to be done.

Then, through impossible chance, 12944's chair gave way and it fell, crashing on top of the upturned seat. It got up as quickly as it could. Too slow. In the moment it lost sight of the implanting machine, the arm froze, leaving a baby untouched. By the time it stood up, the arm had started again; evidence of its malfunctioning now non-existent. 12944 walked backwards into the wall, keeping its eye on the implantation machine as it continued to work. It arched a hand over a shoulder and pressed a button on the wall. Then, it announced to the empty room, "New chair." Within minutes, another human appeared from the door behind it, and the broken stool was replaced.

12944 sat down and continued watching. By the end of the working day, every single baby had been implanted; every single baby except one. 12944 marched down to the ground floor. Opposite the dining room was a door that led to a small chamber that was empty, apart from a little box on one side. It was a curious box; wooden, with a slot underneath, and a button on top. The button was pressed, a needle was dispensed and soon the poison flowed free through its bloodstream, swirling

through the various arteries and veins and seeping into its brain. There had been no regrets. Everything had been perfect. In a few moments, 12944 was dead. The floor opened and it fell into the incineration pit. The floor closed and 12945 came in. The same process ensued. By the end of the day, one thousand workers had fallen into the pit. Nine hundred and ninety-nine babies were ready for their new lives. Out with the old and in with the new.

# Chapter One

It was dark and apart from the sound of marching step, quiet. We were going back to the apartments after another long day at school, another day of boring repetition. I was stood at the back of the line, inconspicuous. No-one would notice if I left. It was the right time.

I waited, stopped marching and slipped around a corner before increasing my pace into a fast jog. I knew the way; everyone did. It was right in the middle of the commune and was the most obvious building in it. I went past the apartments, the manufactories, the hospital; and then it emerged, the huge palace, shining white in the light of the moon, bursting out of the uniform grey concrete buildings that surrounded it. It was the first time I had seen it this close. It was beautiful and unique.

For a few moments I stood there, frozen in awe and wonder. I wanted to enter, but only now I did notice the imposing jagged black gate that ran around it. Go back, go back, go back. We had been explicitly and repeatedly told to not go near the palace. I fought against the seeds of doubt and the ingrained uneasiness. I will not go back. I sprinted, leapt, clambered over the gate surrounding the compound and fell down hard onto the grass. I lay there and caught my breath. I could've lay there forever; it was like resting on little sheafs of wheat, water soaked soft, but I knew there wasn't much time. I lifted myself up and made my way up the steps to the entrance. Again, I hesitated. To go in or not to go in? I had thought about this moment for weeks; in my imagination, I had stridden in full of confidence, but now as I considered it, the choice was much less obvious. Inside was a new world, danger, freedom, both possibilities, both outweighing the other. Outside was safe; outside was ignorance; outside was conformity. What to do? I had never seen anyone do any different to what was prescribed for them, break any of the unwritten rules. If I entered, it would be more than mere antisocial behaviour. It would be open rebellion, a betrayal of society and the powers that governed. The minutes disappeared as I struggled in front of the great door but I knew my mind was made up. It was probably locked anyway. I turned back, repeated my acrobatics over the gate, jogged back along the road and was back in bed within the hour. For once I couldn't sleep, as I agonised over my decision. I knew I couldn't continue in this current state, living in deadening monotony and ignorant to... to everything. There was something more I was missing. I was ashamed at my weakness in turning back, yet I didn't regret my choice. It was too much to risk and I could always go again, couldn't I? But would I go in the next time? I had to, yet there was something holding me back. I was among these thoughts as I drifted into sleep.

It was now late afternoon. We were in school, sitting at our desks, memorising the usual passages that were meant to be vital for our practical fieldwork in four days. It was the same information which we had been learning about for the past five months. At the front of the room the electronic speaker was playing the information to us. Presently, it was informing us about the use of scythes. "Scythes are used to harvest wheat. Scythes consist of a long wooden handle with a curved metal blade at the far end. They should be held with both hands, with the handle at a forty-five-degree angle to the ground. The blade should be held parallel to the ground. The scythe should be swung in a wide loop, with most rotation occurring at the hips." There was a pause as the speaker allowed for us to recite what had just been announced. "Scythes are used to harvest wheat. Scythes consist of a long wooden handle with a curved metal blade at the far end. They should be held with both hands, with the handle at a forty-five-degree angle to the ground. The blade should be perpendicular to the ground. The scythe should be swung in a wide lo---". We were interrupted by a beeping sound that whined from the speaker, forcing our recitation to a halt. Then I heard a human voice emanating from the speaker for the first time in my life. "Five-four-one-five-eight-eight. Report to the hospital

now." That was me. My time was up. The hospital was where we were all born, raised and conditioned but I knew that the hospital was also where we went to die. I was going to die. I shot up from my desk and sprinted out into the hallway. But it was too late; I was surrounded. A group of guards was right outside our room. They seized me. Someone cupped their hands over my mouth. Another rapped something against the back of my neck and I blacked out.

I was somewhere else, panting. I opened my eyes. In bed. It was only a dream. But it was also so real. It was like someone had blurted out some secret truth to me, right into my face while I slept. There was now some new knowledge inside my head, but it was not fully formed. Though I knew instinctively that it was important. I was hungry but breakfast could wait; I needed to figure this out.

Breakfast could wait. I was the only one who could even think that thought. If they were hungry they probably couldn't stop going to the dining room, gorge themselves on that slop and enjoy it. They're all in this stupid bliss, happy to live out their lives like a machine, doing repetitive tasks day after day until their consensual suicide. But I can't do that. There must be something more. There must be something fulfilling, something meaningful. I'm trapped in this world that cares for none of these things, only efficiency. I need to get into that palace. Why did I fail last time? As the question turned over in my head, I soon realised the truth embedded in my dream. I died. That was the worst they could do to me. Death.

I had failed to go in because of the consequences. But death, the worst consequence was barely a consequence at all, a small change compared to the hollowness and repetitiveness of my current life. No, I had to go to the palace. There was something more there, and I had nothing to lose.

## Chapter Two

I was at the door of the palace again. It'd been 3 weeks since my last visit as an intensive two-week excursion to the farms to hone our use of scythes and other farming equipment left me tired and with no opportunity to escape. But through those two weeks, the disillusionment only grew. The long hours in the field sowing seeds and harvesting wheat didn't help. This time I refused to hesitate. I turned the knob, pushed the door and it swung open, wide and easy. It was dark save for the quiet glow of moonlight that projected in through the windows but my eyes soon adjusted, and I could make out the features with some clarity. The palace was much larger from the inside, with high ceilings and a wide area covered in fluffy red flooring that gave way to a looming staircase that swept up and zigzagged back. To my right, a handful of doors were spread out along the wall, each numbered with six digits. To my left, past an archway was another room, and I could spot rows upon rows of books, stacked onto heavy wooden shelves. The doors could only lead into the apartments of the people who worked here. That was to be avoided. Instead, I crept my way up the stairs, careful not to disturb the silence and arouse any suspicious. At the top, it was even darker, and I could make out only doored hallways in both directions. More apartments? And so, I decided to go to the bookshelves. Back down the stairs I went, with the same care as I did when going up, and then I approached the bookshelves. I was nervous. Maybe it was just going to be a multitude of the common instructional books, the ones from which we memorised from. But I was also hoping for something different, something that would alleviate the intense boredom and meaninglessness of my everyday life. I needed hope, and it would have destroyed me if I had to leave the palace with nothing more than when I entered. And so, I was profoundly disappointed as I found those books; *Farming Techniques*, *Building Techniques*, *Manufacturing Techniques* on the first bookshelf which I inspected. However, I was soon relieved as I found on other shelves, books that were different to anything I had ever laid eyes on. They were in all sizes and colours and textures. On one bookshelf, labelled "fiction", a thin, small, black, hardbacked book caught my eye so I picked it up. On the cover, in bold typeface, the words Nineteen-eighty-four were set in a shiny silver. I flicked through some pages, and sensed there was something there. I needed to read it. The book was tucked into my shirt and I continued looking around. There was such an extreme variety on every shelf and the hours wasted away as I examined each book that caught my attention, each one telling a different story in a different world, with different language. As I looked through, I realised that there was so much I did not recognise or understand. Words and concepts; some were completely alien to me. I ignored the problem, and eventually it solved itself. When I was younger and I was being taught language, we used dictionaries, books filled with the meanings of everything that there was to know. While I was looking around, I caught sight of one of these dictionaries. It was getting very late now so I picked it up before I left the bookcases and began my way back. By the time I arrived in my apartment, I was tired, exhausted and hungry from missing dinner, but there was a weight off my shoulders. I had found something that broke the monotony of day to day life. I was truly happy for the first time I could remember.

Throughout the next few weeks my world morphed into Airstrip 1 and the plight of Winston Smith became my own. It was at first strange; I was only used to reading instructional books, but I pushed through the words I didn't understand with the dictionary, gradually acclimated to the style, and discovered a story that was forceful and captivating. Throughout the day, I struggled through the lessons, tormented by sleep deprivation, summoning all my energies to keep myself awake and avoid the arousal of any suspicions. Only at night did I feel alive, albeit inhabiting a world that was not mine. Some way through reading the book, it occurred to me that the world described in



Nineteen-eighty-four was not dissimilar to mine and the disgruntled thoughts and feelings of Winston Smith had often appeared in my own mind. My entire life was almost wholly under the control of unknown powers, and while their manipulation of thoughts and feelings were not successful for me, it was working for everyone else. My knowledge of my world was, like Winston, very thin. I didn't know its history, its organisation; apart from this book, I did not have access to any information beyond what those who controlled me wanted me to have. In the book, it was that passage, *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* that eventually answered the questions of Winston's world. For me, it only raised more questions. What was the history of my world? How did it come about? Who were the rulers? I was desperate to find out.

As I considered it more, I found that I was also different to Winston. My struggle was more torturous. I was totally alone, without a Julia, without a brotherhood. I was unable to share my experience, and my thoughts and feelings could only stay within me until my death. Anyhow, this beautiful, awful introduction to the world of fiction meant that some variety, some interest had appeared in my life. I wanted to live now, to read more, to find out more. I vowed to return to the library to explore and retrieve more books as soon as it was possible.

## Chapter Three

I was back at the palace again. I couldn't remember why I had to sneak away on my previous journeys; this time I just left my apartment after dinner. I went upstairs again and continued along the hallway at the top only to reach a dead end. On my way back, I observed the doors more closely. They were wooden instead of metal, and the spaces between each one was wildly inconsistent. These weren't apartments. I tried to open a door, but it was locked. I charged against it, and upon hitting the door and after eliciting a loud thump realised I couldn't continue. I crouched down and waited. Nothing. I was safe. I hadn't woken anybody. I knew there was something important behind these doors; they weren't locked for no reason, but this was not the time to find out. I went back downstairs, to the bookshelves again. I picked up a book called *The Trial*. It was short and interesting at a glance, so I took it back to the apartment and it was the book that I read for the proceeding weeks.

*The Trial* was a story about a person named Joseph K, trapped in a confusing world which he doesn't understand and no-one will explain to him. He is in trouble for some unknown reason and must go to a variety of places in an attempt to seek help. However, he never receives help and everything gets worse and worse for him until in the end, he is taken away and murdered. This book was quite similar to *1984*, telling the story of another world where the main character is slowly destroyed. And so, Joseph K's situation was also similar to mine. His enemies were inaccessible but still able to manipulate and ultimately end his life, much like the controllers in my world. Despite this, I didn't understand his character at all. Why didn't he try to fight back? He seemed to just accept his fate at every turn, passive and submissive. I knew that I would've acted different. I would've been angry. I would've resisted the executioners. I wouldn't have turned over like a dog.

Having read through the two books, I felt something change in me, in my mind. The stories were stories of defeat. The protagonists failed and they were crushed by their oppressive government. But in their journey, in their worlds, I realised there was a capacity in me to fight for change. It was my mission to do something against the powers that controlled. The genesis of these thoughts occurred while I began to feel very fatigued. Perhaps I shouldn't've read for hours into the night, night after night. My energy during the day was almost non-existent, and it was difficult just to get through the basic lessons in the classroom. I was still always thinking about my world, trying to gain an understanding of its framework from the limited information I had, but this was very difficult as I was consistently tired and uninspired. I had no energy to think, let alone be disillusioned or angry. This continued for weeks, and even as I intellectualised the desperate importance of my new cause, I did not have the will to do anything. It was a month or so until I had finally caught up with my sleep and recovered my drive. Then, it was straight to the palace to continue my quest for more information.

In the back corner of the library there was a book resting in a glass case on a low pedestal. I had not noticed it before, and now that I had seen it, it seemed strange that I had missed it on my previous two trips. Perhaps someone had only recently put it there, but that would be even stranger. The book was open at the middle, revealing letters in complex typography that looked impractical, but delightful. I read the open page of the book, and instantly knew that I needed to read the rest. It seemed that an explanation of my world sat in its pages. It was my *Theory and Practise of Oligarchical Collectivism*. As such, I began working at removing the book from its case. I tried to lift the case, to shake it, to find some opening through the pedestal. Nothing. It seemed I had to shatter it. I swung at it from the top with my elbow. Intact glass and a numbing pain that seared through me

alerted me to the fact that this was not the right tactic. Eventually, and ingeniously, I found that I could run my thumbnail along the right-angle intersection of two pieces of glass and slowly cut through the adhesive binding the glass together. I proceeded to work my way along the top in this manner until the top piece was no longer attached and then I lifted it up. I pulled it out, turned the pages until I found the beginning and began to read.

**On Utopia: a look into the future**

# Introduction

The state of our world has become increasingly volatile. The '26 and '41 crises have plunged a majority of countries into economic ruin and recession, and wellbeing for people everywhere has begun a decline. Russia and China both look to be on the brink of civil war. America has lost its grasp on international relevance as its domestic issues loom large.

What is the cause of this devastation? At the very core, the problem is with the socio-economic system that runs our world. At the very core, the problem is with capitalism. This system, where wealth, which is relative, more or less equates with success, is essentially a zero-sum game in which everyone plays against everyone else. The consequence of this is that only a select number of people can be successful. The rest can only be left unsatisfied. This inherent problem is compounded by a variety of other factors that reveal the system that govern our world to be completely untenable.

First and foremost is the instability in our markets. This is an instability that has resulted in the destroyed livelihoods of billions. 130 years ago, it was the Great Depression that bankrupted countries and caused the rise to power of dictators. Today it is the Global Collapse that has triggered the renaissance of warlords in Africa and Asia, drug lords in South America, and seen 21 changes of heads of state in the Western Hemisphere over the past 18 months. We've been waiting for a Great Moderation to happen in our markets for a whole century; it's become clear it will never happen. The instabilities are here to stay.

Another symptom of the poor state of our society is our population levels, which have been constantly increasing. The vast majority of predictions of an optimum population have fallen around 2 billion people; our population will be a whole order of magnitude larger than that within the turn of the century. This is self-evidently unsustainable in the long term. We've already seen food crises. In the past, our improvement of farming technologies has kept pace with the growth in population and the decline in growing conditions. But now it's become increasingly obvious that this cannot continue forever; the famines occurring worldwide go a long way to illustrate this. Water shortages are also affecting more areas than ever; droughts are widespread thanks to human-induced climate change. Maintaining our current population will result in a steadily diminishing quality of living; maintaining our population trajectory can only precipitate a catastrophe. In the search for continued capitalistic growth, we have put ourselves in this position. The economists in the past argued that technological improvements would today be the main driver of economic progress. We can now see that they are plainly wrong, and our recent growth has been driven almost exclusively by unsustainable population increase.

Pointless costs are also emblematic of our current system. A world that fosters a throw-away mentality and a focus on the next shiny toy will inevitably produce large amounts of waste products. Amazon has released six domestic robot models within the past four years. Over sixty million of these have already found their way to the dump. Jobs such as advertising are another pointless cost. Tens of thousands of people work on a task that would be obsolete if our system were planned. Tens of thousands of people, needing to be sustained by food, water and shelter, but don't add anything.

It's clear our society has finally outgrown the monstrosity of capitalism. But, having recognised this fact, what should replace it? Many have pointed to the total failures of socialism in multiple countries as evidence that though capitalism has many flaws, it is the best option available. In reality, it is through a want of trying that has led to this conclusion. It's already been sixty-five years since

the fall of socialism, yet a design for a new society, one that is egalitarian, sustainable and values happiness and utilitarian good over the individual acquisition of wealth has not even been suggested, even though almost everyone would consider it to be far superior to our current society. But the time has come, something has got to give. The problems clearly cannot be solved by maintaining the status quo. There must be a reset, a re-evaluation and ultimately a new world.

As a civilisation that prides itself on its logical and rational thinking, it has come time for an application of these virtues into the running of our society. A recent Zoch paper has managed to reduce the underlying structure governing our physical world to an irreducible indeterminism that manifests itself in probabilistic behaviour of subatomic particles. This indeterminism, when applied to sentient beings suggests that though actions are not pre-determined, they are also not the result of free will. Instead, since behaviour and action is governed by chemical processes in the brain, and these are in turn governed by the movements of atoms and subatomic particles which have been shown to be probabilistic, a model of incompatibilist indeterminism has now become standard. This allows us to rid ourselves of the notion that freedom is inherently good. It doesn't even exist. Our society should therefore be run in a way that reflects our newfound knowledge.

Utopias are reliant on control. Without control humans are free in the sense they are physically able to do things that would stop the society being utopian. Atavistic and selfish impulses drive humans to take advantage and advance goals, goals which in our capitalist society, are the acquisition of wealth and power by any means possible. Murders, thefts, assault, manipulation and deceit exist across human society currently, even if great effort has been taken to condition them away. Even in countries of extremely high social-economic status and where wellbeing is extremely high, these actions still occur on a regular basis. These problems prevent us from reaching the next level; they prevent us from transitioning into a utopia. It has often been noted that a lack of free will would destroy any notion of ethics. If humans couldn't choose their actions, they need not be condemned for them. Thus, it is often argued that if this is taken to account in the running of society, chaos would ensue. Justice would seem to be redundant. This is a ridiculous response. Our realisation that freedom is unnecessary should instead allow us to create a utopic society with the state having full, unadulterated control. In the past, this has been near impossible. Even in literature, the existence of a society with absolute control has been non-existent. However, we now have the technology and the intellectual capability to realise this society. We must act.

My vision for the practical aspects of this state is detailed in the following chapters.

# The New World

## General

The institutions of nations and states that have governed our world have become farcical. Each protecting their own interests at the cost of lives and the greater good for humanity. Each playing out a soap opera of "international relations" that are characterised by childish one-upping disguised in expensive suits and long titles. It's a travesty. Instead, the world should be run as thousands of small communes, united by a single leader, monitored by a central body, and made to be virtually independent of each other but with standardised rules and laws.

The advantages of these small communes are numerous. Firstly, they limit bureaucracy and problems associated with managing large amounts of people and resources. The co-ordination of people; their education, production and consumption can all be made easier in these communes

only 10,000 strong. Also, if strife breaks out, it is much easier to contain when it occurs in an independent commune as opposed to a world state with billions in population freely travelling. Disease, for example will only have a real impact on the commune it first affects. If it kills off all members of the commune, it has nowhere else to spread since the communes are physically separated. The central control would only spring into action if a disaster of this magnitude occurred and would be tasked with “restarting” and repopulating the affected commune. Another clear advantage of having small communes is that the produce and production of the people of the commune can be adapted to the environment the commune is situated in. This includes growing only crops suitable to the biome, such as growing oats and wheat in communes located in more arid environments, while growing rice in communes located in wetter environments. Each commune will have the benefit of coherence and consistency with the greater whole, while being able to be customised based on its individual circumstances. Unlike countries, the system is not based on arbitrary geopolitical relations, and thus doesn’t suffer from the drawbacks of the state system. Its borders are not drawn based on the word of those with the pointiest sticks and the best negotiators. Instead, it is characterised by trust, peace and co-operation. It’s based on function, not history.

These communes will be perfectly efficient in every sense of the word. It starts with education. Only practical skills like farming, mining, construction, manufacturing and operation of specific technologies will be taught. These are the only skills that are necessary. In our current world, we value creative talents and inventiveness highly, even more than skills that are more practical in nature, blindly following a belief that artistry and technological progress ad infinitum is good. It is not. The aforementioned must be married with a maturity and unity that focuses progress into producing positive effects. And that has not been happening. Some innovations, nukes and giant death robots come to mind, are used to destroy and ruin; others, such as disposable holograms, are an unadulterated waste of time and money. The industrial revolution was largely hailed as a great leap forward for mankind. Ultimately, future humans living in a ravaged world will see it as the beginning of the end of the earths’ habitability if nothing is done. In a similar vein, when mankind stepped on the moon, many viewed it as the greatest achievement of humanity. Taken objectively it was really money badly spent. The twenty-four and a half billion dollars that it costed then could have rescued millions from poverty and starvation. The technological improvements the program achieved, while admirable, could have been made at a fraction of the cost if the context of going to the moon was taken out. The point is, while we almost universally admire artistic and technological feats, they do not provide any tangible benefits compared to their sunk costs, other than a “feel good” effect or a temporary feeling of novelty. Efficiency can only be achieved through doing what is necessary, and doing that well. And that is why the skills taught in the new world are only practical in nature. This practicality means that the skills are significantly easier to teach. Requisite knowledge of the required disciplines can be easily and deeply imprinted in the minds of the citizens of the new world through simple rote learning: Listening to a recording, followed by intense repetition, then by practical work. This can be scaled to any and every situation necessary. Easy and efficient.

Another aspect of education in the new world is conditioning. Much like in Brave New World, a good, yet imperfect basis for any attempt at utopia, conditioning will form a large part of childhood development. Every aspect of good citizenship will be deeply imbedded into the minds of everyone. What this will mean is that from a young age, those in the new world will absolutely love every single part of their life. For them, the food they eat will be utterly sublime, their home, perfectly suitable, their work, fun and rewarding, their peers, genuinely amiable and agreeable. This lays important groundwork in constructing a permanent happiness in the population. Similarly, there will be things that the youth will be conditioned to dislike. They will hate the outside of their commune and will detest the thought of ever venturing outside. They will also be hesitant to venture into

places that they are not be allowed go in, such as the residence of the leader. The mere thought of rebelling, of doing anything outside the norm would be odious and detestable. They would not think to steal, to murder or even hurt one another. This is the great power of conditioning. It serves two purposes of the utmost importance; first, as a positive influence on one's happiness and second, as a preventative for anti-societal behaviour. However, conditioning has long been the target of moral complaints. Being able to engineer and manipulate the thoughts and feelings of humans seems evil to some. They are able to accept a worse evil, the state of our current society over this perfectly benign process. What they don't understand is that even in our current world, conditioning still occurs. Deliberately or not, our parents, our schools, our friends and their actions as well as random events all have a conditioning effect on our lives. We take after our parents, modelling much of our actions on them. Schools restrict us and imbue in us the norms of society, while our friends, through peer pressure, forces further homogenisation. Every event influences our psyche and forces us into patterns of behaviour. We are not free in ourselves. It is externalities that shape how we feel and what we feel and what we think and how we think. In our current society, this semi-random conditioning produces widespread unhappiness and negative thoughts and feelings on a regular basis. It espouses contradictions and paradoxes. Parts of us will be conditioned to wish to do one sort of thing, and another part will be conditioned to do another. It is damaging and dystopic, causing us to feel uncomfortable, detached and unbelonging. The conditioning I propose here is just a more structured version of the conditioning that already exists. Its structured basis allows for it to be focused, instead of contradictory and thus allows the greater purposes I have elucidated to be achieved.

Also important to the stability and efficiency of the new world are the combined elements of genetic modification and so called "hard test-tube babies." Genetic modification has long been seen as an innovation that would finally free us of the shackles of natural selection and allow us to improve our human selves. The only reason this has not already happened is because of some superficial issues. These "issues" stem from a few beliefs. Some people believe that genetic modification is unsafe, some think it will affect genetic diversity while others decry the "ethics" of genetic modification. Firstly, on the safety issue, it has become established through multiple recent studies that genetic modification is perfectly safe to be done on humans if done correctly. We have genetically modified plants and animals for decades, allowing them to better survive and taste better, with no apparent drawbacks. There were fears over the safety of IVF, a treatment that became mainstream and almost universally accepted only a few decades after the first procedure. Our fear of genetic modification of humans being unsafe is really a fear of the new and bold, a fear of progress. The issue of genetic diversity is certainly a much more pertinent one. And in a society of humans with homogenous genetic makeups, it may pose problems, when disease is factored in. A single disease could target a specific gene and wipe out vast quantities of humans. However, as I have discussed earlier, the existence of separate communes is a preventative of mass extinction. A superbug realistically could only appear in one commune at a time. And then, even if the bug was so effective that it killed all those living in the commune, because there is no method of transmission from inside the commune to outside the commune, the bug would eventually die out with no host. The commune can then be slowly repopulated. The last critique left of genetic modification is that it is in some way unethical or immoral. The argument of religion is the most common one. Genetic engineering apparently contradicts God's will and means humans are playing God. This argument falls flat for a number of reasons. First, what even is God's will? How do people know what it is? And why would a God will against something if there are no independent reasons to, other than the people claiming that he does? The other part of the argument is that humans would be playing God. That's just plain wrong. It is nature that determines our genes through selection, not God. So then we have the next most popular argument, the appeal to nature. Genetic modification is unethical



because it is unnatural. Another argument that's just totally invalid. It is based on the premise that only what is natural is ethical; an opinion, not a fact. So the only barriers to genetic modification are muddled and illogical people. We should ignore them and press on. Genetic engineering of humans and other life forms will only further increase efficiencies. We can make ourselves faster and stronger, with a lessened need of sleep, food and water. Humans can also be adapted to their physical environment through modification. As mentioned earlier, we can have increased cold tolerance in colder climates and increased heat tolerance in hotter climates. But it's not just pure physical improvements that can result from genetic modification. Humans can also be improved mentally; to be more accepting of authority, to have a more stringent body clock and to be able to learn faster. This is just the tip of the iceberg, and there is so much good that genetic modification can do that this short treatise cannot do it justice.

So we move on to hard test tube babies. First described as "decanting" in the 20<sup>th</sup> century novel, *Brave New World*, the technology has only recently caught up to the fiction. But what awesome technology this is. For those uninitiated, hard test tube babies are babies created completely independent of parents or any other humans. A single piece of DNA, some technological wizardry and an incubation period of 9 months is all that's required for a newly minted human being. What this means is that the potential for mistakes and errors is significantly reduced, approaching zero. When human conception and pregnancy is taken out of the equation, ridiculous mishaps like miscarriages, genetic abnormalities and other defects that often occur in procreation also disappear. The technology in the creation of hard test tube babies can be perfectly calibrated so that the babies that are created will have exactly the right genetics for their future roles. Hard test tube babies allow for an unparalleled level of control, a control that is required for the ubiquity of uniformity in mankind that precipitates utopia. What it also does, along with genetic modification, is allow a world without biological gender, an unnecessary and detrimental blight on our world. Gender only exists as a product of nature's obsession with evolution. Its function is in its forcing of competition, allowing only the fittest to procreate. That was before our modern societies developed; when humans were still struggling to live past fifty years. Back then, natural selection was a necessary evil for the improvement of humankind. Now, we have genetic modification and hard test tube babies. Gender only acts as a barrier to equality and acts as a distinct differentiating force that creates divisions in humankind. Rather than the dichotomy that exists today, a dichotomy that has endured even when it has lost its utility, we should aim for pure unity, a genderless world. This is the way of the future.

The questions of work and jobs have been partially answered by these above descriptions. However, there are more in depth concerns that must be raised. Foremost is its allocation. Allocation of jobs will be based entirely on age. Those younger and fitter will do the physically tougher work; farming and construction, and while their life progresses, the physical workload of their occupation will diminish accordingly. Those nearing the end of their lives will be placed in jobs that are suited to them; working on a production line or in a hospital. This method of labour allocation ensures work done by each according to their own abilities. What this means is that there will be no choice of occupation. Of course, that is the goal. The abilities of those of like age will be the same, and thus they naturally will have the same job. Also relating to jobs is the amount of production that should be derived from work. It would at first seem, with the benefits of genetic modification having been championed, that the amount of production achieved should be as high as possible. This is not the goal. Instead, the speed at which citizens complete work should be perfectly calibrated through genetic modification and conditioning in order that production should be no more and no less than is necessary, whilst ensuring that work will make up all the time not spent on sleeping, eating and cleaning. That is to say, citizens will have no leisure time, and will be conditioned and genetically modified so that their rate of work, multiplied by the amount of time they work will produce the

exact amount of output that is necessary. This will mean that there will be no surplus nor deficit of energy, produce and time; with perfect efficiency the supreme guiding principle.

While we have discussed birth, we have neglected to speak of death. Death in the new world will be a voluntary act of suicide. Sixty years is enough of a time to enjoy existence, to contribute to the maintenance of utopia and to live the good life. It is also short enough so that life does not become a burden on others, so that death comes gracefully; the mind having not lost its lucidity and psyche. An acceptance of death is both noble and practical; this fact will be made clearly known to all who live in the world. They will understand their duty when their time comes. In this way, the efficiency and overall happiness of the society is maintained. If there were no impetus for a structured recycling of population, then slowly but surely the state of society will begin to decay. The fluctuations in population will result in imbalances between people and jobs, and will undermine the egalitarian nature of the world. If the old are removed from their job, then others will have to work more to maintain their life. If they remain, the well being of a younger generation will diminish, and their sense of purpose will be totally absent; what would have been their job remains occupied by a septuagenarian who performs poorly. Death will not be a choice, but through deep conditioning, it will be a voluntary and agreeable act. The citizens will approach it with peace.

As has become evident, the economic model of this new world will not be based on any exchange of goods or any equivalent of money. Money, through its implication of a private economic system, would undermine control. Thus, there will be no free market; no ready exchange of goods for cash. Necessities: food, water, clothing, shelter and tools, will be distributed free of charge by the state. Nothing else will be needed or wanted. Nothing else will exist. The perils of our capitalist society have already been laid out. It has become clear that monetary systems do not work. If we try to maintain money in the new world, we would be committing a blatant act of suicide. In keeping something so obviously destructive, we would show ourselves to be stupid. However, the exchange of goods could also precipitate a rebirth of the capitalist model in the new world. This is a legitimate concern. Of course, goods will never be provided in excess; it will always be the exact amount needed for optimal nourishment, happiness and work. Conditioning, will also play a role in making trade a detestable idea and make sure that what every citizen gets will be exactly what they want. With these measures employed, our previous self-destructive economic system will never reappear.

## Administration

The leader of the commune will not be subject to the same conditioning the others receive and will live separately. The necessity of this leader is debatable, but its inclusion is warranted on the basis of unforeseen circumstances that may disrupt and destroy the commune without separate intervention. Maybe a glitch in a system wreaks havoc on the conditioning of the citizens who then become rebellious. The leader's job will be to fix this up and return the society to its previous state. The leader will also be responsible for smoothing the edges to allow the greatest efficiency. Maybe the genetic code of the citizens is slightly off, making them weaker than they could be and unable to complete enough work. Again, it will be up to the leader to make the tweaks to achieve a more perfect state. All of this means that the leader must know in depth everything about the commune. While this may seem like too much power invested into the one person, it should be known that even though the leader is not subject to the same conditioning as the other members of society, they will still be conditioned. This conditioning will make sure the leader is deeply patriotic, to such an extent that it would sacrifice its life if necessary without hesitation. It will also understand that its sole purpose is in its monitoring, improving and saving of society. It will not interfere with world in any other way, and will mostly be confined to its own residence. The leader will also be conditioned

to condition its heir in the same way. The heir will be taught anything and everything that will be required to replace the leader. Optimally, they will eventually grow to become a replica of the previous leader, and this process will continue forevermore.

On top of the leader, there will be a central control of all the communes, responsible for saving the world from the most catastrophic of threats. Incoming asteroids, invading aliens, superbugs, natural disasters, a rogue commune; these are all problems that will be dealt with by this central control. This central control will comprise of a small township of free-thinking individuals, who are allowed and able to further scientific progress. Even then, they will only be working on preventing and dealing with the aforementioned events. Defence systems, vaccinations, and the like will be all within the domain of these people. They will be the ones who launch the rocket that destroys the asteroids on a collision course with earth, the ones who negotiate peace with aliens, the ones who seek and destroy a new virus. But of course, their own existence may be termed a catastrophic threat. Their freedom allows the possibility of selfishness; some may try to harness the communes for their own good and to improve their own lives. Some might want to just destroy the world. To have people with this sort of power seems like a recipe for disaster. Then again, maybe it's only in this capitalist every man for themselves society that fosters this thinking, and the people who have lived their entire lives away from it will never even consider putting themselves before the greater good. But even if this is not true, I contend that this would be an evil that is necessary. It would be dreadful if, through much sacrifice, this utopia is finally achieved, only for an asteroid to crash down and destroy all progress. It is a matter of probabilities. If the probability of all the world-destroying events occurring was less than the probability that this central control would betray the state, then it would be hard to justify having this group of potentially havoc creating individuals. But the fact is that this is probably untrue, and a colossally destructive event would be more likely to occur than betrayal. This group will exist; a risky but important safeguard.

## Happiness

On the topic of happiness, developments have occurred that have resulted in new understanding, and have shed some light on how needless and ridiculous the systems that run our current world have become. The developments in question have occurred in the field of hedonic adaption, a concept first raised a century ago. Recently released, decade long studies have all but confirmed this phenomenon. What is it? It was a theory, now a tenet, which describes a fundamental feature of our happiness levels. According to hedonic adaption, our happiness level has a baseline, determined largely by genetics, which it always reverts to. Happiness levels of lottery winners and people who become paraplegics see a sudden rise or dip when the altering event occurs, but years later, these levels revert to the level they were before the event. Thus, there is almost nothing that can be done that can tangibly change happiness in the long term. Material pursuits are useless. Social pursuits are useless. Achieving them will not allow us any long-term happiness. Some people then point to the extreme happiness of monks as contradictory evidence; and its true, monks are a lot happier than most other members of the general population even though in their genetics, they are fairly representative of the general population. The reason for this is that their lives are, like the citizens of the new world will be, extremely structured, with all their desires totally suppressed and meditation takes up a large portion of their ascetic lives. It is only from a full immersion in this lifestyle that allows them to reap the benefits. And this immersion still constitutes control, whether self-imposed or by the state. It is control which allows them to reach their state of bliss. Enemies of my proposition will indubitably hypothesise a world in which we all live as ascetics; another utopia, without all the technological impositions that I have proposed, which they illogically take exception with. While I concede that this world would indeed be great, there are some obvious problems with

it. First and foremost is reproduction. A very short-lived utopia it would be indeed if modern technology and sex were both removed. Since its very essence is in its lack of any modern technologies, hard test tube babies and other artificial reproductive technologies would be excluded. Thus, sex would be necessary in this world. But there is clearly a reason those beatific monks live in pure chastity. Sex represents a relinquishing of control, a giving in to the most primal desires of our condition. And since utopia requires us to quash these sorts of desires, the same desires that cause us to be violent and to lust for power, sex would pose an inherent contradiction. Without its restriction, the whole system of self-imposed control would collapse. So a monk based utopia would either destroy itself if it excepted sex from control, or it would die out in a single generation; everyone having died of old age. Also, in contrast with my proposition, achieving this monk based society is totally impractical. It would require most of the world to change their mindset from one extreme to another. For this to happen without the use of any technology could take hundreds if not thousands of years. And by that time, we'd be lucky if our earth had not turned to a barren wasteland through human maltreatment.

It may be of some consternation that a realistic transition from our society to that of my proposition has not been detailed, especially since this would be necessary for comparisons to be made with any other utopia. Thus, I will explicate. First, there must be consensus reached among those in power to work together in achieving this utopia. Then the birth rate must be substantially decreased. As this is happening, the first commune should be created, and during this process, the logistics and planning of the commune should be carefully studied and perfected. The birth of a new commune will require some outside intervention. While the commune only has babies and children, work will need to be outsourced. Food, accommodation, clothes, education, direction and the like must be provided from the outside, but this must be done with minimal interference. After a few decades, the commune should be self-sufficient, and thus more and more should be set up, with all the new efficiencies gained from studying the creation of the first commune. With several communes having been created, and a significant proportion of the world population having been diminished, the main focus of the production in the non-commune world should be focused on the creation of communes. Eventually only a small population will exist. They will be invited to voluntarily join the central control group as explored earlier. The rest of the non-commune population can be eradicated by a variety of methods. Perhaps an artificially created virus that the citizens of the commune are genetically resistant against and the central control is immunised or any other quick and effective means. Of course, my outline has been quite simplistic. There will be many challenges and difficulties faced by those who want to bear this world into fruition that an armchair designer has not foreseen or decided to expound. And this only heightens the importance of exercising full control over the commune and making sure that any possible world destroying events are suppressed by any means possible. Even if some of the methods described may seem unethical, all the sacrifices and effort required to create this utopia will be for nought if it fails. A colossal waste. And so, my proposition has a clear path forward, a path leading directly to utopia. On the other hand, in turning a blind eye to technology, the ascetic utopia sacrifices longevity as well as practicality. While mine is realistic, the other remains a pipe dream.

Before my digression, in discussing happiness, I neglected to mention that the relativity of happiness is also present in another form. Events that cause changes in happiness are judged relative to others instead of being absolute. For example, if you received a massive pay rise of one hundred percent in just a year, you would likely be ecstatic, but this would only be true because this pay rise is a lot more than the normal annual wage growth of between 2-5%. If instead, average annual wage growth was to be 200%, then you would not be so happy, as you would quite clearly have been short-changed. Even if it were just your co-workers receiving a bigger pay rise than you, you would

still be annoyed and unhappy. This does not just apply to money. Breaking your arm is both extremely painful and a massive inconvenience. You would be almost definitely saddened if this happened to you. But, if this occurred because of a plane crash, and everyone else on the plane had smashed skulls and spines, then you would be grateful, and likely, very happy. You survived scot free compared to those who became paraplegic because of the incident. The implication is, with an uneven distribution of happiness causing resources, there is little chance for universal happiness, since happiness is relative. Because of this relativity of happiness, one person's gain is another one's loss, even if they both have a gain in happiness causing resources. If one person gained more, the other would justifiably be peeved and unhappy. Perfect equality is the solution to this. Everyone getting the same available happiness causing resources for the same amount of work will see no disparity in happiness levels. Then, if the base happiness level is lifted through genetic modification, citizens of the new world will live in a world of persistent joy.

A new technology that I have not mentioned earlier, but which may be of great utility in the new world are BCMs or Brain Chemistry Modifiers. For those unaware, BCMs are internal head implants generally placed in the neck, above the bulging discs, and connected to the brain, which it can subtly alter the chemistry of. Since chemicals and hormones are inextricably linked with emotions, the BCM is able to change feelings and emotional states through its injection and extraction of such substances. Hormones such as dopamine and serotonin are directly linked to surges in short-term happiness, while cortisol shares a similar link with stress. BCMs are able to modify and control these chemicals. It can work in conjunction with conditioning to force a stronger positive response and greater happiness for acts that are conducive to conformity, while also amplifying stress hormones in those who may have any thoughts, ideas or act in a way that opposes societal benefit. BCMs can serve a special role in allowing the permeation of utopian values into the deepest recesses of the minds of the citizens, while also assisting in the strengthening control over the population. In terms of hedonic adaption, BCMs can help avoid the diminishing returns of happiness. Through its manipulation of happiness causing chemicals, it can maintain happiness levels and avoid its gradual loss. The only question mark over BCMs are over its necessity. My belief is that all other practices employed in this utopia should be sufficient to maintain it. Genetic engineering coupled with hard test tube babies and conditioning should ensure that control over the society is enough for utopia, so BCMs can be seen as a waste of resources, time and effort in a perfectly efficient world. But safeguards are important. The fact that BCMs take the level of control to another level, removing almost any possibility of dissatisfaction and the destruction of the state through a revolt of the citizens of the commune. Through BCMs, their lives can be almost perfectly controlled. And with this technology used correctly an even greater society beckons.

So there we have it. An achievable utopia based on practicality, efficiency and control. A utopia that makes use of modern day technologies to maximise these virtues, while allowing for universal and persistent happiness. But even still, I am able to pre-empt some further complaint, which will be refuted herein. The most likely argument that would be raised would be the possibility that those scientific theories of indeterminism that had the implication of a lack of free will may be later disproven. While this argument is a logical possibility, it is quite implausible and even if it were true, it would not mean that my proposition for utopia should be in any way tarnished. I only discussed the lack of free will in order to evince a greater agreement from those who have a deeply held belief that control, especially that of the state is bad, but the viability of my proposition does not rest on this fact. The mere fact of the existence of free will does not make it good; instead freedom is conducive to chaos, a destructive force that shatters the possibility of any sort of world free of pain, misery and suffering. It is only control that can allow any sort of structure that would precipitate a world free of the aforesaid evils and allow universal happiness. Then there is the argument that

control is inherently bad. Those who subscribe to this belief point to those countries such as North Korea and Gambia as examples. But this is fundamentally wrong. Though the running of those countries were based around strict control, this control was ultimately corrupted. Instead of being designed to serve the people, control was manipulated by the ruling leaders for the sole purpose of their own personal gain. While my proposition also involves strict control, this control is not designed for a minority to have power, but for the happiness of everyone. It features a totally separate type of control to that of those dictatorships mentioned, and while leaders still exist in some form, these leaders are the unlucky ones. It is a necessity of their roles that the same technologies utilised to maximise happiness in the other citizens are not utilised on them. They are the ones burdened with relative unhappiness.

I've mentioned various figures throughout this pamphlet. I've said that 60 years is the optimal age for death, and that a commune should have 10,000 citizens. But of course, these are not exact figures. I've not done hundreds of years of research; I'm pursuing generalisations and estimations. Cleverer minds will figure out the exact numbers. Those who critique me on the basis of these figures need a healthy dose of common sense. It is the ideas, not the specifics that is the goal of this examination. And the ideas themselves are flawless. Then there are those that reject new technologies outright. They argue that since we intuitively feel uncomfortable with new technologies, they therefore must be bad. Their ethical arguments are murky, (and I have already refuted a few of these in regards to genetic modification, which can largely be applied onto other propositions as well), so this argument seems strong for them. I admit that a dislike of new technologies exists in many people, but I contend this is really fear of loss. An inherent dislike of the new would not make evolutionary sense; in fact, it is the opposite. Evolution itself is change. So it can't be a disinclination towards change that drives a dislike of technology. It has to be a disinclination toward potential losses. And of course, my proposition will mean many things are lost. Useless things that have negative overall effects. We'll lose capitalism and freedom and all the evils those entail. But what we'll gain is much more important, and since we will certainly gain utopia, any potential losses are trivial.

Another argument that I will pre-emptively refute is that a loss of individuality will occur which would be inherently bad. The fallacy of the goodness of individuality has been a tremendously destructive force for too long and has spawned countless misleading aphorisms. Individuality contributes to conflict. Our great individual world is filled with ideological clashes and differences in culture that have caused countless wars and untold destruction. Individuality is also seen as an expression of our "true selves", and a fight against conformity. What is our true self but a manifestation of the interactions between our body, pre-determined through genetics, and the environment, which we have no control of? And even if there was something of ourselves that could tangibly be labelled our individual selves, what makes it good? What makes conformity bad? The fact is there are no good answers to these questions. Those who decry a loss of individuality are not grounding their arguments in any form of logic. In fact, individualism has continuously negatively impacted our society. It is all our selfish, power mongering, critiquing, jealous and deceitful inclinations combined. It is only a belief in the importance of the self above the common good that causes these traits. Collectivism, in bringing everyone together for the work of a common goal is almost objectively better. Collectivism is when we help one another, when we do work not just for our benefit but for the benefit of society.

The potential for a perfect society is right in front of us. We just have to recognise the failures of our current world and that, in living within this limited world, we have been indoctrinated with some illogical and irrational beliefs. These beliefs include our dislike of control and our propensity toward

individualism. If we only viewed these beliefs objectively and critically, and thus destroyed them, we would quickly find a path toward utopia.

In concluding, it behoves me to mention one final hypothesis. Through all the time, money and effort spent on the quest to find alien life, we have found exactly nothing. Even though it is highly probable that billions of other planets strewn across our own galaxy are habitable, we have not heard even a whimper from any of these planets. But that shouldn't automatically lead us to suspect that there is no alien life within communicable range; almost all calculated probabilities suggest that there are millions of worlds with intelligent life within our galaxy, and trillions throughout the universe. Thus, there must be a reason that we have been unable to communicate. Many solutions have already been posited for this paradox. Some believe that it is the nature of intelligent life to destroy itself; some believe in a general periodic destruction of life; some believe that earth is just deliberately ignored and uncontacted, while others believe that aliens are too alien, psychologically or physiologically unable to communicate with humans. My own theory is distinctly different. While the interactions of material concerns may be the major factor of societal change in any early civilisation, once that civilisation becomes sufficiently technologically advanced, a point our own civilisation has reached, that civilisation can effectively transition itself into a self-contained utopia such as that which has been described. This is the reason that we have not found any alien civilisations. All of them, having reached a particular point in technological prowess; the means to genetically modify themselves, a working knowledge of conditioning, and competent logistical skills, as well as a particular point in pure intellectual capacity, in being able to recognise growth to be not intrinsically good and discovering the ideals of hedonism and utilitarianism, would have transformed their society into utopia. Previously, a similar solution to the paradox had been proposed, in which societies would eventually have the technology to harness the energy of their sun, and upload their consciousness onto a super computer run by this energy and thus cease any interaction with the outside world. The difference between this solution and mine is that this solution predicts this point of singularity to exist deep into the future of our own civilisation, and requires technology millennia away. My proposition can happen with our current technology. This is good, but also somewhat concerning. Why has this sort of utopia only been conceived now? Why haven't we been able to conceptualise a perfect world unless it occurs thousands of years in the future? Our own society is the greatest prison of our minds. While we are still young and impressionable, our education system proselytizes useless garbage into us and our media continues this trend during adulthood. We focus on personal achievement and personal gain as the ultimate good. And thus, we have lost our way, our perception limited. We still intuit that happiness is the superior good to wealth or popularity, yet, thanks to society, our actions don't reflect this. We still work longer hours, sacrificing our health and sanity, in order in order to claim that bonus at the end of the year. We still scoff at monks, living in bliss, while our obligations of work, maintenance of a social life and our health weigh us down till the very ends of our lives. This is the nature of the society we are living in. We remain brainwashed cogs of a larger machine that doesn't care for us. We still live in false freedom. However, this is not a critique of those ruling our worlds, or of rulers past, for they too have been a victim of a flawed system. But, if they don't accept the new world, and fail to set the wheels change in motion, then they would be worthy of the most savage of criticism; in jeopardising happiness, and perpetuating all the evils that burden the lives of those in this world, they would thoroughly deserve anything they get. Instead they ought to help us break free into eternal utopia. With luck, this world will be realised within a hundred years. With luck, perfection will be realised within a hundred years. Perfection forevermore.

## Chapter Four

So that was it. It was informative, answering many of the questions I had harboured about the world. But that was the extent of the positives. As I read through the pamphlet, I became more and more concerned as I saw that the world was based on the awful ideas of this one person. The writing was confused, the arguments, plain wrong. It wrote that freedom was unnecessary, control to be good, happiness to be relative. I live its world first hand and though I'm controlled and equal with everyone else I hate it and I hate it for those reasons. I'm unhappy. I want freedom. I want variety. The author doesn't understand and hasn't experienced anything of what I feel now. It doesn't have the right to tell me what's good. It was so arrogant, so certain of its own correctness that it could not even conceive that it itself was the cause of total anger, boredom, sadness and agitation. I sat for a moment, resolving to commit my feelings at this point to memory. Now that I had realised that this world was the result of unintelligent and illogical musings, I knew that from now on, everything had to change. There would be no more waiting, no more patient endurance. I would have to begin a rebellion at whatever cost. I would create a brotherhood, a successful one. I would banish this world from existence. And if ever my will weakened, I would take my mind back into this moment, this moment of undiluted passion. I would remember how this world was conceived and my will to fight would flare again.

Eventually, the anger subsided and as it did, the facts of my current situation presented itself. I was woefully alone and deep in the territory of my new enemy. I needed to return to my apartment. I replaced the book into the case, found the glass piece I had removed and pushed it down on top. Then, I began to creep out of the library towards the door. My new role as an enemy of the state left me on edge, and so, when I was nearly outside, I managed to hear a quiet thud that seemed to come from back in the library. What was that? I was frozen in a moment of fear and uncertainty, ready to sprint away but also eager to see what it was. It felt like a long time before my head stopped spinning in panic and my hesitation ended. It was curiosity that won out. I turned and headed back toward the library. I soon saw the source of the noise; a book lying awkwardly on the ground that was not there before. Who had knocked it to the ground? Was it dangerous? Was it a trap? Hesitation again. But this time, my thoughts came through clearly and simply. It couldn't have been a trap. If they wanted to take me they would've done so already. There was no need for any deception. I approached the book, picked it up, turned it over and read the title: *The Art of War*. It was, by coincidence or design, startlingly relevant. I looked around, heard nothing, saw no-one. Someone had definitely dropped it there and I wanted to find them. Then again, they chose to hide themselves for a reason, and it was approaching morning. I was tired. I needed to return to my apartment. With book in hand, I crept to the door and pushed it open.

The sun was low in the sky, casting fantastical orange and pink among the clouds. The silhouette buildings were ensconced by a warm glow and trailed by shadows that were stretched to their limits. It was a sublime sight, and I stood watching it for far longer than I should have. I needed to return to my apartment. I started on the way, but I only made it as far as the steps before I sat down and continued to watch. I was too tired. I knew I needed to get up. I knew I needed to return. It was mesmerising, the way the shades of the buildings changed, the clouds whitened, the sky cooled, as the world faded into normalcy and the beautiful sight I had witnessed earlier disappeared into a memory. It was time to get up and go back. I needed to go back.



## Chapter Five

They were right in front of me. The two of them sitting on the bed, talking quietly to each other. I implicitly knew that they were Winston and Julia. We were in my apartment for some reason but I didn't question it. There was noise down the hallway, loud, boisterous, incomprehensible shouting. They were coming toward us and I knew that they were trouble. Then they crowded through the open doorway, six or seven of them. I told Winston and Julia to run, then stepped aside as the invaders approached, but they remained unresponsive, still as the world collapsed around them. My room was trashed. They flipped the bed, broke the shower head, opened my drawer and ripped apart my clothes. Then they surrounded the pair, who continued to stand still as they were hit; kicked in the shins and punched in the jaw. With shouts over the din, I questioned them from my side of the room, asking why they didn't fight back. They did not respond. I then pushed through the throng who seemed to be apathetic to my existence to drag them out of their mess myself. With one hand on each of their shirts, I attempted to pull them away. But they were like rocks; heavy and uncompromisingly still. It was hopeless. Then, as soon as they were seized by the throng, they became easily moveable, and were marched out of the room. I was left alone, angry, distraught, the room a picture of destruction. Almost as an afterthought, a few of the assailants returned, lifting the bed and putting it back as it was, screwing the showerhead back onto the wall, depositing new clothes in my drawers, ignoring me as I stood there. Eventually, one of them dragged me onto the bed and lay me down. Then they were gone again, and it was like nothing had ever happened.

And then I was somewhere else. A different room, a place I didn't recognise. Joseph K, out of nowhere, next to me. A knock from a door. And from the open door two people came into the room. I felt like I needed to be outside, and so I moved passed them and exited. Suddenly, I was in a dark open field. K and the two of them were there as well. One of them stripped K while another found a spot next to a boulder and led K there. I had a knife in my hand, and I felt that I would have only one opportunity to use it. I swung at the one who was closest to K. the knife hit its side, and bounced right off. After this failure, I was pushed to the side, and though I tried to move, I couldn't. I could only watch as they began their work on K. They had a knife as well. One of them reached into their pocket and awkwardly fumbled it out. It dropped it. Grab it, I thought, pleading with K in my mind. Grab it and stab them and run and run and run! But no. They picked it up. They put K down on the boulder. They even held out the knife for K to kill itself. It could've easily snatched the knife. But it did nothing. And so, they lunged and plunged the knife into its chest, and I was already fleeing even though I didn't need to. The whole world was hateful to me. There was something miserable, something wrong, and K had done nothing and died.

I woke up. It was bright and I couldn't see for a while, but I could hear voices nearby, and snatches of conversation. "...doesn't have the implant..." "...the leader's orders..." My eyes adjusted, and I turned to see a group of four of them at the bottom of the stairs. My eyes met a pair of one of theirs, and it announced to the group, "It's awake." The four of them raced up the stairs. They had rope, and despite my struggling they efficiently bound my arms and legs. I remembered K and Winston and Julia and I tried to fight. My mind wanted desperately to move but my body was immovable. Just like the others. One of them pulled out a syringe from under its coat, and began looking for an appropriate spot on my arm to jab it in. I couldn't stop it. The syringe went into me. A sharp pain; and I began to feel numb. They pulled me down the stairs, lugging me by my arms, my legs dragging behind. Even as they pulled me, in the brightness of day, my eyelids grew weary and I grew weary.

## Chapter Six

I woke up again. I was back in my room. I was safe. No-one had caught me yet. No-one had injected me with anything. Something still felt wrong though. The last dream was so vivid, it was like it seeped into reality and became true. The emotions, the terror, was still with me. I inspected my arm. There was no sign of any injection. No. It was all a dream. Even then something was still horribly wrong. It was dark outside. Night. I had missed the whole day. I was now conspicuous in my rebelliousness. What were they going to do about me? The other dreams came to mind. I couldn't visualise them, but the feelings of loss and anger and sorrow filled me again. Maybe they would send a force to take me away or kill me. I would fight back though. I wouldn't accept it. But they'd done nothing yet. They've let me be as I've began to wear down their control. This was the first time I haven't dreamt about memorising what we did in class. Maybe because I hadn't even gone to class. It was the first time I hadn't woken up at 8:09am. I'd changed. Everything had changed. It was the beginning of my active rebellion against the state. The beginning of the end of total control that wrecked the lives of everyone. I was going to destroy them. They had made a grave mistake in leaving me unhindered.

Except last night in the palace. Who was it? Was it them? What was it doing there? I remembered the book I had picked up; the Art of War. I grabbed it from under the bed and a sheet of paper slipped out. Floating to the ground, it flipped, revealing an underside covered in text. I picked it up and began to read:

**I know everything about the world. I know who you are and what you want. I will help you. Do not try to communicate with me. Do not try to find me. I will initiate everything. I will give you necessary instructions later. In the meantime, I have given you this book as a token of trust. Read it.**

### **An Ally.**

There was a co-conspirator. My first thought was of O'Brien, the fraudulent ally of Winston in 1984. It gave Winston a book, Winston trusted it, and it did not end well for Winston. Maybe my "ally" was really the leader, or someone it entrusted, intent on tricking me for some secret purpose. I knew I should tread carefully and reserve my judgement. But then, what would it gain from taking me into its confidence and deceiving me? I couldn't imagine any reason, any complex plan that would necessarily involve tricking me. This world was all about efficiency as I was all too aware, and some plot by the leader in securing my alliance with the intention of hurting me seemed too farfetched. Anyhow, I could see no harm in doing as the note said and reading the book. It couldn't do me any harm. It was just a book after all.

Reading the Art of War only took me a week. The book discussed in simple sentences the way to lead an army in a practical sense, which wasn't too relevant, as well as engaging enemies in actual war, the main thrust of which was to deceive the enemy and act unexpectedly. I returned the book. It was useless. Perhaps it was part of a more elaborate deception, a plan to send me in the wrong direction while they decided what to do with me. If that was what it really was, they had failed. I was pressing on with my mission and had formulated a basic plan during this time. I had realised I didn't have a tangible enemy within the commune. I could attack the leader, kill it even, but what good would it do? It was an instrument, and its death would not effect any change. The only enemy I would face would be the methods of control imposed on my fellow citizens. The only victory would be in their freedom. My plan was first to undertake any means to free the peoples of my commune,

and ultimately take control of it. This disruption would then coerce the central control to send means to quell my rebellion. If I were able to defeat them, then the world would be mine. There would be no-one to oppose me and I would be free to liberate everyone. There were details I needed to iron out: I needed to make sure that once a citizen was freed from control, they would follow me; I needed to be sure that I would be able to defeat the forces of the central control; but at least I had a plan. I was ready to begin a revolution. But one thing at a time. I needed to find a method through which I could free one person. That was my first objective.

## Chapter Seven

I had it in my bedroom. Another person. Though it had been quite the challenge bringing it in. We had been marching back to our rooms, along the corridor. When we passed my room, I didn't enter; instead, I followed it until it was outside its room. I approached from behind, an arm around its neck and another around its torso. It seemed calm at first, almost apathetic, but as soon as I began to drag it away from its apartment, it began struggling. First, it tried to rip my arm from its neck, clawing at my fingers and trying to dig its free hand in between my hand and its face, but I held firm. I could feel the breath coming out its nostrils, and it was growing in intensity and regularity. It was scared. Then it began flailing its legs and arms, its heels hitting my shins and its hand periodically catching the top of my head and my cheeks. I kept struggling it along, and had managed to pull it about three steps closer to my apartment. Then one particular swing of its leg hit my shin hard, and my grip loosened from the pain. It burst out of my grasp and sprung toward its apartment. I quickly recovered, launched myself forward and gave it a push just as it had a hand on the doorknob. The combined force of its own momentum and my push knocked it straight into the door, its head swinging back then forth, smashing hard against the metal. It crumpled onto the floor; I dragged it, unconscious, into my room. My hand was covered with sweat and my legs were marked in patches of red. It had fared a lot worse, blood flowing freely from its head. I secured my subject with some improvised constraints, made from my bedsheet. Then I showered, clearing my head in the process. As I began showering, I noticed the water was a delightful shade of pink, swirling on the ground around my feet and being pulled into drain. By the time I was there for five minutes, the water had returned to its normal clarity, and I was clean. I returned to my captive.

It was awake again, a pile of coiled blankets lying uselessly to one side of it, and it was working to free its other hand. No! I lunged forward, and as it noticed me, it shielded itself from me with an arm while desperately trying to tug its other free. I pushed back the arm held in front of me, and swung my fist in a slap to the face. There was sudden rush of fire into my hand. Its skull was hard, and I must have hurt something in my hand. It was burning with pain. I fell to the ground, my whole-body tensing, clutching my hand, trying to force away this torture while desperately hoping that I had hurt it enough that it couldn't leave. The pain did not leave, but eventually, the heat subsided to a tolerable level. I blinked away the tears, got up and examined my captive. It was unconscious, blood oozing in and out of its mouth with a fresh gash on its cheek where I had struck it. I dragged my captive onto the bed face down. It was complex process, as I was only using one hand and had to be careful that it did not get blood on the sheets. When this was completed, I reached under a pillow and pulled out a scalpel of plastic I had carved from a brush over the course of a few days spent in preparation. I examined its neck, and found a streak in a crescent shape that was darker than the surrounding skin. This had to be where the BCM was implanted. Resting a forearm on its head in order to stabilise it, I stabbed, penetrating the skin. It was not as deep as I wished. I stabbed again and again in short controlled bursts, penetrating deeper and deeper, ripping into skin and flesh. It took time, a long time, and my improvised knife often blunted, requiring me to sharpen it against the wall. Through the night, I worked at it until I finally hit something hard. This was it. I pushed my smallest digit into the incision and attempted to dig it out. I didn't have enough room. I swirled my instrument in the hole, expanding the incision to an adequate size and then I was able to pinch the small metal contraption. I tried to lever my hand to pull it out, but it was stuck fast. I hacked around it, pinched it again, and then jerked my arm back. I felt it detach and then it was out. Blood went everywhere, dripping onto the white sheets. I had been so careful about it before, but now I didn't care. This was a great moment. I had liberated another human being. I examined the ugly metal and

then threw it hard against the wall. It skittered along the ground and disappeared under the bed. Good riddance. Then I untied it and turned it over. It was still unconscious. I slapped it a few times, and only then did I realise something was wrong. Its body was too cold and it wasn't breathing. The stark reality of the situation forced the conclusion that I was desperate to avoid. It was dead, and I had killed it. I must have been too caught up in the excitement of it all.

In the proceeding weeks after the misadventure, I was burdened with fixing everything up, burdened with the evil consequences of the mistake. Every night during the allocated showering time, I brought the clothes and bedsheets tainted with blood and cleaned it under the shower. Each time we left the Education Centre to do practical work I would be totally inept, my hand fat and stiff. After a few days of struggling, I stopped going out, spending my days in my apartment; the lack of consequences surrounding my other transgressions had emboldened me to continue in my subversion without fear. Anyway, going out was menial and boring. I was above it now. There was also the problem of what to do with the body. For the first few weeks, I left it there, lying under the bed. It turned green, then black, shrivelling up into a jumbled mass of wrinkled flesh, hair and liquid. It was disgusting and it stank. One night, its smell particularly bad, I resolved to do what I had been putting off. I wiped up the liquid with a piece of bedsheet and squeezed this out over the drain. The remaining bits I ripped apart, pulling through skin, organ and muscle. It was slippery and wet and disgusting. I dropped the pieces bit by bit into the toilet, flushing regularly to prevent blockage. I cut its face off. I emptied its skull. The smell was intolerable, and the work was hard; I had only my hands and that plastic implement after all. It took days, since sometimes the toilet would stop working for some periods of time. By the time I was finished, I was mentally and physically exhausted. Eventually, all that was left was a pile of bones, which I pushed under my bed. My failure was hard to take. I had tried my best and somehow it all fell apart. I just wanted to forget about the whole affair, but I was reminded of it every time I sat in the classroom or in the dining room, and saw the gap that used to be 124993 two rows in front of me and three spots to the right. All of this affected me and it took time for me to remember the righteousness of my intentions and the necessity of trying again and succeeding. It was only a small setback and I myself was certainly fine to continue.

## Chapter Eight

Three months after the first attempt, I tried again. It was obvious that I needed to change tact for my next subject. I needed a way to free them without harming them. I allowed myself more preparation during this period. I ventured back to the palace, browsed through the reference books and found a book about conditioning. Through this, I discovered that I could re-engineer the conditioning that had already taken place. It was unnecessary to take out the BCM. I also ripped up part of my blanket and made a rope that I tied into a loop to use for restraining my target.

Now, in the same scenario as months ago; marching through the corridor and back to our rooms, I was much more effective. As I reached my door, I turned around, dropped the rope over the one behind me, tightened, pulled it into my room and shut the door. It was over in seconds. It didn't have a chance. It began struggling of course, but being restrained by the rope meant it couldn't escape. I tied it to a bedpost, tightened the knots and waited. It fell asleep some time past nine and as soon as it did, I shook it wide awake. I had read an explanation that said sleep deprivation might help with conditioning. And so, I was trying to keep it awake for as long as possible to make my job easier tomorrow. As soon as it fell asleep, which it did quite often, I would be at it in an instant, shaking and slapping it into wakefulness. This process repeated until very late into the night, when I myself had become too tired to continue.

In the book, it was explained that the type of conditioning everyone was subject to was called operant conditioning, a process in which behaviours were either rewarded or punished in order to strengthen or weaken them. I remembered this process being applied to myself quite vividly. I was young, maybe four or five years old, and instead of the normal classes one day I was led on a march to the other side of the commune and into a building that I had never been to before. Inside, they took me down a corridor and into small, dim room, occupied by only a single chair. They sat me down and then they left, shutting the door behind them, leaving me alone. I stayed in the chair for some time, slightly confused. Looking around, I saw a drain under my chair, and two ominous looking tubes hanging from the ceiling. When I finally decided to get up, huge jets of water attacked me from the tubes, forcing me onto the ground. I struggled toward the door but the water held me back and pushed into my every crevice. I couldn't see, I couldn't breathe and the only thing I could hear was the sound of the gushing water that kept me pinned on the ground. Then, after the longest time, I felt a spasm, my mouth opened against my will, and a gulp of heavy water dragged down into me and burned me from the inside. The water stopped, and people came in. They thrust the water out of me, and sat me back on the chair; coughing, wet, weak. Then they left again. I learnt very quickly to stay in the chair, but they left me alone in that room for what seemed like an eternity, on my own and still very scared. Every day for the next few weeks, I was taken to that same building and left in a variety of rooms that I now know was meant for further conditioning. I avoided any pain by following what I assumed I was meant to do. But that first experience was so tortuous it etched itself firmly into my memory; maybe it was the beginning of my discontent. I resolved to be more humane in my own attempts at conditioning.

I had earlier decided that my first course of action would be to decondition its predilection to escape back to its own room. For these purposes, I had made a whip, a weapon discussed in the book as an ideal tool for conditioning. I had ripped the clothes of my previous subject and twined it into rope, then attached a spring that I had dug out of my mattress to the end of it. I had then tested it lightly on myself, and the resulting sting confirmed to me that it would be adequately painful.

I began the next morning. My subject was still asleep, and I woke it up while I was removing its shirt. It tried to stop me once it was awake, but pacified as it were by its bounds, its furious shaking only made my task slightly more tedious. With its shirt off, I began now to loosen its bounds, edging my fingernails under the tight knots. I had left my whip on the ground right next to me. As soon as the bounds were loose enough, it leapt up, making a break for the door. My hand went down and in a single motion I grabbed the whip and swung it hard into its back. It reeled in pain, and I pushed it to the ground, grabbing my pillow and holding it over its face to starve it of oxygen. I wanted it to associate escape with immense discomfort. I let go after a minute or so. It was still very much awake and tried to escape as it did before. I whipped it again, put my pillow over its face again, let it run again. It would not let up, and the game continued until I myself was too tired. I tied it back up, rested, started again. If it wasn't giving up I wasn't either. However, I didn't seem to be making much progress. Its initial conditioning must have been deeper than I thought. By lunchtime I had prevented its escape forty-two times. There were thin lines of red across its back and even though I had read that whips could not do much physical damage, I didn't want a repeat of the previous disaster, so for a few hours I stopped, and made sure it wasn't too badly hurt. In the midst of these humanitarian feelings I also saved most of my food from dinner. When I brought it up, I could sense a change in its mood, as it eyed what I held in my hand. It was famished. But I stopped short of giving it what it wanted. I realised that its desire for this food could be another avenue for its deconditioning. I picked up my whip and untied it again, making sure to keep myself between it and the food. Would it attempt to escape as it had dozens of times before, or had it learned? Would I have to stop it again? I could see that it was hesitant; where previously it would furiously rush toward the exit door, it was now still, its head turning to the door, then to me, then to the food, at which it paused. For minutes, we stayed in our respective positions. It, staring down the bowl; me, weapon at the ready.

It wasn't going to escape.

I picked up the bowl and slowly approached it. It stayed motionless until I reached it. Even as I handed the bowl to it, it did not respond. It just kept staring. Eventually, I poured the gloop down its throat myself. The food spilled into sloppily, before it adjusted its mouth and properly swallowed it. The bowl was emptied and it sat down again. After that I didn't tie it up anymore, and it didn't escape. We just sat there, residing awkwardly next to each other, me on the bed, it on the ground. It was still hungry; I was unsure of what to do next. I was happy with the victory I had achieved over its desire to go back to its room, but it was a hollow victory. I wanted to decondition the relentless control over my subject and return free-thinking and independent agency. Instead, it remained as robotic and restricted as ever. Anyhow, at least I knew that the method worked in some way, and it had proved useful. My subject would now stay in my room, and I would be free to experiment.

## Chapter Nine

I was stuck over the next few days, unsure of what I should do with it. In the meantime, I brought it down to the dining room for every meal, while keeping it inside my room at all other times. It slept on the floor, next to the bed and passed its days idly, looking at me whenever I moved much, but otherwise staring at the opposite wall. It was still doing nothing. It was still restricted. One day however, a week after I had brought it in, there was a breakthrough. I was sitting on my bed, trying to extract more information from the book on conditioning but not getting anywhere. It was on the floor as always. It had not washed in a long time, and I noticed an evil odour wafting from it into my nose. Sweat, dirt and blood. I was already in no good mood. I tried to continue my focus on the book, but whenever I breathed in, the smell would pull my mind away; this unpleasant sensory overload made it impossible to process what I was reading. In my annoyance, the contents of my thoughts erupted out of my mouth.

“Go shower!”

I did not have the expectation that my exhortations would be listened to, but it stood up and walked under the shower and sat back down.

What had just happened? Would it listen to my orders now?

“Come back.”

It did as I said.

Something had changed. Why was it listening to me now?

A whiff of its scent forced me to send it back under the shower and allowed me to collect my thoughts free of disturbance. I tried to recall any special occurrence, anything out of the ordinary over the past week. But there was nothing. I had read, and it had sat. We both slept and we both ate. We had done nothing. Maybe it was that first day of deconditioning that did it. What I was certain of, was that I was successful. Somehow, I had chanced upon a method through which I could grant individual agency, a method through which I could grant freedom. I had told it to go shower, and it chose to obey. I felt freer myself. A burden had been dealt with. I had been scared at the seemingly insurmountable task that I faced. I hadn't known what to do, and in a world where I had been taught and coerced to do exactly what someone else wanted, I was acting blindly. But now I was back on track, and the first part of my plan accomplished. I had to try again to make sure, but I was confident that I could replicate this first result. I could rest easy tonight. Tomorrow, I would start with a new subject.

It was under the shower when I woke up in the morning. I asked it to shake its clothes dry while I began to make preparations for the night. Then, having given it instructions to stay in its room, and to only come out for meals, I departed intent on securing a new subject.

*Back to my room I want to go back to room I was going back to my room and what's that I can't move my arms get it off let me go back to my room I want to get back to my room its around my arms I can't move I need to go back to my room let me go let go where is it taking me its loosening I can almost get back oh no its tightened it again jam my foot against the frame of the door ouch ouch I need to move my foot let it take me into its room I will escape I will go back to my room I want to go back to my room. It is too tight my tummy I can't reach it I feel the knot I can't untie it I can't untie it I*



can't what is under bed white rock can't see it it's a rock no it's not don't know what it is too tight when air go in my tummy go big and too tight and it is on bed and holding book and reading book and I want it to let me go but it not sees me it read book I wait I wait and I am tired and and and shaking it shake me and I awake it wake me why it wake me and I tired and I want to sleep sleep sleep I awake and it wake me again I want to sleep I want to go back to room and I need to go back to my my my I awake and it wake me again let me go back to sleep let me go to room it is too tight I can't take it it it I wake and it wake me again let me go I tired and I want sleep too tired tired tired I wake sleep sleep tight sleep wake tight it is wake sleep.

I wake and I am hungry still tight it sleep and head hurt what is under bed and I turn head reach around post and it hurt my tummy and I see and it is what is? is bone who's bone why how why and I look at it and it sleep and it will kill me and my bone under bed and my hands tied I want to go out I want to eat I am hungry and I need to go I pull hard shake bed but knot too strong and I hungry and it come and I scared it will hurt it will make my bones under bed and I close eyes and it try take my shirt I want my shirt I will be cold I need my shirt I need to go back to my room I need to eat I need and it bring rope and it take my shirt and I hit it with my head but it pull off and ouch ouch ouch more ouch it take begin to take off knot so I no hit and it almost off and I run to door and ouch ouch and it is too pain and it grab something and over my head I can't breathe I can't breathe I can't breathe I can't breathe I can't breathe I can't breathe I can't breathe I can't breathe I can't breathe I can't breathe I go to door I can go ouch ouch ouch I can't breathe I can't breathe and I go to door I know it will ouch but I need to go and ouch ouch and I can't breathe and I go to door and ouch and I can't breathe and I want to go ouch ouch ouch no more no more can't breathe I must escape take deep breath it pain can't breathe go ouch gulp no breath go ouch gulp no breath go ouch can breathe no more don't tie me up let me go I hungry I in pain I want to go to eat food I want my shirt I want pain to go. It leave me where it go I hungry and pain and hungry and pain and let me go it too tight and hungry and pain I want to eat I want to go to my room it will kill me can't undo knot I try pull but too heavy too weak too hurt too hungry it come back it hold food I want eat I hungry I too hungry it undo knot it hold food can escape it hold rope need food need escape cannot escape it will hurt I hungry eat food eat food it bring food I need eat want to eat it hold rope I don't know it take bowl to my mouth and I eat I eat I eat I less hungry still hungry need more food it have none I go back to room ouch ouch I won't go back to room too much ouch and it gave food and wait and hungry and it take me out and hold rope and go down to eat and take food and eat food and take food and eat more taste good and eat more taste good and not hungry and go back and it hold rope and I not tired and I wait and I tired and ground hard and no blanket and cold and want to go to room but it have rope and ouch and no breath and I too tired and I lie down to sleep and see bone will it kill me I must escape but ouch and rope and too weak and it will make arms can't move and take me to room and kill me and ground hard and sleep tired and sleep.

Wake and hungry and it take me to down and take food and eat food and taste good and eat more and not hungry and go back to room and wait and wait and wait and it tell me to go shower and I go under shower and wait and wait and want to go back to room and wait and it tell me to go back to room and I go back to room but still ouch and tired and hungry.

## Chapter Ten

There were now two successful cases and I was assured of the efficacy of my method. My new burdens were in scaling this method and planning the next stage. Regarding the first concern, I had formulated the solution of making those I had already freed assist me in further liberation. I spent a whole day in the room of my first subject, where I took it through the process I had created. I began with instructing it on making a rope and a whip. It seemed to be unhappy with ripping up its own blankets and digging into its mattress, but otherwise, it was a passable student, able to follow my instructions easily. The tools were made and it was time to acquire a subject. I stood with my pupil outside its room after we had finished dinner. Then, when everyone began marching past us, I motioned to for it to throw the rope over one of them and tighten it. It ignored me. I explicitly told it to do so. And it still ignored me. I commanded it in angry tones. Still nothing. Finally, I snatched the rope out of its grasp and did it myself, ordering it to follow me into its room. To my relief, that it did, though it neglected to assist me as I struggled in containing and moving this new subject into its apartment and down into a restrained position. Having tied it down with some difficulty, I told my student to leave it there and to keep it awake for as long as it could. I went back to my apartment and tried to sleep. But I couldn't. I was almost sure that it would not follow my instructions, and I did not want the process to be corrupted. Eventually, I couldn't stand it anymore. I needed to make sure that everything was running smoothly.

I entered the room and saw that they were both sound asleep and I was furious. Why hadn't it listened to me? What couldn't it understand? I tossed off its blankets and woke the other. I then picked up the whip that had been left on the ground and turned to hit the traitor. It cowered to one end of the bed, towards the corner of the room. It was a pitiable, despicable creature. I gave it a single lash, told it to do its job properly, and left the room, giving both inhabitants a fierce look as I closed the door. I still wasn't sure that my instructions would be followed, and my anger belied a tiredness of mind and body. I needed to sleep. If there were any further problems, I could sort them out tomorrow.

The night came and went, but I was as weary as I had been the previous day. Having eaten breakfast, I made my way back up to the room. They were both wide awake, and it was to my satisfaction one was still tied up. I gave it permission to go eat breakfast, and while it was gone, I forced its shirt off. By the time it came back, I was ready to begin proceedings. I made it pick up the whip, and I stood in front of the door.

"Untie the ropes."

It did, and as soon as it was loose enough, it attempted to escape.

"Hit it!"

Nothing. It approached the door and I attempted to wrestle it back down onto the ground.

"Now! Hit it!"

For a moment it freed itself from my grasp and flew toward the door.

"Do something!" I was almost screeching now; I couldn't let it escape. I grabbed a leg as it was turning the knob and it tripped back onto the ground. As it tried to recover, I snatched the whip from my incompetent accomplice and beat it back down myself. The sluggard received a few lashings as

well. Having tied it down again, I decided to change tact. I returned to my room and retrieved my own whip.

“Let’s start again,” I announced into the room as I returned.

“Pick up the whip and untie the ropes.” It duly obliged, but did so feebly and slowly. My own whip enabled me to give it some encouragement. It sped up its work, its fingers trembling slightly at the knots. Pain and fear were good incentives. Then it was free and ran toward the door. I grabbed hold of it with my hand and shouted “Hit it! Hit it with your whip!” It ignored me, and so I gave it lash with my whip. It finally understood the seriousness of my commands and did as I said. Crack! “Again!” Crack! That was satisfying, satisfactory. It was down on the ground now. “Grab the pillow and hold it over its head.” It duly followed my instructions.

“Now let go.”

“Grab it!”

“Hit it!”

“Hold it on its head!”

And so the process continued, and we inched closer to a full deconditioning. By the end of the day, I was exhausted, and so too seemed my student. As we wore it down, it grew increasingly lethargic; its whips lacked power and it barely smothered with the pillow. Nevertheless, by the end of the day, after going through the course of withholding and then giving it food, I was confident that the procedure had worked correctly. However, the earlier difficulties I had encountered convinced me that this was not the right path. I had to effect the method myself and free each person individually. In some ways, it seemed fitting that I had not created a mechanism, a machine that would churn out a result; that was what I was fighting against. Instead it was going to be personal and difficult. And I had never shirked from hard work.

*Hungry and go down steps and take food and eat food and less hungry and eat food and less hungry and go up steps and go into room and wait. Walking outside door open it come in it say things and say things and it tell me to rip up bed no and again no and again and it do take blanket and I hold it and it snatch it and it pull it and it rip it and I sad and I will cold when sleep and I snatch back and it snatch back and rip it and rip it and I try to take back but it move and keep ripping and it spin together and together and throw on ground and I go pick up and ouch and I don't pick up. It start saying and keep saying and it hold something and it hit mattress and hit mattress and I try to stop and it rip mattress and ouch and it rip mattress and it rip mattress and it hurt and it take things out and onto ground and I sad I sleep on mattress and it now broken and it take it out of mattress it is strange and it take blanket and do something and put on floor and I need sleep and I take it and fix it but it come and stop and give back it do thing and ouch and it go and need sleep but ouch so don't fix and sleep floor and it hard and I sad and I lie down and tired and I sleep. Wake and hungry and go down steps and take food and eat food tasty less hungry and eat food tasty and less hungry and go up steps and go into room and happy and wait and hungry and go down steps and take food and eat food it tasty and less hungry and happy and go up steps and it behind me and it come in and it saying and it say things and I no listen and I sad and want it go away and it hold blanket and give me and I scared it will hurt but nothing and it say things and I hungry and we go down stairs and it make me take blanket and I take food and eat food and it tasty and I no hungry and I less sad and we go up stairs and it look at me and point at it and do something with arm and it say thing and it snatch blanket and grab it and take it and no into my room and get out do yourself why into my room and it fight and I watch and it put blanket it and around bed it cannot move and it angry and it say thing*

*and say be mean and I not mean and it leave and I tired and floor hard and less blanket and cold and I sad and I tired and I sleep. Door open loud and wake and it come in and it hold mattress and blanket and it come and I scared and go onto bed and it come and I scared of ouch and it shout and shout and ouch it hurt and I sad and it shout and it shout and it hurt and I tired and it leave and I sad and hurt and tired and I sleep on floor it cold and less blanket and I tired and sleep. Wake and hungry and it come inside and I hungry but I scared and it say eat so I go down stairs and take food and eat food it tasty and take food and it tasty and not hungry and go up I scared but want to go back to room and need to go back to room and go in and it and it both in there and it have no clothes and it give me blanket-mattress and it tell me take away blanket from it and I do and it run to door and it shout and tell me to hit and no want to hit no want to hurt and it jump on it and on ground and it is fight and it tell me hit it and I no want to and it run to door and it make it fall over and take blanket-mattress from me and hit it and hit it and ouch ouch and it hit me and hit it and it put blanket around it and put to bedpost and it hit me and I sad and hurt and it leave and I happy and it come back with blanket-mattress and say something and tell me to pick up other blanket-mattress and to take blanket off it and I remember it before and don't want to do but I scared it will hurt so I do and take blanket off and ouch ouch ouch and I do I do I do it hard to take off and I do ouch and blanket off and it run to door and it tell me to hit it and I no want to and it hit it and ouch and ouch and it tell me to hit it and I hit it and I don't want to hurt it and I don't want to hit it and it make me hit it and hit it and tell me to take pillow and put on it and I no want to I no want to hurt and ouch ouch ouch ouch and I scared and I put pillow on and it throw arms and I put pillow on because I scared of ouch and then it tell me take it off and I take it off and it run and it tell me to hit and I hit because I scared and it tell me to put pillow on and I put pillow on and it tell and I take off and it run and it tell and I hit and I don't want to and I put pillow on and take off and hit and put on and take off and put on and take off and it tell and it tell and it tell and it tell and I scared and hit and put on and take off and hit and put on and take off and it tell and I no want to hurt and it tell and I hungry and it tell stop and we go down and take food and eat food and tasty and less hungry and take food and less hungry but sad and sad I don't want to.*

As I entered my room, I discovered a piece of paper laying on my bed. Strange. There was writing on it. It was the "ally" again.

**It has become a matter of great urgency for me to inform you that your current path is destructive and will ultimately end in your own demise. You must desist immediately. I know best and I am trying to help you. Deconditioning will not lead to freedom. You are wasting time and causing trouble. I will eventually reveal to you the truth but you must stop and you must be patient. I have been here far longer than you. You need me, and I will help if you do as I say.**

### **Your Ally**

That was ridiculous. I was now sure that whoever this was, it wasn't an ally or a friend. They had their own plans, their own agendas and my successes were affecting those plans. I wasn't going to listen to any of this rubbish. I was going to continue do what had been working. I was going to continue with my liberation of the commune and then the world. I was not going to be dissuaded by suspicious advice.

# The Allegory of the Rock

Once upon a time there was an old man, alone in an empty plane that stretched out further than the eye could see. For time immemorial, the old man sat in this nothingness, until one day he held his staff in front of him and snapped it. From it, the world exploded into existence. The elements shaped the plane: First there was fire, fire that engulfed everything, and when this cooled, it coalesced into stones, which broke down into earth. Water appeared as oceans and swept through the land, creating rivers, valleys, lakes. The part of the plain the old man now sat in was desert, and a rock rested gently next to it. The old man sat on the rock and remained there for many many years. In the distance, trees appeared from the fertile soil and animals crawled out the seas. The old man continued to sit. The animals changed, evolved. Out of them grew mankind. Eventually, the old man stood and tapped a half of its staff on the rock and infused in it the essence of life. The rock awoke, and asked the old man: "What am I?"

The old man replied, "You are a rock."

The rock asked, "Why am I here?"

The old man replied, "Because I put you here."

The rock asked, "Who are you?"

The old man did not answer the question.

The rock paused then said, "What should I do now?"

The old man was silent for a long time, then said, "You ask questions which I cannot answer, but I will tell you this: You will cease to know the world if you split in half."

With these words said, the old man disappeared.

The rock wanted to stay alive so it went into a cave to be safe. It stayed in the cave hidden alone for a long time. Outside mankind had begun to change. They learnt to make tools, to farm, to build villages, then towns then cities. Then they began to fight; devastating wars that wiped cities and civilisations. The rock stayed in the cave. Then one day, a missionary arrived in the cave, seeking shelter from heretics.

"Who are you?" Asked the rock.

The missionary looked down and saw that it was the rock who spoke.

"I am a missionary. I help people find the way of God and how to follow His ways. I explain to them the meaning of life and help them find purpose."

The rock asked "What is my purpose?"

"Your purpose is to find God, repent your sins and act piously. He has a purpose set for you and you will know it when you find Him." The missionary replied.

The rock said, "I understand." But it did not understand.

For the next two days the missionary stayed within the cave as the heretics were waiting outside. During this time the missionary poured out its life story to the eagerly listening rock.

"I found Him when I was sixteen. I was on a voyage at the time, working as a sea-hand on a ship whose name I forget. We had perfect weather at the start; the sun was always shining and the sea

was as still as a rock. It was on the fourth week of our journey when the weather turned. We saw the dark clouds encroaching, and we knew a huge storm was coming. It reached us early the next morning. There was terrible lightning, lashing rain and monstrous waves that moved our ship like a leaf in the wind. Water poured onto our vessel in huge heaves. I was sure I was going to die.

My parents had taken me to church when I was young; every single Sunday bar none I would attend mass and afterwards confess my sins to the priest. But I had never truly believed. Well at that moment I realised the truth. I decided I would ask Him for forgiveness. I repented my failings, my sins and I begged Him to allow me to live on and do His work. I prayed and prayed and He listened. The lurching slowed, the pounding stopped, the clouds parted, the sea calmed and I survived. After we landed I immediately went to nearest church and found my home there.”

The missionary then explained that it was now being chased by heretics whom he had been hoping to convert. They had not taken kindly to outsiders. On his third day inside the cave, the missionary found an opportunity to escape. The rock entreated it to stay inside the cave, but the missionary replied, “The Lord will keep me safe.”

It was an ambush. The heretics had been hiding out of sight but had been watching the cave the whole time. As the missionary left the cave the heretics killed him.

The rock mourned the missionary, and considered his words as it remained alone, but it could not understand them. Years went by, until a lost scientist found the cave. The scientist entered, and the rock began its questions.

“Who are you?” asked the rock.

“I am a scientist. I make observations about the world to understand what it is and how it works,” replied the scientist.

The rock asked, “Why am I here?”

The scientist replied, “You are here because someone has carried you here, or the wind has blown you here or the waters have carried you here.”

The scientist stayed in the cave with the rock for a few days, digging away at the other side of the cave. The rock asked why the scientist did not leave. The scientist replied, “I can find water here inside the cave,” and continued to dig. Whenever it grew too tired, it would talk to the rock. “The reason I became a scientist was to explore. When I was very young my father had hired a tutor for me. And from him I learnt about confounding obscurities that were solved by the geniuses of our time, about creatures strange and mysterious, about worlds big and small. He told me I could see and discover these for myself and entreated me to take up this noble profession. And it is a noble profession. We seek knowledge and truth on behalf of all mankind. That is why I became a scientist.” The rock listened carefully, then asked it what it would do if it eventually understood everything. The scientist paused in silence. “Everything?”

“Everything a scientist seeks. What would do if you knew everything about the state of the world?”

“I don’t know. I’ll find out when it happens.”

There was no water in the cave, and the scientist eventually died.

The rock was alone for a very long time. It thought over the scientist’s words alongside those of the missionary and did not understand them. Then one day, a villain arrived in the cave covered in blood. The rock began its questions.

“Who are you?” The rock asked.

The villain glared down at the rock.

“Why should you care?”

“I want to understand the world to figure out what I should do.”

The villain ignored the statement, but instead sat on the rock. As the villain continued to bleed out, it began to lose its coldness. It told the rock of its experiences.

“I didn’t choose this life. I didn’t know my parents, don’t know what happened to them. I stayed with my unde since I was young. He was a cruel man, liberal with his cane, didn’t like children; he turned me out when I was just fourteen. I was still young and naïve, had nowhere to go, and I needed to survive. The life of crime found me, I did not choose it. And it was also something I was good at. I was merciless, infamous, and quickly grew powerful. Yesterday, I was attempting to complete a most audacious heist. The King himself was passing through this desert in his caravan. I was going to kidnap him, hold him hostage. Imagine that! Me, the King in the palm of my hands. His treasures were to be mine, and I was to be the talk of town. I would be rich and powerful, everything I wanted if I could kidnap him. I approached the caravan full of confidence, having been told that the guard was going to be especially light, eager for the treasures that would await me. But there was a big group of guards, hidden at a distance from the convoy, armed to the teeth. I had been tricked. As soon as I was near the King’s caravan, the guards struck, and I barely escaped with my life. Or I thought I had escaped, but now I’m here, dying alone in a cave talking to a rock. I could’ve been powerful and rich man, I could’ve...” The bandit trailed as the energy left him. He grew weaker, and soon died. His body rested next to the bones of the missionary and the scientist.

The rock remained alone in the cave thinking through the words and lives of the three men. After some time, it was interrupted by a madman who had sprinted into the cave, kicking rocks and dust into the air. The madman caught sight of the rock, and briefly stopped. “Hello,” he said, and continued in his flurry of activity, smashing his fists against the walls, and digging into the ground. He only stopped when the sun set and it was impossible to see in the cave.

“What are you doing?” said the rock.

“I’ve almost found them, the fairies, I’ve been looking for years and years, I’ve travelled the world searching for clues, and I’ve discovered that the fairies are here, in this very cave. By the way, have you seen them?”

“No. What are fairies?”

“Well, I can’t tell you if I haven’t found any, can I?”

“Why are you looking for them in the first place?”

“I’m looking for them because I want to.”

“Why do you want to?”

“Well, I’ve wanted to since I was young.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re a rock. If you ask a silly question, you get a silly answer.”



The next day, the madman continued his search. He left at night to find water but promised he would come back to find the fairies. He never did.

The rock thought for many years about the four men and everything that they had said and soon understood all that it needed to. It left the cave and found the old man sitting outside.

"I've finally learnt the truth."

"What did you learn?"

"Nothing."

"I see. Then what are you going to do now?"

The rock did not answer. It split in half and fell into eternal sleep.

The old man was alone again.

# Part Two

# Chapter One

It took ten months for 541588 to apply its deconditioning to a satisfactory number of people, and it was a further two months before its plans for the domination of the commune were complete. It had deconditioned seventy-three, which was most of those who lived in the same apartment. Applying the process to everyone in the commune had crossed its mind. It was the most peaceful and perhaps simple method out of the many it had thought up, but 541588 had realised it would take too long. It took six months deconditioning just 73 and it was almost totally burnt out. It was only carried through the planning it did during the rest of the year by sheer force of will.

In the end, its plan was simple. It would bum and destroy things in a way that would have a big impact on life in the commune and thus coerce action from the leader and the central control. Then, it would proceed to conquer whatever was sent at it, culminating in a surrender by the governing forces and a relinquishing of control to it. 541588 was confident in its plan. A year of hard work would surely yield a positive result, wouldn't it?

With all the preparations having been made, and a week off taken to recuperate, it was time to begin. It entered the room of each of the seventy-three, explained its plan to them, and told them to meet it in front of their apartment building the next night. To get the others to obey this sort of command was not easy. It was only after a multitude of further exercises after the original day of conditioning that allowed them to be able to fully follow its orders. It was the reason why the process had been so arduous. But it had all worked out, and so, late the next night, they were all gathered as requested in front of the apartment, huddled together in their thin jumpers, looking around with apprehensive and fearful faces. A few minutes later 541588 appeared, dressed in the same kit as the others, though it was layered in three jumpers instead of one. It was a cold night. 541588 ordered the others to march; east, toward the wheat farms and the grain sheds. It itself disappeared toward the centre of the commune, where the manufactory lay. It hoped to prepare fire that it could use to set the fields alight and destroy the sheds there. It had been to the manufactory thrice before; once during a school excursion to learn about the place, again during an incognito trip it had made to scout the location, and a third time to plant the materials it needed to start a fire. The manufactory itself was one of dozens around the city. It was near the end of its age cycle, its concrete walls showing the scars of defying the elements for forty odd years. The new one had already begun construction in the empty plot next to it, and the old manufactory would be demolished within the next few years, its raw materials sent away to be recycled. These could not be used in the new building, since the new manufactory had to be ready the day the old one closed.

541588 entered, finding a slow way through the dark with outstretched hands. This manufactory was used for the production of various wooden objects. Doors, chairs, tables, bed frames were all made here. 541588 climbed over some work benches, and felt its way to the wood scrap bin that sat in the middle of the room. It was emptied in the morning and so it was presently brimming. 541588 reached in, feeling through the different shapes and angles, eventually finding itself a nice long and flat piece of wood. It eased it out as smooth as it could, but as soon as the piece was dislodged, the intricate puzzle inside the bin collapsed, causing a flurry of noise.

It didn't matter; no-one was going to come. They never did, and that was the real problem. But 541588 was sure a fire would entice them, force them. It crawled back over the benches with the wood plank in hand, and proceeded toward the drills. It found the switch, flicked it, and a dim red light appeared, allowing it just enough visibility to begin working. Of course, it was far too

impractical to make all the eclectic machines, such as drill machines in the one commune. There was a necessary trade between communes, with each specialising in making a specific piece of machinery. Whenever a commune needed such equipment, the leader could send a message to another leader requesting one, and this equipment would be soon made available.

541588 placed the piece of wood under the drill and slowly lowered the drill until it hit the wood, where it allowed the drill bit to rest, whirring maniacally. Pungent smoke emanated from the mutilation, filling the air with a heavy haze and soon there was a deep hole in the wood filled with fine black dust. Then the first embers appeared, small orange lights that flickered as the drill tossed them around the hole. 541588 hastily stopped the machine, pulled out a few crumpled, dried pieces of paper it had shoved under its shirt and fed it onto the embers. They were the messages from the "ally", the enemy. Well at least they were being put to good use now. The paper caught alight easily, and the flames eventually spread to engulf everything, shining with a defiant energy until the fuel was used up. Then there were only embers again. It needed to get these to the farms, six kilometres away.

A few weeks beforehand, it had begun the plan for this specific night. It had found an Army Survival Manual sitting in the library, and inside were detailed instructions on how to create, fuel and carry a fire. As it read and learnt more, the idea of starting a fire in the commune seemed a distinct possibility. It scoured its memory, finding the ingredients, the tools; everything it needed to execute this plan. Elements that floated in its head turned into concrete ideas; the pieces of wood and the drills in the manufactory, the paper from the ally, the bucket from the recycling plant, and all these congealed into a rock, a purpose. Then it began to act, scouting various manufactories, drying its paper in the sun, sneaking an empty tin of paint from the recycling plant and hiding it under a corner table. Everything was ready for tonight. Now, it found the tin again and deposited the embers and the rest of its paper into it. Then it departed the manufactory and headed toward the fields, as the first signs of the new day streaked across the clouded sky and the sun poked through the horizon. It was running out of time, the people were soon going to begin work in the field.

## Chapter Two

They stood awkwardly, clumped together on the boundary between the field and the road like a collection of erratics and watched as 541588 ran around them and onto the field. It ordered them to stay where they were and prevent it from being disturbed. They weren't going to move anyway. Then it crouched down among the wheat, placed the tin on the ground, opened it and cradled out its contents. The embers had died. It seemed that there was only blackened paper, dust and ash left. 51488 leaned in and blew on it, spiralling ash into the air that caught the wind and disappeared. Otherwise, there was nothing, the small pile showing no signs of flaring back to life. It kept working, desperately trying to conjure the fire that it had worked so hard to prepare. Still nothing. It was almost ready to give up when it caught a glimpse of the orange that it craved, and with renewed focus, it willed the bundle to turn into fire. For another ten minutes, it tried everything, varying its breath, its mouth shape, the intensity of air; minutes of dedication on each technique, and it received nothing in return. The sun edged its way up the sky, and 514588 knew that within the hour, there would be people emerging from their apartments, ready for work in the fields. No, it had to stop soon. It dropped the pile on the ground and gave it one final burst of air. Nothing. It had to leave now, no chance, nothing left. The quickly thickening clouds above amply reflected 541588's despairing mood. It had planned, it had worked, it had executed, and all for nought. "Come," And the group trudged back to their apartment.

As 541588 returned to its room, the workers left, having been satiated by a delicious breakfast, ready for a happy day of enjoyable work. As 541588 lay on its bed, defeated, they took to the fields under the darkening clouds. As 541588 tossed its mattress, ripped apart its blankets and punched the walls in angry confusion, they had started to retreat. Too slowly. A jet of blue flew down from among the clouds and struck with a furious clap upon the field where the kindling had been left. 541588 was jolted out of its malaise by the thunder, and when it looked out the window, it saw a most beautiful sight. There was fire; a roaring, bright, yellow destruction. The rain was no match as the lightning lit more fires, and the dry wheat surrendered to the all-powerful flames. 541588 was awed, moved, engrossed in the tremendous spectacle. Its failures had somehow transmuted into great success, and its anger and sadness quickly dissipated, replaced by pure contentedness. And there was a new feeling. The feeling of destiny. Whenever there had been a problem, whenever it had slipped up, whenever something seemingly went wrong, there was a greater force that overturned these mistakes and it always ended up closer to its goal. From what 541588 could see, the destruction was total. The wheat crops were gone. And the ramifications would be felt almost instantaneously. The workers would have fled, without a clue what to do next. And by harvest time, a season of missed produce would have to have a damaging effect. Something would have to give. 541588 was satisfied. The next stage could begin.

## Chapter Three

The leader of the commune was sitting alone in its control room. It watched the destruction unfold from a collection of screens on the wall. It saw 514588 meddling in the manufactory, saw it conduct some sort of process in the fields with its deconditioned group and then saw the disastrous effects of that process. And though 0 had seen multiple thunderstorms throughout its life, it had never seen one so ferocious, one that would set fire to the crops. Now, things were starting to fall out of its control despite everything it tried to do. It chastised itself as it watched the fields and the crops burning in the brilliant fire. The fault lay with itself. 514588 had been borne out of an inattentiveness of its predecessor, but 0 had many opportunities to rein it in. Instead it had, as much as it loathed to say, enjoyed the spectacle of 514588's life. It was boring, the days sitting alone in front of the terminal, eternally monitoring nothing, so when it discovered 514588, it thought it some harmless entertainment. But then, it escalated, of course it would, and it happened far too quickly for 0 to handle. The failed crops were an issue, but the commune could still function as normal; they had a large amount of emergency rations in storage. There was enough food in there to last them to the next harvest season. If 514588 could get its hands on that, then there would be real trouble. That would starve the commune, or even worse, allow 514588 to take control of it.

0 looked at the screens again and saw the disoriented workers running back to their apartments as the wind swept the fire in their direction. On another screen there was 514588, lying on its back, smiling deliriously. The idiot! It was too stupid to understand what it was doing and how much damage it was causing, but it could somehow constantly conjure up new methods of ruin. The murder, the torture, the deconditioning and now the fire. It was an evil too much for 0 to handle. It moved over to its computer and initiated a never used program.

After a short period of loading, a stern face showed on the screen. 0 was not used to seeing the faces of those from the central control. This one was lined with old age and sprouted grizzled grey hair. His strange appearance did not help with 0's nervousness. It knew that this was only for emergency situations, and was embarrassed to have to use it, but it was too important, too necessary. It was out of options.

"There's a problem I need help. It was...it was the one before me. It didn't... didn't do it properly and now there's this it wasn't my fault and there's one that didn't get conditioned properly, didn't get the BCM and now..." it trailed off. The face on the other side of the screen remained silent, and the quiet lingered for long enough that 0 was emboldened to continue. "It was, it was fine at first, then it, it killed one of the others and then somehow started to decondition some more, and then today, it, I, I don't know what it did, but there was a storm and massive storm, I'd never seen anything like it before and there was lightning," a shaking boom at that very moment verified the veracity of this statement, "and then the crops were set on fire and I don't know what to do or what it's going to do and if the grain stores are destroyed or the, if it destroys the grain stores, then we'll be without food and then we'll..." 0 trailed off again as it contemplated the potential and very disastrous consequences of this likelihood.

The face listened and after 0 finished, its features softened into a slight smile. Its calm voice was in stark contrast to the desperate blubbering of 0. "We understand what's going on in your commune. We see and hear everything, and I can assure you that we are working extremely hard in finding a solution. We expect that we will be able to send military forces to assist you within a single month--"

"A month! That's too long!"

“Well it’s the best thing we can do. We’re trying. So sit tight and help will come.”

Despite O’s protestations, the connection cut out. The person on the other side had left and it was clear that there would be no further discussion.

O was at a loss. What was it to do? All it could do was sit and watch. It turned around and tested the knob on the door. It was locked. One month. It had to limit the damage and preserve its own safety as best it could from inside its sanctuary. It resolved to call the central control again in a short time and try to pester them into sending help sooner. O was not sure if it could handle a whole month with 514588 continuing to wreak such havoc.

Unbeknownst to O, the person on the other end of the line was no ordinary member of the central control. It was the Grand Master himself. It was in the midst of a complex project, and the news it heard from the commune was conducive to a positive result for the work it was undertaking. Of course, help could be sent immediately, but the Grand Master had other plans.

## Chapter Four

The second part of 541588's plan was the destruction of the grain storage. It reasoned that focusing its attack on a single target, the communes' stock of food, would be the most effective way to cause a significant disruption. With this plan, 541588 wanted to avoid relying on creating a fire to burn the place down. It had worked for its previous mission, but only through some extraordinary luck. Instead, it was hoping to make use of its human resources to seize all the grain in the storage facility and to bury it underground. It was an audacious plan. The storage sheds were massive, and there was enough food inside to last for a whole year. They were designed for the worst case scenario; a harvest completely failing without providing anything, and so there was enough to be relied upon while the next season's harvest was sown, grown and harvested.

For this new plan 541588 needed a suitable site, large enough so that the hole did not need to be too deep and with the ground composed of soil that was easy enough to dig into. There was nowhere in the close confines of the commune; buildings, roads, all concrete and 541588 was loath to dig up the surrounding farms, burnt as they were, since they might be needed after it took over. 541588 had to venture outside the boundaries of the commune, something it had never tried before.

It wasn't a physical barrier that kept everyone inside the prescribed area, but a mental one. The outside was never talked about, never taught, never explained. From the edge of the farms, one could see wild grass, rolling plains and perhaps some buildings on the horizon, but to leave, to actually step outside the commune was something no-one ever contemplated, let alone tried. There was no need to explore, no need to leave, no need to find a better world when they lived in utopia itself.

541588 departed after lunch. It was empty out, even though normally the streets would be busy with activity. In the morning, an announcement had been broadcast throughout the commune telling everyone to stay in their apartments until further notice. It was the same announcement that was always made during extreme weather. But the storms had cleared the previous night; today the sun was shining mildly through benign clouds, and the air was as fresh as it always is after heavy rain. The leader of the commune was panicking.

541588 walked through the sullied fields, feet crunching through the tangled mess of burnt wheat. It thought the new aesthetic was quite striking; a heavy blanket of black that stretched hundreds of metres across and stopped neatly at the road. It made its way along and soon found that it was out of the commune. The texture of the ground was different. The wheat had been replaced by grass, though besides that, there was no indication that the commune had really ended. The fire was indiscriminate, and the ground was blackened some way into the distance. 541588 looked around, pulled some grass and ran its hand into the dirt. It was perfect; there was enough open space, the soil was consistent and loose, and the grain shed was only five hundred or so metres away. The others would have no trouble digging this place up and transporting the grain into the hole.

Now it was time to procure some shovels. It was easy from here; they were left unsecured with all the other tools in the warehouse next to the entrance of each field. 541588 carried them three at a time back to its room, four on the last trip, until it had seventy-three of them, one for each of the others. They would start tomorrow.

It called them all together the next morning to lead them out to the site. They followed it, not enthusiastic, but nothing unusual either, their dull grudging selves. The problems only began when



they were halfway across the field and they began to show the signs of their agitation. Perhaps they knew where 541588 was leading them. They slowed as they approached the edge, their movements jarring, unnatural. They weren't walking anymore; it seemed more like they were swimming through mud, pushing their arms forward and dragging themselves through. Metres became centimetres became millimetres. Most eventually stopped. Some outright turned back. Others, coerced by 541588, made it all the way to the boundary. But even these ones could go no further, firmly rooted within the limits of the commune. 541588 tried to push them out, to punish them out, all to no avail. Even when it managed to drag one of them into outside territory, it would go crazy, losing its balance and begin thrashing around on the ground and grappling its head. This would continue until it was brought back into the commune. The BCMs had a function built into them that could incapacitate the brain by interfering with the firing of neurons and the movements of chemicals if it detected that it was outside the commune, and 541588 stood no chance. After a morning of wrestling and chaos, it figured that something was very wrong, and came to a conclusion similar to the reality. Seeing the strange powerful effect on the others as soon as they left the commune, it theorised that there was a deeper conditioning that was not worth the time to attempt to remove. Thus, there necessitated a change in plan. The hole would have to be dug in one of the fields.

It rounded everyone up again and they marched across the empty roads to the fallow. There, 541588 found a place to sit, ordered them to begin digging and watched on as they commenced their work. Over the afternoon, the fallow was split into two. Half of it was turned upside down, the soil shifted to the other half which grew from a small pile into a large mound that had to be compacted to stop the dirt dribbling back into the hole.

Throughout the next few days, they continued to work, with 541588 standing by and encouraging them to dig harder. There were few difficulties; the soil was easy, the top layers almost fluid, and the digging, while tedious, was exactly the sort of work they had been trained from youth to do. It took a week until they were finished. Fifteen metres long and wide, three metres deep. 541588 gave them a day of rest, and then began the next part of his plan.

## Chapter Five

The storage shed was a concrete building, with no entrances or exits, only chutes that led from two ends. Every day, a portion of grain would eject from one of the chutes into a pit, enough for one day's food for everyone in the commune. The chute on the other side was frequented during harvest season, when the loads of grain would be deposited inside. The building was designed to ensure that no-one could accidentally disrupt the main supply of food. For any glitches in the mechanics operating the chutes, there was only a tunnel that led from the leader's palace, allowing it to fix any possible problem that could arise. But 541588 was not accidentally disrupting the food supply. It was very purposeful, a little desperate. It had spent the day of rest it had given the others scouring the exterior of the buildings for any weakness, any imperfections. The concrete was impenetrable, that was for sure, and it was soon evident that the only ways inside and out were through the chutes. Those thin metal chutes.

541588 lay itself down on one of them, its shoulders contorted and almost touching each other, its hips pushed hard against the sides, and tried to pull itself up, feet first into the building. Its legs made it through, bunched together, but once it got to its hips its feet hit an obstruction. It bent its knees, felt for clear air and found none. It twisted, falling out a bit, but managed to turn itself a hundred and eighty degrees. Its reward was its face knocked against the hot metal. But it persisted; the chute was just large enough that it thought it had a chance. It pulled itself back up to where its feet hit the obstruction and bent its knees, feet going upward, and this time, there was nothing in the way. Though its hips still couldn't make it through. It could feel the bone on either side, stuck, a smidgen wider than the opening. It was too small, it could not fit.

But it couldn't give up.

They had dug up the field, dug a massive hole. Now it was its turn to do its work. It pushed as hard as it could, felt the pain sear all the way up its waist to its ribs to its tucked shoulders and then it was in, smashing its legs against a sheet of metal, and falling face first into a heap of grain.

It took a moment to look around and recover. Two beacons of light that came from the chutes provided the illumination, revealing metal pieces, gears, sheets jutting in every direction out of a sea of grain. It was going to take a long time to get it all out. The words "get out" stayed in its mind for longer than it should have and it soon realised that it could not get out itself. The shape of the opening and the metal sheet that stood a metre away from the chute meant that it would need an impossible angle to exit. It could stay inside for now and try to work something out. The others would come tomorrow with their buckets. They had been told to do so. They would help. For now, it would have to wait among the grain through the night.

They arrived the next morning as it trusted they would, crowding outside the chute, blocking the light. The buckets wouldn't fit inside. It could only scoop the grain onto the chute with its bare hands and hope the others would listen to its shouted commands and carry the grain into the hole. It was slow going from inside the shed and woefully inefficient outside. Most of them were just waiting for something to do. Eventually, 541588 ordered a few of them to lie into the chute and they were pushed inside to help with removing the grain. It was quicker now, with seven of them inside working together, and handful by handful, bucket by bucket, the commune's food supplies disappeared from the storage and filled the hole.

0 could see the entire operation. From the camera inside the storage, it could see the grain being scooped onto the chute and disappearing outside, while another camera on a nearby apartment showed the others collecting the grain in buckets and carrying them out of sight. It kept following this trail and ultimately found that the operation stopped at the fallow, which it now understood why they dug up, as it watched the precious grain poured into the hole. It wanted to do something, to stop this dreadful business immediately, to cast 541588 away and to fix the commune, but it was unable to muster up the courage to do anything other than watch. The trapdoor at the corner of the room that led to the storehouse beckoned. It could go through and confront 541588. But there were six of them inside with it. It couldn't win. So it did the only thing it could. It called the central control, got no response, and called again and again, while outside, 541588 was doing exactly as it feared and destroying the rest of the food supply.

For 541588 the next few days were a continuation of the success that it was now accustomed to. By late afternoon on the eighth day, the last of the grain was moved into the hole and buried. Then the problem of getting out returned. They had managed to stay alive during their time inside the warehouse by getting the others to bring them food and water. But now the situation was untenable. They could not stay inside the shed forever. At least there were seven of them in there and they could help each other out. Through some trial and error, a technique was soon found that would allow one to escape if they were lifted and pushed head first down the chute by another.

541588 went out first. One by one the others followed until there was only a one left. It couldn't get out on its own, and they tried for the best part of an hour to help it from the outside to no avail. It was getting late now, and 541588 decided to leave it behind. It promised to itself that it would bring meals to it every day before calling everyone back to their rooms and retreating to its own, looking forward to a night in its own bed.

541564 was miserable inside the storehouse. It just wanted to go back to its apartment. It had helped 541588 as much as it hated it and it had stayed in the storehouse for eight terrible days already. It tried everything, injured everything trying to get out by itself but it was truly impossible. It would have to remain miserable, alone and trapped.

## Chapter Seven

Back in its room, 541588 had forgotten about 541564 thinking about the next part of the plan. What was to be the next part of the plan? 541588 had expected that there would have been some resistance to its actions, but so far there was nothing. It had to attain the power to rule to liberate the entire population, but for this to happen, it needed to defeat someone: the leader of the commune or the leader of world. But the apathy from the powers above seemed perpetual. The only method of liberation which it could conceive of if nothing changed would be a slow and laborious manual deconditioning of everyone, one by one. But it couldn't make the others help it decondition, and it would take years to complete on its own. This was unfeasible. 541588 needed someone to come and challenge it, or it needed a new plan.

Try as it did to think up of one, a new plan eluded 541588 and dinner quickly rolled around. It realised how hungry it was, slumped off its bed, and went down to the dining room. Only then did it consider for the first time that there might not be dinner, that there was no food to be had, and there was a moment of worry as it dawned on it that it might starve the whole commune. The worry dissipated, replaced by confusion as it arrived at the dining room to see everyone eating their fill. It had to check for itself. It hurried to the dispenser, pressed the button and the normal portion of gloop poured out. It sat down, eating in contemplation, and then it figured out what had happened and the worry returned. The grain was ejected and taken from the storage in the morning, before they had finished their work, and this grain would only last until the end of the day. That meant that there was still a problem with food. Would the grain have to be dug up? It was such a ridiculous proposition, but it seemed to be the only way out of the current predicament. It chastised itself, angry at its own rash stupidity. The plan had made so much sense at the time, but now, now what? Starvation for everyone. A slow, torturous death over the coming weeks. 541588 considered it more and decided it was not going to dig anything up. It was sure that it itself could last for many weeks without food, and within that time the leaders would have come to intervene. They wouldn't let a whole commune die of starvation. The train of thought trailed off as 541588 was assured that it had made no mistake. It was now sure that it had acted ingeniously in executing a plan that would force an intervention. With that problem solved, it turned its mind to the conflict and battle it envisaged would certainly occur. The others would have to be able to fight, to attack and defend. But in their current state, they were too weak. They needed to be trained. 541588 was disturbed that it had not contemplated this much earlier and hurried to its room to think up a plan for the education of the others in the art of war.

## Chapter Eight

The next morning, 541588 woke up hungry as usual and only remembered halfway down the stairs about the lack of food. It was still curious as to what would be happening, so it continued down the steps into the dining room. The scene was serene and there seemed no difference from a normal day. 541588 strode up to the dispenser to investigate this oddity. Was there another storage that it was unaware of? Then, as it saw the dispensed food, it realised that the grain was indeed missing. The “food” that was dispensed was only vitamins and minerals mixed in water. Everyone would still starve. There would still have to be an intervention. Satisfied, it drank its fill and returned to its room, where it began to finalise its plans for the training of the others; the weapons to be used, the strategies they would employ and the techniques of fighting.

Training commenced the following day. 541588 led them to the storehouse, distributed the scythes, shovels and pitchforks around and then marched them to a field where it paired them up and ordered them to try to beat their opposite number down to the ground. There was a smattering of awkward movements among the group. They swung their implements slowly, in random directions that had no chance of hitting the targets intended by 541588. They clearly weren't trying at all. It took a moment for 541588 to recollect its experience in trying to get one of them to hit another with a whip. It was difficult, but it could be done with the right encouragement. It picked up a scythe for itself, and demonstrated the task it wanted done on an unwitting victim, felling it with a swing that struck its torso. Then it issued an ultimatum. If within any pair there was no-one who had been defeated within 5 minutes, both would have a bout with 541588. The victim continued to thrash on the floor in pain. This was ample motivation, and the group was more focused in using their implements against their forced opponents. Still they were no fighters; instead their movements reflected the utility of the tools. Those with shovels, shovelled. Those with scythes, scythed. The result was a mess of activity with no positive result. They were practising their farming, not their fighting. 541588 wasn't sure what to do. Even for itself, there was an unshakeable feeling of bizarreness when wielding and using the farming tools in a weapon-like way. It continued to watch the group staggering around, and noticed a trend. The shovelers were most effective. The motion of shovelling, a forward thrust, was the closest to actual fighting. The scything was easily dodged, and whatever they were doing with the pitchfork was useless.

The other weapons were confiscated. All of them were given shovels and now there were real contests. The practise fights began to produce winners and the losers learnt from their mistakes. Their motions grew more refined, their dodging improved, and bit and bit they turned into a passable fighting force. Within days, 541588 thought they were ready, and all that was left was the waiting.

## Chapter Nine

0 had watched with increasing apprehension as 541588 trained its forces for combat, waiting on a reply from the central control. It turned around instantly when the computer screen flashed on without warning and sounded a buzz. A familiar face peered through the screen; that wrinkled scraggly man succumbing to old age. However, he seemed to be considerably happier this time, and he spoke of good news. The forces had been prepared for deployment, and within the next few hours could be in the field. 541588 and its merry troop would be quickly subjugated and brought back into order. They would borrow some grain crops from surrounding communes and the commune would be returned to normal in only a week. Everything was going to be fine. The months of fear and uncertainty were about end. Upon hearing this news, 0 was relieved and excited and forgot to ask about the specifics of the operation before the grand master had departed.

In the early hours of morning the old transport plane carrying the troops departed from the headquarters of the central command. Over the next quarter day, it flew over land and sea and touched down on an island previously known as mainland Australia. The airports had been retained from the time before the new world was established, but the centuries of disuse were evident as the plane jolted onto the cracked, uneven tarmac and ground to a stop. The men stumbled out of the plane, desperate to escape the turbulence in their head and stomach that they had suffered for the past six and a quarter hours, and quickly received orders to begin a march to the nearest central settlement fifteen kilometres away. They got marching; first through the dilapidated airport buildings, then into the increasingly thick bush. Without human interruption, the plant life had regenerated and with it, insects had reappeared in large numbers. Trudging through the dense scrub they were pestered by floods of flies buzzing loudly around their faces and clinging on to their sweaty backs. As they walked, the winds blew the clouds above them and then there was rain. The flies disappeared, but out came the mosquitoes, furiously attacking their bare skin, this rare delicacy triggering a feeding frenzy. The group were none the wiser. Instead, it was the incessant rain, the thick branches and uneven terrain that posed the immediate challenges as they pushed along, their direction uncertain, based on their last sighting of the sun's position. Thud, crunch, pitter, snap, buzz, slap, patter, gasp. Then, to their relief, the bush began to clear out, and soon they found themselves within a grassy plain, the central settlement visible in the distance. They picked up their pace, the finish line in sight, and covered the remaining distance quickly, despite the soreness in their legs. They were weary when they arrived, but there was no time to lose. They were each handed a package of food, then ushered onto a helicopter.

## Chapter Ten

541588 thought it was going mad. There was a monotonous, rhythmic thudding that came from nowhere and got louder and louder until it sounded like it was just outside. It peeked out the window, saw nothing and lay back down on its bed, confused, before everything clicked. This was it. It flew out of the apartment. Raced along the floor. Shouted to everyone to come down, then did the same on the floor below. It waited on the bottom floor as they filtered out of their rooms. They assembled outside the apartment, where 541588 counted them and caught its first sight of the enemy. It was a black creature soaring free across the sky, the source of thunderous noise even though it was still some distance away. What was this thing? They ran to the sheds, fast, panicked. Stumbling in and struggling through heavy breath, 541588 ordered them to grab a shovel each. There were not enough shovels for everyone and not enough time to go to another shed. It picked a scythe for itself and led the half-armed group out and together they trudged toward the approaching beast. They neared it as it begun its descent onto one of the fields, the noise deafening. Now 541588 could see it clearly. It was huge, bigger than twenty of them, with blades on top that created its own wind and seemed capable of slicing all of them in an instant. 541588 had been confident, but now, as it saw the enemy, metres away, face to face, everything vanished. 541588 was tiny, out of place, out of its depth. The rulers were far greater, far more powerful than it had ever conceived. Why hadn't it thought things through properly? The others had already begun retreating. It alone stood dumbstruck, frozen in front of the force that was going to be its doom. But then the helicopter landed. Its blades slowed down, the noise went down and its sides opened. The twelve members of the unarmed peacekeeping force staggered out. They struggled to find their footing and once they did, only lined up and stared at the troop ahead of them. The two groups paused, hesitant and fearful, as the helicopter started up again. Then, as soon as it was gone, 541588 charged, followed by some of the others. The peacekeepers ran, ran for their lives. 541588 gave chase, and swinging wildly with its scythe and soon knocked one of them to the ground. It was about to deliver a fatal blow, stopped only by the realisation that it was alone and the others had lingered at the edge of the commune. It was past the boundary already and outnumbered there, twelve to one. And so, it hesitated, giving the man enough time to roll and slip out of reach. 541588 made the snap decision to go alone. This was an important opportunity. They were a bunch of cowards. They had to be headed toward the central control.

It was heavy going. They were fast, and it lagged further and further behind, so it dropped its scythe, and pushed harder to make up the distance. Then pain started to come on. Pain in mouth, where the air feels harsh against the dry lungs and pain in the legs, pounding on the ground, one after the other, one after the other. It was getting closer in tiny increments, but it was still a hundred metres behind the last of them. They ran on. Seconds turned to minutes and the minutes approached an hour. Their pace had slowed. The commune was now gone, way behind in the distance. More minutes, another hour. Dinner time neared and the running continued. They had all slowed further, but they were still faster than 541588. It was losing ground, and its resolve also began to crack as the pain overwhelmed.

They were running for themselves, their safety, their lives. 541588 was running to complete its mission. But there was always another chance for the mission. 541588 was two hundred metres away from them when its body gave up, and it collapsed onto the ground. Hot, pained, its will broken by two hours of non-stop running. It lay there as its targets slowed to a walk and continued on, further into the unknown plains. It could never catch them. Recovering its breath, it pushed itself

up and began the long walk back to the commune. It was starving and its legs were shaking and it was not sure which direction to go back. It was hills and grass everywhere, nothing else, apart from the twelve deserters getting away. It went the opposite way from where the others were headed, hoping that they had traced a straight line from the commune. Its feet hurt, its shoulders ached and it would have to walk deep into the night.





## Chapter Twelve

It had been a turbulent day for O. There had been the initial happiness and excitement when it was told that the intervention was coming. It had believed that its problems were to end and things would return to normal. Then, there was that sudden, brutal reassessment as it watched the forces routed and 541588 chase after them with its scythe. Then they all disappeared out of the view of the cameras, running away from the commune. O waited and waited, hoping that 541588 would never come back. It was outnumbered twelve to one, with all its brainwashed troop waiting behind within the confines of the boundary. Surely it would be overpowered and removed.

At dinnertime, O saw 541588's troops return back to their apartment's dining room and there was still no sign of the leader itself. O kept itself awake, way past its normal bedtime as it looked across the screens and saw nothing. Maybe this was the central control's plan all along; drawing 541588 somewhere far away. Perhaps they'd even killed by now. As the time passed, O grew more assured, finally deciding to go to sleep at midnight if it saw no signs.

At six minutes to midnight, a lone figure, shoulders hunched, head bowed, unmistakable even in the dark, limped past one of the cameras. O was too tired. Felt nothing. Went straight to bed. And slept as soon as it lay down. It was only next morning, after seeing 541588 right in front of it on its video screen, that the reality of the previous night could be comprehended. Last night had seemed like a dream. Now it was back in the nightmare of its own deteriorating existence. The central command had failed. 541588 was still at large. Now what? O went on the computer and contacted the central command. The man appeared in an instant, sad and regretful and spoke before O had a chance to open its mouth.

"We apologise for what happened. Mistakes were made. We are sorry. We -"

"How did that even happen? Who were those people? They just ran away. They did nothing. They did nothing at all. You've failed. You've failed your duty and let our commune down. And 541588, it's still out there."

On the other side, the sound had been muted. There was just O remonstrating madly with its arms. The grand master waited for this episode to finish, but continued nodding as if it were listening and understanding. It waited for the shouting to die down O to compose itself before turning back on the sound and giving its reply.

"We're sorry. We've already sent new troops along the way. These people are armed. They will not make the same mistakes. They will be efficient, they will be direct and they will use force. They will capture 541588 by the end of today."

But O was shaking its head.

"It's what you told me last time. How can I trust you? The people in our commune are starving! You'll just apologise, you'll make me wait a few months and send another group, a weak group, a half-hearted attempt." The shouting was back, but this time, the grand master was ready.

"You're all usele—"

"No! You're useless. If you really cared about your commune you would have stopped hiding in your little room and gone out and stopped it yourself. You've had your opportunities. Talk about half-

hearted attempts, we should talk about those notes you left for 541588, we should talk about failing to secure your palace.”

“I’m trying!”

“Well, so are we. We’re trying to get you out of the mess you created.”

“It wasn’t me; it was the one before me.” It’d quietened. The person on the other side was right.

“The failed implanting was the fault of the one before you, but you know we can see everything. You know we saw you skip parts of its conditioning. And you enjoyed it, did you not? You didn’t do anything, you let it happen because you were bored.” There was extra venom on that last word.

“You should’ve tried to stop it while it was still entertaining, harmless fun. You should’ve tried to stop it after it had killed someone. But you didn’t, did you?”

In the face of such excoriation, O wilted. The person on the other side did indeed know everything; all its inner thoughts and private actions. And they were right about everything, right about all of O’s mistakes and faults. O sometimes did doubt its own ability, but it had always believed itself to be a good person. Here it was exposed, its failings demonstrated in the most demeaning fashion. It had one job. To oil the most well-oiled machine there was. That was the only reason for its existence, the purpose for which it had been raised from birth. And it had somehow destroyed it all. It was completely at fault for risking the system that was everything because of its stupid, immature desire for some entertainment. Why? Why had it been so dumb? Now, even if normalcy were restored, there would be a permanent scar, a stain that would hover over it forever. The deaths were irreversible. The tarnished lives could not be untarnished.

Now it saw the beauty of its world and why it approached perfection, not for itself, or the other commune leaders, but for the majority, those numbered 1 and above. Their lives were lived in fulfillment and peace. For them, there would be none of the pain of seeing failure, none of the pressures of ruling a commune. Its hate of 541588 turned to pity. 541588 was burdened with freedom, struggling with unhappiness and dissatisfaction. And yes, it was its fault. It had failed to condition 541588 properly. It had ruined 541588’s life because of its own selfishness and boredom. The man on the screen was right. The man on the screen. It snapped out of its thoughts, and looked up again.

He was still there, had stayed silent. He had watched as O turned away, looking down, thinking, shameful. Seen the distress marked on its face. He had been successful in feigning anger, perhaps too successful, and the words now coming out of O’s mouth confirmed this.

“I’m sorry. Forgive me. I’m wrong and, and I’m sorry. But I didn’t want to be here. I didn’t ask to be the leader of the commune. But yes, it’s my fault, my fault. I’m sorry. I need your help, really need your help. And, uh, I accept your apology from before.”

“Well. help is coming today. It will be fine. Nothing to worry about.” That was enough to placate it. He turned off the screen, gathered his notes and left his apartment.

## Chapter Thirteen

The voting room was packed. The seats filled. All three hundred senators were present, sitting, waiting, as the grand master made the long walk through the centre of the room, onto the stage and behind the podium. He was late. The screen behind him flashed on, displaying a white background and the words "Motion 433". He took out a single piece of paper and placed it on the stand, then cleared his throat into the microphone. The talking died away. The senators finished organising their notes; some took out a clean piece of paper on which to write, others were content just to listen, all were focused on what was to come. There was quiet. The grand master began.

"In the past few weeks, we have seen ample evidence of the extreme fallibility of humankind. Exhibit A."

Behind him, a montage of some of 541588's shenanigans played on the big screen. First, there was a long shot of 541588 with whip and pillow, torturing, brutalising another member of its commune. Then there was 541588 with its sharp utensil, stabbing an unconscious figure, stabbing it to death. Finally, there was a shot of the deserters, fleeing as 541588 chased after them with its scythe, freeze framing as 541588 was seconds from delivering a fatal blow. Dramatic. Visceral. Terrifying. Some of the audience had turned away, seen enough.

"This was the result of human incompetence. Under the former leader of this commune this one was not implanted. You would have thought, we all believe, that this should not be an issue under the regime of conditioning that we have implemented, but again, human error. The new leader of the commune was too bored, yes bored, to allow the conditioning of this one, and the consequences speak for themselves."

The grand master paused as the noise rose in the room. They'd known about this motion for ages, and had ample time to learn as much about it as possible. But the video, it was new, more information to process. Eventually the chatter died down and the grand master began again with a new intensity.

"In the past, we have struggled with these disastrous instances of human failure. They have torn at the fabric of our utopian society, risking its very existence. Today, we finally have a solution. We have run the simulations, tested myriad scenarios, and they have all shown that artificial intelligence is infallible. Our world was built on a promise of stability, efficiency and happiness. We have seen that humans leading the world cannot fulfil this promise. Until now, we have had no choice but to rely on a flawed system. Today, we will vote on whether to leave this flawed system and approach perfection with artificial intelligence. Today we will vote on ensuring the future security and prosperity of our world. I trust that you will all make the right call."

There was applause as the grand master finished and made his way to the only empty seat in the room. There was a brief break in the proceedings, before a member of the opposition made his way to the podium for the reply.

"While we have all been busy jumping onto the wagon of technological change we have failed to consider our humanity. Yes, artificially intelligent machines and programs may be more efficient and more secure at running the world than ourselves. But what the grand master has neglected to mention is the fact that their implementation will precipitate our end. It's all in the motion. Next to them we're all useless, a wasteful drain on resources. We would have to die. But that's not the point.

If it were truly beneficial, I would be the first to sacrifice my life. However, the implementation of artificial intelligence does not make logical sense. Our society was founded on utilitarian principles, but we have to recognise the extent to which we should take it. Under the reasoning that forms the basis of motion 433, we might as well replace all humans with machines. Why leave it at leaders, when efficiency and security can replace all forms of life? In light of our undeniable humanity, we have placed that possibility out of the question since the beginning. Why should we accept a proposition that is grounded in the same logic as a position we have all agreed to be untenable? We should not accept artificial intelligence. That is all.”

Most of the audience had made up their minds long before today’s meeting. The implementation of AI was the conventional and popular choice, and few did not regard the latter speaker as too conservative and extreme. Many who were on the fence swung towards support upon viewing the video. When it came to the first vote, the numbers were two hundred and ninety-seven in support and three against. The motion had needed a unanimous decision for it to pass, and though this would seem to be an impassable impediment, after another round of speeches the second vote gave the grand master the desired three hundred to nil and ensured the passage of the motion. The three who had opposed had not changed their mind, but they did not wish to impede the will of the majority. Their opinions were void now that the motion had passed. For the grand master, there was only the small matter of subduing 541588 left before the implementation of AI. He excused himself from the celebrations in order to complete this task.

## Chapter Fourteen

What had I been thinking last night? In a moment of weakness, I had lost my mind and forgotten everything. Or had I? I remembered having an epiphany. Seeing the bare world, without my motivations or impositions. I pushed into my memory, trying to recapture the feelings, the thinking that had occurred. Nothing. It was emptiness. It was a different state of mind. I tried to recreate the experience again, but I couldn't do that either, and it now felt alien. Maybe I had just been tired and weakened. Maybe it was nonsense brought on by sleep and energy deprivation. I had been crazy. That was all it was. But even now, I could intellectualise the experience that had overcome me. I could consider the emptiness even though I couldn't feel it. I was trapped in two minds about my mission. One where it made sense, where I should continue, the other where it was unintelligible, equivalent to doing anything else or nothing. It was depressing. I was stuck in this contradiction while precious time was passing by.

Precious time.

Why did I call it precious?

There was no process. I had just made an intuitive choice there; it was precious because I thought it was precious. Yes, that was it. I could choose what I think. That was the solution. It was a matter of choice, everything was a matter of choice and I could choose to continue my mission. To want to continue my mission. But again, why would I choose to do it? It was at that moment I remembered my promise to myself and the passion that had erupted in me after reading that evil pamphlet. The person who wrote it was so sure of itself, why couldn't I be the same? My mission was worth it. My mission was worth it. My mission was worth it. And in my mind, it became so.

## Chapter Fifteen

The men were legitimate professionals; trained and conditioned from an early age for subduing this insurrection. They were not going to fail like the previous group. They were not set up to fail like the previous group. The Grand Master had talked his way into journeying with them. He had explained that he would be able to observe any inefficiencies in their handling of the situation to help improve any future interventions. Like it would matter. Anyhow, it was enough to convince the organisers of the trip to let him on and to change the plans to suit his needs. As the plane was readied, he retreated to his study and watched more videos of 541588.

It was less than an hour before they took off. On the plane, the Grand Master introduced the soldiers to two crates that had been loaded onto the plane. He instructed them to open one of them, and they found their weapons that they needed for the operation. About the other crate, he told them only that they were to protect it with their lives. The contents he kept unrevealed. The men armed themselves, before taking their seats. The Grand Master sat down as well, and found himself next to one of the men, who looked at him quizzically.

“You’re the Grand Master, right?”

“Yes.”

“Well, so you would’ve been there, you would’ve voted. Motion four three three?”

“Yes, I was the one who proposed it and we had the vote, around three hours ago.”

“And it won? The vote passed?”

“Yes, it was quite the popular motion if I do say so myself.”

“Then, would you know? Well, you would know what’s going to happen to us, right?”

“Not everything has been finalised. Of course, you will be the first to know it about it if there’s something in it that affects you.”

“Well, there’s rumours going around that we’re all going to be killed.”

“So what?”

“Okay, I get it, I get it. Well, I just wanted to tell you that I don’t fear it. I’m fine with it. Just wanted to tell you that.

“That’s good to hear.”

The soldier was silent for the rest of the trip, and the Grand Master found himself thinking of his work. The application of artificial intelligence had been considered since the beginnings of the new world, but the technology was not there then. It was the previous Grand Master who had spent his time accelerating research and pouring resources in its direction, and by the time he had died the scientists had perfected it. There was no question what the current Grand Master’s role was when he took over. He was bound by a duty to catch the politics up and bring the vision of artificial intelligence into fruition. And now he had succeeded with the motion being passed. But the Grand Master was not happy yet and he wasn’t sure why. He felt there was something wrong. Maybe it had something to do with his immense curiosity about 541588, but he couldn’t see the connection. It was something obscure, something couldn’t quite grasp. Eventually, as the plane began circling the

same airport visited by the other group, he decided that he would be happy when artificial intelligence was actually implemented.

The pilot found a runway that was less damaged this time, and the landing was relatively smooth. The men unloaded the crates, and waited as a helicopter came to meet them, saving them the burden of hiking through the treacherous forest.



## Chapter Sixteen

541588 saw the helicopter from outside its window. The beast it had feared. The beast it still feared. But there was no time for fear now. If it wanted to succeed, it would get up and face it. And it did want to succeed. Its legs were heavy and ached, it had not gotten enough sleep but it still managed its way off its bed. It called its troops, and they gathered outside with their weapons. The helicopter seemed to be hovering in the direction of the palace. It led them towards it.

Soon, they were on the main road that led to the palace, and the helicopter was almost directly overhead. One of its doors opened, and behind it a man was preparing a large gun. 541588 and its troop continued running beneath the helicopter, tired, scared and ignorant of this new danger. The helicopter slowed, and the man leant out, taking aim. 541588 felt it before it saw it. Felt the air change, the sound change and knew the helicopter had slowed. It had looked up, and seen the man a moment before the trigger was pulled. A moment before there was a whizz then a thud and someone near it recoiled and fell to the ground. It all happened too quickly and there was another whizz, another thud, another person down before 541588 yelled at the others to disperse and turned and sprinted toward the closest building itself. Even as it was running, it heard more of them being hit and more of them yelping in pain. It was a familiar sound. 541588 went inside the building, the hospital and found its way to the nearest window. The others were running, slowly, back towards the apartment, and the helicopter was circling around, the man inside picking them off one by one. 541588 watched in absolute terror as this process continued. It had feared the helicopter, the mere physicality of the thing. But now, it had seen what they were really capable of. The helicopter was just a vessel, a vessel for that all powerful machine inside that could destroy someone just by being pointed at them. It had known that the central commune would be hard to defeat. It had not known that it was impossible. They were untouchable in their beast. And they were now destroying everything. 541588 stayed in the hospital, peeking out the window as the helicopter buzzed away, chasing after the others as they spread out around the commune. It waited until the helicopter was out of sight before leaving the building. It was bound to end up back in there sooner or later once they caught it, but for now, it could still survive. It crouched down despite the burn in its legs, and crept from building to building, towards its apartment. The shock and pain of its new situation layered on top of the energy drain it had suffered yesterday. It had nothing left once it arrived in the apartments. It clambered up the stairs, staggered across the hallway and collapsed into its room, before sliding under the bed and into the dark.

## Chapter Seventeen

As the helicopter approached the commune, they saw the damage. The fields, disfigured and spoiled, indubitably by 541588, enraged them.

“Look at what it’s done.”

“That’s horrible.”

“Why would someone do that?”

“I want to destroy it.”

The Grand Master heard their conversations and spoke up, “Remember your orders.”

And the orders were explicit. None were to be harmed. Including 541588. Their weapons were loaded with tranquiliser darts. The extent of any physical force would be nil. The helicopter approached the palace. They had also been ordered to drop the Grand Master off at the palace before engaging with the enemy and subduing 541588, but when they saw their targets cavorting below, it was too good of an opportunity to miss. They asked the Grand Master if he had any objections to them beginning their work. He only had one.

“Don’t hit 541588, I want it to be awake when I speak to it.”

They didn’t question him, despite the statement being ludicrous. Why would the Grand Master need to speak with the enemy? But authority was authority, and they began their work with his words in mind.

One of them opened the door, while another operated the gun. Below, their targets were jogging together in the same direction as the helicopter. There were seventy-three of them; all identical. Without the tracking device they had injected inside 541588 a few months ago, it would have been almost impossible to identify it in the group. But even with the device, the GPS co-ordinates were not precise enough to isolate it. They needed to be dispersed before they could figure out which one was 541588. The gunman motioned to the pilot to slow down before looking down the sight and taking aim at one straggling a few metres behind the main group that they were certain was not the leader. His finger twitched and it fell to the ground as the syringe slammed into its chest and began to pump the toxins through its system. There was no instant reaction in the group however, so he shot again, hit one next to the first target and then they began to move. One made a beeline for a building, and they soon knew from their tracking device that this was 541588. The others turned around and ran in the opposite direction. Now that they had separated them, they could subdue the others freely before apprehending 541588. The helicopter swung around to follow the others, and the gunman stretched his fingers.

## Chapter Eighteen

541588's hand brushed over something hard and it remembered the bones. It rolled out from under the bed and slammed down on top, curling up tight and wounding the ripped blankets around itself. Its head was swirling. It wanted it to end, everything to finish now, or to wind back time, to before, when it followed the rules and everything was simple. Just thinking about it hurt, all its former dreams and aspirations, now delusions. They must have known, known the whole time, noted its litany of transgressions; and then instead of acting, had dutifully watched and waited. Waited until 541588 was at the peak of its confidence, then struck, struck them all down. The memory of the man in the helicopter with the gun, briefly surfaced in its mind, and its hand clenched like a claw onto its hair. They were going to find 541588 here. It was just a matter of time. 541588 would soon be due for extreme pain or death just like Winston and K. But it did not fear death nor torture. The thing that hurt, the thing that pained it the most was that they were so wrong about everything and so powerful that they could enforce their wrongness on everything. They abused their absolute power with their absolute ignorance, destroying all that was good while perpetuating a vacuous, sad and hopeless world. After some time drowning in this pessimism, 541588 resurfaced and decided it had to do something. Anything. Whatever effect it had, it would at least ease the anguish of contemplating its current reality and serve as a distraction from the soul-crushing desolation it felt. It had critiqued both K and Winston for giving up so easily, and thought that it had learnt from their failures. Now was its chance to show that it was true to its own beliefs. Its body was weakened, wrecked, its head was not on completely, but it had to continue. But to do what? The others were all lost and it was alone now, and it wanted to do something audacious. It wanted some final action before its end that would etch it into the fabric of the world and change it forever. What could it do in the short time before it was caught? Numerous possibilities flashed through its mind: taking a weapon and smashing anything it could get its hands on, tackling the enemies in the helicopter head on. These were all dismissed as unfeasible. Eventually however, the answer revealed itself with stunning clarity. Those locked rooms in the palace. The leader. It had to be there. Now was the time to find it and ensure that it paid for the suffering it had caused, paid for 541588's fallen supporters, paid for inviting the helicopter to destroy its plans for freedom. 541588 had considered this before, but dismissed it because it was not conducive to its plans for freedom. But now the cause of freedom was already lost. It wasn't freedom anymore, it was personal, a mission to quell its own angst. It was going to die soon, but it couldn't die as nothing, forgotten, never existing. This was its chance to be, even when it was long dead. The helicopter had gone and it was quiet now. Presumably it had landed somewhere in the distance. 541588 was safe from the gunman. It left its apartment to retrieve a shovel with which it would perform this act.

## Chapter Nineteen

It was in front of him, thin, sickly thin and its movements were swollen in fear and confusion. It was less an enemy than an object of pity, a mistreated slave, a painful frame of a normal commune citizen. He looked down his sight and saw it more closely. Its face was blank, its shoulders drooped. It was a lost, desolate figure. He took the shot and its face contorted and its body sagged. It had been a perfect hit, straight in the thigh, and the anaesthetic would soon do its work. Another job done well, the first step in its liberation from 541588's impositions completed. He stepped back into the helicopter, and someone announced: "That was the last of them."

"So now we find 541588?"

"It's left its room now, it looks like it's heading towards the storage sheds."

The grand master chimed in. "No. Let's go to 0 and sort it out first. I'll have time to evaluate 541588 afterwards. Do we all know the plan for 0?"

Nods from everyone and the helicopter fired up and headed toward the palace.

The end was near. The professionalism of this group was evident. They had subdued each of those that 541588 had turned with ease, and they were soon to capture 541588 itself. From then on, things could return to normal again and this disordered and stressful experience could come to a rest. But there was a question that kept nagging 0. Why did the central command send that first group of incompetent forces? From whichever angle that 0 approached this question the answer seemed nonsensical. As it could now see, the central command was powerful and assured. How then, could they have considered unarmed and weak people as appropriate for retaking the commune from 541588? There was something suspicious going on. But then again, they were actively fixing the commune now, and the peace would soon return. 0 could either forget about the past and start anew or continue to dwell in discontent at these small details.

As much as it wanted to take the first option, it felt that it could not ignore what had happened the past months. It had been irreparably changed, and if the normalcy were to be returned, it couldn't help but be bored. Yes, that was wrong, and yes, boredom had been the cause of all its problems but it couldn't help it. Once everything was fixed, it would have nothing to do except watch the commune repeat the same thing over and over again and contemplate the meaninglessness of its own life. It felt that there was some greater truth that was being hidden by the central command, and the question stabbed into its mind again. What were they up to? Why did they purposely fail? It could try to find out, ask the men when they came into the palace but it felt that it would never be told. And if it tried to find out on its own; well it knew what was to become of 541588. Despite its pity of 541588, much of 541588's thoughts and feelings were now being echoed in its mind. It couldn't bear to live out its life in repetition, with empty purpose. It had apologised for being bored before and for seeking out something different in its life as if it were wrong. That was how the central command made it feel. But the central command wasn't infallible, it had been wrong before, it had sent those incompetent men before, why couldn't it be wrong about the most important thing of all? Maybe the whole world was flawed, maybe 541588 was right. 0 had had an epiphany of sorts the previous day, realising that freedom was a curse rather than blessing. That freedom, freedom was being free to fail, free to see its work ruined, to see its person destroyed. But now it realised an even deeper truth: this destructive force of freedom wasn't intrinsic to freedom itself. No, they were impositions of the central command. When it had allowed 541588 to do what it had wanted, it had

failed the standards of the central command, but not of anything else, not of any objective standard. But what could it do? If it ignored the central command, it would be destroyed, if it followed what the central command wanted, it would live an empty life. The choices were equal and horrible. Maybe it could ask them to erase its memory and condition it and allow it to live in the commune? This seemed like the only possibility that would end its discontent, and it was plausible; they might do it. But then, it didn't know why, but it felt there were some things that it did not want to lose at any cost. It couldn't stand to have its mind wiped, all its of experiences count for nothing, to start again as a different person. None of the options were palatable. None made sense. The problem remained impossible to resolve and 0 continued to think in circles.

## Chapter Twenty

There was a knock on the door. They were here now. 0 tentatively opened the door, and behind it stood the person with whom it had been communicating, along with several other imposing men. It flushed out all that it had just been thinking and eked out a greeting.

“Hello.”

Silence.

“Thank you so much for dealing with all the problems, getting it all solved.”

0 took a step back and they crowded into the room and settled around it. One of the men standing behind 0 had lifted its weapon and pointed to the back of 0's head. 0 didn't notice. The grand master stopped directly opposite it.

“Bu...but I have a question. Why didn't you send all these people the first time?”

The grand master did not answer the question, so 0 repeated itself, louder this time.

“Why didn't you send-”

As 0 was speaking, the grand master tilted its chin down a fraction of an inch, then calmly cupped its hands over its ears. The man behind 0 pulled the trigger. It was not a tranquiliser this time and 541588 heard the loud shot ring out as it was entering the palace.

Something was up. It slowed down and gripped its shovel with both hands in a ready to swing position as it walked up the stairs and towards the source of the noise. There was a large crate outside one the doors and once 541588 got close, it could hear talking from inside the room behind the door. It paused outside and tried to listen in on the conversation, but the walls shielded the noise too well. It slinked to the opposite side of the crate, crouched down and began to think through what was to be its next steps.

Those on the other side of the door were probably the men from the helicopter. It had snuck past it on its way in, sitting docile on the lawn. But even if it wasn't them, why did it matter? The leader, or a group of leaders were inside there; they certainly weren't going to be the normal commune folk. What did matter, was that they were trapped in a confined space, unaware that 541588 was just on the other side of the door. Now was definitely the time to strike. It decided that it would open the door, smash it down if it were locked, then charge in, swinging in a frenzy, injuring as many as possible. Once they began to recover, it would move to just outside the room, and there it could take them one on one as they tried to exit through the doorway. It was a good plan.

However, as it stood up to begin, it noticed the knob turning and the door opening. Change of plan. It hurried behind the opening door and readied its shovel. The door opened. A man exited.

541588 was taken aback for a moment as it saw him. He was an ugly creature, his face deformed by scars and wrinkles, his hair ragged and knotted. The man moved to the crate, right in front of 541588. As 541588 watched him, it felt a powerful wave of hatred well up inside it. He was the man in the helicopter with the gun. It swung, and the blade connected with the man's neck. He screamed and fell to the ground squirming, blood all over him. The next hit connected with his back, and he screamed again. But 541588 was not finished; another strike caught him on his arm, then another on his head. By then, others had begun to exit the room as well. 541588 turned to the first of them,

who looked different but equally ugly to the one lying on the floor. He lunged forward, trying to grab the shovel, but 541588 stepped backwards, pivoted, before planting its shovel against his head, knocking him to the ground. There was a shout from inside the room: "Don't kill it!" and the others stepped back inside and closed the door before 541588 could follow them in. 541588 took this opportunity to inflict more pain on the two who were still left outside in the corridor with it. Then it tried the knob, but it was held tightly from the inside. It began to smash the shovel against the door as it waited for them to yield. Eventually there was another shout from inside the room, "I've got it!" and the door swung open abruptly. 541588 swung violently with its shovel as soon as it did, but it only caught the air. The others were far back at the opposite side of the room.

541588 looked at them all with a menacing stare. Then it stormed in, consumed by furious energy. It didn't even notice the tranquiliser dart that sailed into its chest, and the dart didn't seem to have any effect as 541588 continued forward. Its tiredness and acceptance of defeat was gone and buried, replaced by pure energy, pure adrenaline. It was a different person who had had those thoughts and feelings. The second dart lodged itself on its torso, but still 541588 lurched forward. The grand master had his hand in his pocket, wondering whether it would have to use his gun. Suddenly, however, 541588 stumbled, tripping on the body of 0, and the men took this opportunity and leapt at it, pinning it to the ground and removing its shovel in the process. 541588 clawed and shook and roared, but they held it tight, and waited as the anaesthetic took its effect.

The grand master left the room to check on the two who had been brutalised by 541588. They were smattered in blood, defaced with bruises and still writhing in pain. He knelt down next to one of them and laid gentle hand on its back. He reached his other hand into his pocket and leant the gun gently on the man's head. A shot. There was a groan from the other, and the Grand Master turned to him and soon his suffering too was alleviated. Then, the grand master dragged the two of them along the corridor and put them against the wall, before pushing the crate into the room.

541588 was unconscious now and the men were slumped along the sides of the room and on the bed, wearing empty expressions on their faces. The grand master faced each of the men, granting them a nod and a slight smile.

"Well, it's over. You have all done a good job, a great service to our world. Thank you."

There was a short pause.

"And, well, I spoke to you all earlier, and I think you all know what happens now."

He lingered idly for a few moments, looking over each of them again before handing his gun to the one closest to it. Then he left, dragging 541588 and 0 outside. The gun was received into willing hands; the man quickly inspected it and then brought it to a rest in front of his own face. The recoil flung the gun out of his hands and it landed neatly onto his lifeless lap. The rest of them had their turn, each committing the solemn ritual without hesitation, and after the succession of loud cracks the room descended into a deep silence. The grand master was dragging 541588 into another room when it heard the last of the noise. He didn't go back, didn't think about it, just continued on its way, lifting 541588 onto an empty bed.

## Chapter Twenty-One

541588 woke and saw the hideous being staring down at it. Its previous excitement had worn away with the anaesthetic and it was exhausted. It looked around. It was in a small room, lying on a bed, the man sitting on a chair, draped in black cloth. A door was at the foot of the bed. It closed its eyes again, and tried to find its bearings in time in its head. What had happened before it fell asleep? It remembered lying in its bed in its room, then running outside to do something. To do what? The memory eluded it, but it had a feeling that it was for some important task. It opened its eyes again. The man in the chair had not moved. 541588 shifted in the bed and attempted to sit up, but was forced to back into its original position by a searing pain in its upper back. This was too strange. 541588 closed its eyes again and promptly fell asleep.

The grand master waited patiently for 541588 to recover from the anaesthetic. He had some concern regarding the others, and feared that they might continue 541588's crusade when they woke. The psychologists in the central command had predicted that they would either return to their apartments or stay where they were, and while the grand master trusted them, he still felt a growing discomfort the longer he idled. He wanted to complete his plans before anything went wrong, but he also wanted to speak to 541588. He was forced by curiosity. He was no different from 0.

541588 woke up again, this time having recovered the full extent of its mental faculties. The ugly man was still there. Seeing him closely now it saw spots and stretchmarks on his face along with the wrinkles and white hair. He was old. He had to be from the central command like the others, but 541588 was too weak for animosity. "Where am I?"

"Still in the palace."

Yes, the palace. 541588 now remembered that it had come to the palace to kill the leader of the commune and had instead succeeded in bashing two men from the central control.

"What happened to the people you were with?"

"You killed two of them. The rest, they're gone now."

Killed them? At least that was a success.

"Who are you?"

"I'm the leader of the central commune."

541588 was quiet as it digested this new information. The leader of the central commune was right there. But it was still too weak.

"What are you going to do to me?"

"You'll be killed of course, but before that, I've decided to humour you. That's why I'm here, and you're still alive."

541588's expression remained neutral. It did not want to provide the man any satisfaction.

"Well since you're the leader you should be able to explain--"

"Explain what?"



"This world. Why do you oppress freedom and force a monotonous existence onto us?"

"I believe that you have read the pamphlet. The answers to your questions were explained forcefully and clearly there."

"No they weren't. The author just claimed that freedom was non-existent. That's not my experience. I feel free and I am free. And so was the author of that pamphlet and the authors of all the other books I've read. And so are you. Freedom clearly exists and it is completely benign. And it's only in freedom that things happen. That objects of beauty and interest are created. Our current world is dreary and repetitive. Nothing happens."

"Are you happy?"

"Why does it matter?"

"Are you happy?"

"No. I'm not."

"Well you're free and you're still unhappy."

"No. I'm unhappy because I'm not properly free. You and the others destroyed my mission to achieve full freedom. That is the source of my unhappiness."

"Then do you suppose that in a time when people were 'free' as you take the word to mean, people were happy? I'll tell you now, they weren't. Those works, those books you read were written by people who struggled with unhappiness, weighed down by their freedom and the freedom of their world. Works of beauty and interest, or whatever you crave, are only produced in unhappy states. A perfectly content person does not seek to change and create. And it is obvious that happiness is more important than unhappy creations. That is why our world is as it is."

"But it's not just happiness. When I was completely without freedom, before my rebellion, my experience also felt empty and meaningless."

"Well how is that different to how you feel now? Life is intrinsically meaningless. The only fulfilment is in ignorance, in distraction. It's always been like this. Before any organised society had been established, people were kept ignorant to the meaninglessness of their lives by the struggle for survival. In more recent history, it was in the attainment of material wealth and fame. But these distractions were unbalanced. People who conquered these distractions began to see the truth of the world, and those who failed were left unfulfilled and unhappy. Upon understanding this, it was only natural that a world was established in which a marriage of distraction and fulfilment was achieved. This is the world which we live in today."

"No, I've thought about this too. Life may be meaningless, but it is possible to impose meaning with freedom. That was how I found meaning. I imposed it myself. And that was why my goal of achieving universal freedom felt worthy and important."

"You're very wrong. You haven't imposed anything."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you're not free; not in any sense of the word. You've been controlled by us in the central command your whole life."

“What? That’s ridiculous. You couldn’t have. Did you want me to wander into the palace and read those subversive books? Or to convert others to my noble cause? To destroy the food of this commune and kill two of your allies?”

“Yes, to everything. There’s no BCM inside you. You aren’t conditioned properly. The books were right there for you to read. We didn’t intervene for months. Did you seriously think this was all just a lucky coincidence? You know the commune. It is perfectly efficient. Mistakes don’t happen, and if they did they would be corrected very quickly. No, I created you for a task, my task, to show the others in the central command that a commune could be destroyed if we were not careful[,] but there was no danger. You were under our control the whole time. You can stop pretending that you are anything else, that you are special, that you can choose to impose meaning. I’ve imposed everything onto you.”

“I chose to go to the library myself, picked the books that I wanted to read myself. The contents of the books did shape my views but they were combined with my own judgements and perceptions.”

“You still don’t understand. I’m telling you the truth. You didn’t really pick the books yourself, or choose to go to the library. It may have seemed like it, but we placed the books there for you. We knew your nature, shaped your nature, and had the books we wanted you to read dressed up, placed in optimal positions to ensure that you would read them. And we knew exactly what effect those books would have on you because we created you and moulded you to be affected the way we wanted.”

“You couldn’t have known. You couldn’t have known that I would end up killing two of your comrades. That I would starve the whole commune. You couldn’t have predicted that. I made those decisions after thinking deeply myself, alone. Hours spent considering different possibilities. I had failures before successes, went down wrong routes before finding the correct path. You’re telling me that you all put that inside of me, forced it to happen. Don’t be ridiculous. And what if I didn’t pick the books you wanted me to? Changed my mind, which I could easily have done at any moment. Your plan would have collapsed.”

“How do I make this clearer? We predicted and controlled everything, every aspect. If we thought that you might not pick the books we wanted, we would’ve given them to you directly. But we knew that you would choose them in the conditions we set up for you, without any doubt. We knew that you might kill some people. But that was always part of our plan. Why do you think you have been subdued so easily now?”

541588 looked around, looked down at itself and then turned back to the Grand Master.

“So you’re like Ingsoc, controlling absolutely everything.”

The grandmaster’s face darkened for a moment, and his lips curled upwards but his smile did not reach his eyes.

“Yes, we do control everything, but we are nothing like Ingsoc. How have you not realised this already? That society is one based on maintaining power for those in control. That society is a selfish one. As you well know, our goal is only achieving happiness and wellbeing for everyone. That is what our world is based on. Absolute control is just a necessary component of this. Unlike Ingsoc, where the leaders are happily and malevolently powerful, our leaders and controllers are the ones that are most unhappy; you as well of course, and I’m sorry that we picked you for fulfilling a task that doomed you to unhappiness.”

541588 turned away again, was silent for a long time gathering its thoughts. Did that man know what it was thinking now? Or did he only control the actions and not the thinking behind it? No that couldn't be right. He wouldn't be there arguing if he knew everything it was thinking. Eventually, 541588 turned back to the grand master and continued his questioning.

"What did I dream?"

"What?"

"You heard me. What did I dream?"

"You've never had any." Dreams had been modified out of the people in the commune, and there was nothing in what they changed in 541588 that could've affected that. Or at least that was what the scientists in the commune had said.

"I had dreams. I certainly did. See, you don't know everything."

"We know enough. When I said we knew everything, I meant everything that matters. Your dreams are unimportant to us and we wouldn't waste time learning what they are."

"Do you have dreams?"

"No."

He did.

"You're missing something. Something greater, something beyond yourself."

"I don't really care." The dreams of the grand master were all ridiculous and illogical scenarios, often centring on failures regarding his work. They were unpleasant and he wished he never had them.

"You don't really understand what I think do you?"

"Yes we do. Things that matter."

"Well what did I think when I saw the rising sun or this white palace or lightning or fire."

"What are you talking about?"

"Beauty and sublimity. The experience of true, true peace; not what you've manufactured. You don't understand"

"Well I have seen everything that you've mentioned."

"So?"

"I've seen it. That's all. It's nothing special."

"So you've never looked up at the stars at night. Admired it and lost yourself. You've never had the abandon of leaving your busy mind and having your experience completely overcome. Of having all your thoughts and feelings empty, overridden by nothing."

"Okay, it's nice to look at the stars."

"Well the others don't get that experience, do they?"

"What are you getting at?"

“Well these are just some of the things that are lost in this world. Losing yourself in a dream, or losing yourself in sublimity. Then awaking and feeling changed and being changed.”

“Is it worth it? Losing universal happiness for these intangible feelings? Anyway, the world will always be there for people to see, and if people don't have the same feelings as you when seeing things, well, that's just the way it is.”

“You control them.”

“We don't control their perception of the sublime or whatever you're talking about. Just like your dreams, we don't control that.

What did you dream exactly anyway?”

It felt personal, and yet, 541588 was keenly willing to reveal it all. It was the first time it had talked to another person, and despite its hatred of the man, the human connection felt good. It felt good to share its thoughts with another.

“It was confusing. I dreamt about the Winston, from the book I read, being captured, and I dreamt about K being killed; and me trying to help them but being ignored. I dreamt about my own failures too. Being caught, and having things injected into me.”

The grand master shifted in his seat.

“Being just like Winston and K, powerless in the face of an evil authority. But the dreams, they weren't defeating, no, they drove me, gave me my motivation; to improve, to never give up and make the same mistakes.”

“The dreams were true in the end though. You are defeated, exposed as an object of my control. Your suns, your palaces, your lightning, your dreams; they will go with you when you die and become nothing. They will just exist, the same as the organised concrete buildings, as the fields, as everything else in the commune, as everything you find ugly.”

“You're a machine! There's nothing inside you, that's why you don't understand it.”

“You can choose to believe that, but your end is coming soon. I will continue in the world I have built.”

“I've made my impact too. And you'll also die. We're all the same in the end.”

“Well I've had a real legacy. I've really changed the world. I've passed through a motion to replace everyone with artificial intelligence.”

“Everyone!”

“No, just the leaders I mean. That's my legacy, and yours too, though you are just an extension of my work.”

“You're just an extension of the forces that moulded you too.”

The grand master was quieted for some long seconds. When he began again, he seemed to be talking to itself.

“The future happiness and efficiency will soon be unequivocally secured. The system will be impenetrable. It will be great. There will never be someone like you again, created by mistake or on

purpose. There will be no more pain or suffering or errors. It will be the physical manifestation of perfection. A perfect world.”

541588 listened to his words but its mind was somewhere else. A feeling of emptiness washed over it, triggered by the ramblings of the grand master. There was something wrong to all that he said, a fatal flaw at the bottom of his reasoning, the bottom of everything, and 541588 sensed it but could not form it coherently in its mind. The grand master had stopped talking and a dreadful silence enveloped the room as 541588 continued to think. The grand master rummaged his hand in his pockets, before pulling out a small device. Suddenly, 541588 made sense of it all and its previous feelings and thoughts were forgotten, replaced by an absolute and pervasive clarity. It was a rediscovery of an idea it had managed to capture before, and its next question struck deep into the heart of this reawakened understanding.

“What’s the point?”

The grand master looked up and realising that the conversation had not ended, pocketed the device it had in its hands.

“Of what?”

“Of all this. Of this society. Of replacing leaders with artificial intelligence.”

“Efficiency. Happiness. Security. I’ve told you again and again. What don’t you understand?”

“What’s the point of all that?”

“Well it keeps everyone content and it can last forever. It’s intuitively good. That’s what tells us what to strive for. It is probably quite intuitive that a world in which people are free of pain and suffering is good, even to you.”

“But what’s so good about a world where people are content and free of pain and suffering?”

“It’s self-evident.”

“No it’s not. I don’t believe in it. If it were truly self-evident, I would instantly agree with you.”

“Yes, but you were specifically engineered to not like the world.”

“You’re missing the point. You’ve said the world is meaningless and that it is impossible to impose meaning, which I now agree with. If it’s impossible to attain any meaning, how do you argue that anything should be done?”

“It’s to distract ourselves. If we were to truly contemplate meaninglessness, we would be left in a nihilistic stupor. Only when we are distracted from it, can we act, and decide on things that are good and bad and what we should do.”

“But why? What’s the reasoning behind preferring distraction over contemplation and confusion? What’s the reasoning behind anything, other than that it is ‘intuitively good’?”

“So you’re saying because the world is meaningless, we can only contemplate the absurdity of our situation.”

“No. I’m saying that with total meaninglessness, there’s no way to value anything over anything else. So there’s no way to decide what to do. Everything is equivalent. What’s your response to that?”

“We can judge a world that is happy to be intuitively good and pursue this world because of it.”

“Well your judgement is still a false construction of meaning, isn't it? You don't have a reason for explaining why you should pursue things that are intuitively good do you?”

The Grand Master gradually made sense of 541588's argument. It had vocalised the obscure doubt and confusion the Grand Master had always held. This was why he was unhappy. It was nihilism. There was no reasoning that could escape it. 541588 continued staring at the Grand Master and he began his response. It was the only thing he could think that sounded feasible.

“I do what I do because it's the way of the world. The way it's been constructed. The way I've been constructed. It is. There is no other explanation, nothing else can be said that makes sense. But even knowing the world as meaningless, I cannot help but create arbitrary notions like intuition and goodness, cannot help but to see the world, through my actions, as having meaning, and myself as having free choice. Because it is the way I am. It is the way of the world.”

541588's expression had changed. It had had a fiercely quizzical look about it before, but now its face was against its hand, and its expression was sombre. The grand master's hands wandered into its pockets again, and the device was pulled out quietly. Seeing this, 541588 quickly interrupted his progress.

“Wait, I have one more question. Why is there a palace in this commune? Isn't everything meant to be about efficiency and utility?”

It shifted in its bed.

“I have work to do, but I'll give you one last answer. The commune we are in now is the first commune ever created. It was necessary to have someone who was from the outside be the first leader. It was the first commune after all. It took a long, a worldwide search to find a candidate who was capable enough to be the leader we needed and who was also willing to give up their old outside life. We had to throw in a few perks, like this palace, and the library to convince him. After that, it was more efficient to keep the palace than to destroy and replace it, and of course, it also served as an important structure in your developme-”

541588 pounced, launching from the bed hands first, knocking the device out of the grand master's hands. This was the way of its world. The device flew into the wall, fell onto the ground and there was a snap as a piece smashed off. The two of them scrambled for the rest of it; the grand master was there first, snatching the device up with one hand and pushing 541588 away with the other. 541588 managed to shove its arm past him and knock it out of his hands again. There was a tussle; their arms locked together and they tried to manoeuvre the other into a submissive position. Eventually, 541588's fatigue caught up with him, and the grand master pulled it onto the ground, placing a knee against its chest and wrapped both its arms wrapped in one of his. The grand master punched its face with his spare hand until it lost consciousness, then wiped his hand on the bed before picking up the device along with the piece that had broken off and sitting back on the chair to inspect the two pieces.

The damage was superficial. The device still turned on, and the grand master swiftly authenticated his identity and contacted the central command.

“Yes?”

“Start it. Start it now.”

“Yes.”

He should've been happy now. His life's work was done. But 541588 had ruined it. He had been working toward implementing artificial intelligence because he had always been working toward artificial intelligence. But what was the reason? Because it was good. Because it thought it was good. Because it had been made to think it was good. Because he existed in a time and place when people were made to think it was good. Because the world had him exist in this time. Because there was no reason to think it was good. Because nothing.

Because nothing. That was the truth.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

At the central command, the new mainframe was powered on, and after a few moments of loading, a message was displayed on the screen in bold black sans serif. PRESS ENTER TO BEGIN. On a small keyboard under the screen, the specified button was located and pressed. The screen dimmed to black, and a whirring emanated from the machine.

Back at the palace, the lid of the crate popped off and the sides opened, revealing a boxy, wheeled automation. It rolled along the hallway, into the room where the grand master was sitting and 541588 was laying. It paused in front of the two of them while its front gave way to the barrel of a firearm. The grand master closed its eyes. 541588 had just woken up, and opened its eyes at this source of new noise. The bullets flew out in a flurry of flashes and bangs. They found their way into the heads of each of them. Both died instantly. Felt nothing, became nothing. Gone were their thoughts, memories, feelings. Gone was everything except their lifeless bodies.

The gun was retracted, and in its place two hooks emerged. These were latched onto their clothes, and the robot wheeled itself out, dragging the bodies behind. It slid down the stairs with its load and exited the palace, accelerating as it made its way outside. It soon arrived at the hospital. A mechanical arm reached out and turned the doorknob, and the robot pushed itself inside with the bodies, depositing them in a small empty room. Once it left, the ground gave way inside the room, and the bodies were incinerated. The only evidence left of their existence was a small pile of ash, the sum total of the Grand Master and 541588, mixed together and indistinguishable. For the rest of the afternoon, the robot continued its trips from the palace to the hospital, each time bringing two bodies, and eventually, 0 and the troops that accompanied the grand master were left as piles of ash as well. There was one more body inside the storage shed to fetch, and the robot proceeded in its direction.

*Go to the shed. I am going to the shed. Go to the shed. I am going to the shed. There are stairs in front of me. Go up the stairs. Initiate go up the stairs sequence. I am going up the stairs. I have reached the top of the stairs. End go up the stairs sequence. Go to the shed. I am going to the shed. There is a door in front of me. Open the door. Initiate open the door sequence. I am opening the door. The door is open. End open the door sequence.*

*Battery low. I need battery. Charge battery. Battery medium. I need battery. Charge battery. Battery full. I do not need to charge battery. Go to the shed. I am going to the shed.*

*I am at the shed. Initiate body recognition sequence. I am looking for signs of the body. I see an object lying on the floor. Object matches body description. Body found. Hook the body. Initiate hook sequence. The body is hooked. End hook sequence. Go to the hospital. I am going to the hospital. Go to the hospital. I am going to the hospital. There are stairs in front of me. Go down the stairs. Initiate go down the stairs sequence. I am going down the stairs. I have reached the bottom of the stairs. End go down the stairs sequence. Go to the hospital. I am going to the hospital. There is a door in front of me. Open the door. Initiate open the door sequence. I am opening the door. The door is open. End open the door sequence. Go to the hospital. I am in the hospital. Deposit the body. Initiate deposit object sequence. I am depositing the object. The object is deposited. End deposit object sequence. Return to default position. I am returning to the default position. There are stairs in front of me. Go up the stairs. Initiate go up the stairs sequence. I am going up the stairs. I have reached the top of the stairs. End go up the stairs sequence. Go to the shed. I am going to the shed. There is a door in front of me. Open the door. Initiate open the door sequence. I am opening the door. The door is open. End*



*open the door sequence. Mode alert. Mode changed from active to alert. Wait. Wait. Wait. Wait.  
Wait.*

## Chapter Twenty-Three

News of the motion passing had reached most of them. When they had been given the afternoon off they all knew what was to come. They returned to their rooms in varying states of emotional distress. Only a small number of them were indifferent; the rest were on a spectrum that ranged from sadness to fear to utter torment. There was certainly no conditioning about the goodness of death for them.

The politicians also knew that they were soon to die. They had time to consider it for many months, ever since the grand master had first suggested that they could all be replaced by AI, and so they were well-prepared. Not in any practical sense; there was never any matters to settle, but emotionally. Most of them were calm as they awaited their end; they had come to terms with what was to happen to them, and were content in the knowledge that their deaths would secure their perfect world into the future. For the three that had opposed, there was a tinge of regret, a tinge of melancholy. But they too had long accepted their fate. They had lost the war of ideas; this was the consequence.

It was announced that the AI was turned on over the intercom. There was a hush, a pall across the entire central command. The last remnants of activity were two chemists and two engineers working in a dingy basement in the centre of the facility. The chemists had concocted two different mixtures, sitting them side by side on a long table that rested against the wall. One was a powdery white substance, while the other was a clear liquid. Next to these was a large pot filled three-quarters of the way up with water, and on the other side were four syringes, kept in tight sterile packets. In the middle of the room there was a metal pyramid structure with a flattened top. One of the chemists lugged the pot across and rested it on top of this pyramid, while the other adjusted the buttons and knobs on the side. Soon, the water began boiling and as it did, the engineers sprang into action. They had earlier placed four massive fans around the pyramid, and now they fine-tuned these to ensure they directed the steam up into the air ducts. Then the white powder was added and violently mixed by the chemists. The steam thickened into plumes of white smoke that disappeared up out of sight through the grates in the ceiling. The engineers turned on the duct system, and the smoke was carried through to every room.

The smoke calmed them, left them drowsy and put them to sleep. Normal sleep first, quickly followed by eternal sleep. Most of them barely realised what was happening, even those who had been nervously waiting. Meanwhile, the four in the basement were opening the packeted syringes. Their movements were clumsy, as the smoke began to affect them as well. They all managed to draw some lethal liquid from the second mixture, and three were able to inject themselves. The other, his mind clouded by the smoke, dropped his syringe and fell onto the floor asleep. He was the last one alive. Not for long. Within minutes, a robot had appeared at the door to the basement, and it delivered a lethal shot into his head.

Everyone in the central command was dead now, and the AI sent robots to pick up the bodies. The transition of power was complete.

Across the world, a similar event was taking place. In the preceding months, robots in crates had been secretly deposited near every commune. Now they awoke and travelled into the apartments of the ignorant leaders. It was late afternoon and most of them were idling as usual. The robots appeared at their doors; then, the simultaneous ambush of thirteen thousand zeros, all death, all

nothing. Their bodies, dumped into a fiery void at their commune's hospital. Then the robots took their place where the Os used to sit. The change was imperceptible.

In the following months, normalcy was completely restored. Through the robots, the AI had organised the transferral of grain to 541588's commune and sent extra robots there to secure those who had been damaged by 541588, and integrate them back into commune life.

Soon, perfection reigned supreme. Every morning, in every commune, the workers woke up in order. They ate their delicious and nutritious breakfast. They marched to work. Did their work. Ate lunch. Worked more. Had dinner. Returned to their apartments. Fell into sweet sleep. Day after day, night after night. Every year the oldest died, and the newest entered the world. The robots sat in front of the screens. The earth turned around itself, turned around the sun, as the moon inched away and the sun expanded. In the communes, the cycle only continued. Centuries, millennia without fail.

Then one day, the earth was swallowed by the expanding sun, disintegrated in an instant. Everyone, and everything on it was gone forever. But the world was still there. In it, other civilisations like the one on earth were created and destroyed. Gradually, over billions of years, the ones being destroyed began to outnumber the ones being created, as everything floated away from everything else. Floating and disintegrating. Floating and disintegrating. Eventually, the last of it disappeared. The planets. The stars. The holes of gravity. Everything. In the end, nothing changed. There was nothing left, nothing to come. Just like always. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.