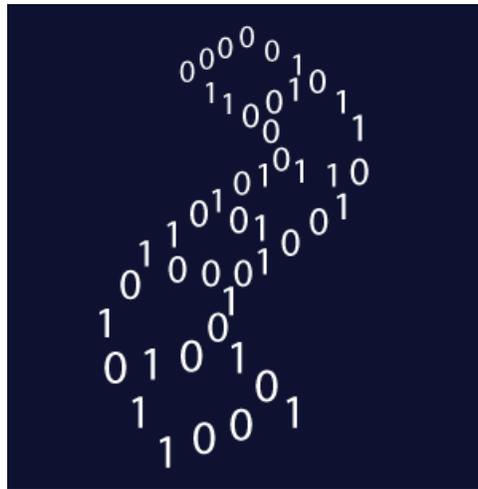


Unleashing Janus



By Ted David Harris

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Chapter One

In Knowledge Hides Death

Sam had traveled one path for so long the fact it was a choice often escaped her. Sitting in the dark waiting gave her time to reflect on this, one of the reason she typically avoided all forms of waiting. Her path was not, had not been, and would not be in the foreseeable future a pleasant one. The path she followed was stark, colored with only lies and deceit. It was one that she must never reminisce on nor dream of what lay ahead. In truth, it was not even her path; it belonged to others. Others dictated her actions, her future. Traveling down undesirable paths is just a part of life; Sam often reminded herself of this. But, while most people toil through their unwanted lives due to apathy or lack of will to change Sam was different. She lived her life by choice; it was a willing sacrifice to what she hoped was something great, something revolutionary. It was the will to create change that led her down her lonely path. To be apart of that revolution she knew would be worth her life. And her part, it seemed, was to cease be a person; Sam was an instrument to an end and that end she would see. Nothing could prevent this.

Nothing would prevent this. She could not imagine any force of nature or man short of death that would stop her from her task. Sam could never allow doubt or fear play in her mind.

“Focus on the Now!” she told herself as she waited in the dark.

Those were the only words that helped Sam find sanity. All she had was the Now, the ephemeral point in time that only existed with no future, end nor desire. It pushed her doubts and fear from her. It allowed her for many years to travel this path without reservation. Her dreams of a family, the simple life with one true love she accepted as being unreachable. In the Now she would find peace but the present she would endure, the past she would forget and the future she would ignore.

Under the eerie glow of her computer screen Sam sat silently and waited. To continue a message was required. Just one message and she would carry on devoid of any doubt as she had for so long before. All Sam could do was let time pass by her; her life’s path hinged on this message.

The message was three hours over due. This was not like Keiko; she did not have the same concerns others did about promptness. She was never late. Sam bit her lip as she watched her screen. This task was not Sam’s style; she just wanted to get this task over with. What she was doing was for Keiko and Sam wanted to nothing to be a surprise to her. Sam needed Keiko’s blessing.

A new email arrived; it was from Keiko. It read:

Strive to catch water

Futile is the task at hand

But thirst must be satisfied

Sam laughed to herself. The operation was a go although Keiko was not pleased. She was having doubts but unwilling to say no, so much had already been done. Their conversation was not over on this matter. Keiko could be infuriatingly indecisive on matters such as these. She understood anyone harmed would be harmed for her and both Keiko and Sam knew people would be harmed this time.

Tony impatiently watched as his team left for lunch. He seldom went out for lunch anymore. Lunchtime now was devoted to his new online girlfriend, Sam. She was a mixed blessing. Sam had a knack for encouraging him to do things normally he would not. There were now at least three naked videos of him in her ownership. Tony prayed none of them had found their way onto the Internet. Still, her dynamism was something his life sorely lacked. A good night out on the town for Tony meant watching a movie alone and a meal with super sized fries. His instant messenger flashed; a new message had arrived. Anxiously Tony read the message; it was from Sam. The message read, “GoreousNDangerous: Any one there?”

Tony sighed. Just getting a message from her felt sexual to him. Sam’s avatar was a scantily clad woman with a sword. That about summed her up. This was not a typical woman for him. Half the time his online girlfriends ended up being thirty years older than him or worse. Sam was the real thing. Her eyes alone made him long to be near her; she had beautiful Asian eyes. Tony had dreamed about a woman like her. It

made him ashamed she made him nervous. For now, he was comfortable with having the relationship be only a virtual one. "I'm here," he typed.

"GorgeousNDangerous: I know u r there. Is anyone else?"

"What devilry was she up to?" Tony wondered. After a moment's thought he typed, "All gone to lunch."

"GorgeousNDangerous: Turn on you video."

Tony mumbled to himself. No one was allowed to use video chats at work. They violated half a dozen security and personnel rules. Video chat had at least three easy to exploit security holes that he knew of. He decided not to respond.

Tony's instant messenger flashed again. The text, "GorgeousNDangerous: I will do what I did last weekend," appeared.

This interested him. "Can you wait?" Tony typed hastily. He then nervously watched the messenger. There was a pause.

"GorgeousNDangerous:I can only do it for a bit. I am at work too. I am really, really in the mood now."

"I am at work. I can't do this at work," Tony typed.

"GorgeousNDangerous: I am soooooooooo in the mood."

Tony "We have security restriction."

"GorgeousNDangerous: you are the domain admin, or so you told me. Did you lie about that because I said I liked domain admins?"

"Cannot do it."

"GorgeousNDangerous: Don't be such a boob!"

"After work."

“GorgeousNDangerous: boob boob boob boob boob boob boob boob!”

Tony sighed then typed, “I might get caught.” His hands shook as he typed in his message. He then added, “Let me go home. I can get home in thirty minutes. I will leave work now.”

“GorgeousNDangerous: I cant leave work.”

Tony did not respond.

“GorgeousNDangerous: Well I will do it anyways turn on the video if you want to watch.”

Sam waited till Tony had turned on the video. His eager face popped up on her computer screen. It was like a teenage boy getting his hands on his first girly magazine, Sam thought to herself. Little by little she backed away from the video camera till the top half of body came into view on the screen. Sam smiled as she watched herself in the video feed. Slowly she let one of her dress straps fall down then gazed seductively into the camera. It was odd stripping in front of the computer, she thought to herself. It felt more public than when someone was in the room; as if the whole world could be watching and Sam would never know. She let the dress fall off one breast revealing her bra. Slowly she removed her second strap and her summer dress fell hastily to the floor. Then Sam twisted around to show off her form. Her body was fit; she got more exercise and dieting into her daily schedule than she needed. Sam kissed at the camera then leisurely removed her bra keeping her breast covered with her hands. After a several

seconds of taunting him with her nearly naked breast she raised her arms above her head. Knowing to let him get a good look she froze for a moment resisting her urge to cover her breast back up. It still felt dirty to strip after all these years she thought to herself. Sam kissed towards the camera, walked up close to it and then positioned her panties in front of the lens.

Suddenly, Tony turned off the video feed. His last message read “Tony: Bye. They are back from lunch. We can pick up where you left off later.”

Sam raced back to her computer and checked the logs. The video feed ran long enough for her virtual machine rootkit to be installed on Tony’s computer. She was in. Once her rootkit was installed all the commands sent to the computer’s operating system first went through her layer giving her complete control of the computer. VM rootkits that attached themselves as a layer to the OS kernel were not new; Joanna Rutkowska designed the first such rootkit, Blue Pill, some time ago. Rootkits based on Blue Pill were now easily stopped but Sam’s was different; it was unstoppable and undetectable, for now. Sam put a robe on and began to hack his system. Hacking topless was not her thing; she did, however, require an Irish coffee.

Tony was domain admin. A domain admin had rights to everything on the computer network; they were the all-seeing overlords in their own little world. His network privileges would make this job simple. Sam quickly disabled the intrusion detection system; that would give her time to find something of interest without raising alarms. Now that she was hidden from view she opened a port twenty-three to the outside world. Network ports were tightly controlled. Each port was used for a different service like browsing on the Internet or transferring files between networks. Port eighty

was for Internet connections, http services; Port twenty-three was used for telnet. While port eighty limited the commands you can on the computer, port twenty-three gave virtually unlimited access. Most companies disabled port twenty-three to the outside to limit damage a hacker could do. After Sam enabled port twenty-three she pointed the autonomous data acquisition machine (ADAM) to it.

This site was the best choice to figure out what *they* knew. If the rules had changed it was important to know what knowledge *they* held. ADAM methodically gained access to every major server. It was designed like Internet search engine scanning documents on the server for keywords then retrieving the contents for further examination. Sam let the program trawl through the list of databases and files to find things of interest. After a few minutes the application displayed a list of targeted databases. The mining application then locked onto a database Tony did not have access to and started hack in. Sam thought about halting the program it but stop herself; they had to find out what *they* knew. Quickly, it hacked in and started retrieving documents. Results began to scroll across the screen. A second list popped up displaying a log of the network activity. Sam scanned through the log to make sure she was the only unauthorized activity. A thief needed solitude. She held her Irish coffee to her lips captivated by one outbound data stream. It looked wrong—very wrong. ADAM did not indicate they had been detected but she felt something was watching. The outbound stream then started to repeat; it was a message. Sam raced over to the machine running ADAM, turned ADAM off then unplugged the machine to assure it was offline. When playing against with pros it was better to assume once you were detected your system was compromised; she was not the only one who could build an undetectable rootkit.

Sam ran a clean-up script to remove all evidence of hacking on the network. It slowly executed its commands one by one. As each command ran an error message appeared. She *had* been detected. Reluctantly she yanked to network connection from her primary machine. It was an ignoble end to such a beautiful set up.

Sam opened up an application on her laptop. She typed in a phone number and waited. The application cycled through various encryption routines then dialed the phone number. It was too risky using landlines or cell phones to communicate. Through the Internet you could fool someone watching into thinking your were transferring large files or playing a game. This application piggybacked on a popular online multi-player gaming site to set up phone links. It would take a well-written system a few minutes to even suspect a voice transmission.

“Sam?” asked a voice on the other end. The voice was distorted but urgency in the tone would be heard.

“John,” said Sam, “I got in.” She sounded distressed.

“Can we talk? Are we clear?”

Sam looked at the phone application. “Everything looks fine on this end.”

“It is clear here as well. We have just a few minutes though. Did the ID detect ADAM?” asked John

“Yes,” said Sam her voice revealing tremendous self-loathing.

“How?”

Sam said in a frantic voice, “John, I got in fine but one of the databases... it must have been a plant. It set out a signal when ADAM accessed it. It was waiting for us, luring us in and like fools we stumbled into their trap.” She downed her Irish coffee.

“It was a trap?” asked John excitedly.

“It... it looks that way,” said Sam. “Maybe we have a mole, maybe this is part of their new security.”

“Did it know what system we were using? Do *they* know about ADAM? About *her*?”

“*They* could take a guess. *They* could very well know. Why else plant such trap?”

“Did we get anything?” asked John.

“I don’t know,” said Sam. “Maybe, but one thing is clear, *they* know of us and *they* know how good we are.”

“A big mistake. This whole operation was a big mistake—”

“We should have been more careful,” growled Sam. “I could have blocked all outside transmissions, intercepted it—”

“We cannot think of everything,” said John with a calm voice.

“This is serious! Have to protect her. We have to assume *they* know everything. She could already be compromised—”

“Let me see—”

“We should all go into hiding,” said Sam.

“Who should hide?”

“The Bletchley hundred,” Sam said. “We did not cover our tracks as well as we should have.”

“I will send out word. You should make way to Hut Four—”

Sam asked, “What about my contact?”

“The pigeon?”

“We should do something for Tony. He is not a bad guy,”

“We have greater concerns than him,” said John.

“We cannot let him just hang there,” pleaded Sam. “This is serious. Something may happen to him. I... used him. I don’t use people, not like that—”

“We have to protect her—”

“Then I will go—”

“No! I will see what I can do,” said John. “I always do what you ask don’t I?”

“That is why I love you so,” said Sam. “Take care.”

“I always do,” John said.

On an old metallic chair in a room carpeted with trash Tony sat quietly in fear. The stale air hinted at the torment the room had been witness too. The bloodstains on the floor exposed the suffering others had endured here. This room was a place people disappeared from.

Two men stood beside Tony, one was blond the other dark-haired. Both were in cheap suits.

“We know you know who hacked the system,” said the dark-hair man in a frantic, halting voice.

“I don't know. I told you before I don't know anything!” screamed Tony.

“You are domain admin, you know everything,” said the dark-hair man.

“That system has never been successfully hacked. It had to be an inside job. The logs were clean,” said the blond man. He slowly felt his upper lip with his tongue.

“I know nothing!” shouted Tony. “It was not me! Do you have any proof I took the information?”

“Who helped you?” asked the dark-hair man. “Give us names.”

“How many times to I have to tell you I know nothing?” asked Tony. He whimpered softly.

“That is a pity. It would be much better for you if you knew something,” said the blond man.

The dark-hair man smiled briefly then said, “Knowing nothing means you are of little use.”

“OK I am little use to you so what?” snapped Tony in a tired voice. “Where is my lawyer?”

The blond man’s cell phone rings for moment before he slowly answers it. After a moment of listening to the phone he hangs up and the two men whisper to one another.

“You were right,” said the blond man. “You know nothing”

“To bad for you,” said the dark-hair man.

The blond man pulls out a syringe.

Tony looked at the syringe. “What are you going to do?” he asked.

“Hold still,” said the blond man with a laugh.

The dark-hair man grabbed Tony from behind and the blond man pulled out Tony’s right arm and looked for a vein.

Tony yelled, “You can’t do anything to me! I am a US citizen.”

“That just means we cannot allow anyone to know it was us who killed you,” said the blond man.

The dark-hair man added, “That just means we have to be creative.”

“We excel at being creative.”

“Call it a passion.” The dark-haired man smirked proudly.

“You can't kill me people would ask questions,” yelled Tony.

“We can do anything we want,” said the blond man. He slowly inserted the needle into the Tony’s arm. “It will be a car accident, nothing that dramatic. Quit moving. Work with me here.”

Tony cried, “Why are—?”

“To protect,” said the blond-haired man firmly.

“We do what others are too weak to do,” said the dark-haired man, “for the protection of all.”

“Except perhaps you,” added the blond-haired man with a smile.

The dark-haired shot the blond a disapproving look.

Tony let out a whimper then pleaded, “I can help you, I have admin rights...”

“That is of no use to us,” said the blond man merrily.

“Someone like me is useful,” said Tony. “I have global access to my work surely that can be of some use. I know things.”

“Wait,” said the dark-hair man.

“We already have global access,” said the blond man dismissively. He finished inserting the needle.

The dark-hair man motioned to the blond man to halt. The blond man started back at him impatiently.

“I will do anything,” said Tony eyeing the syringe nervously.

“Give us one name,” said the dark-hair man. “There has to be someone you are not telling us about. Something to show you are willing to help us.”

Tony thought for a second.

“Your life span will vary greatly on whether you give us something,” said the dark-hair man.

Tony’s face lit up with a realization. “Sam! I just remembered Sam was the last person I made contact with before the intrusion. I am so stupid! Why did I not see it? She must have installed something on my computer while we were chatting—”

“Who is she?” asked the dark-hair man.

“My online girlfriend—”

“Why did you not mention her before?” snapped the blond man angrily. His finger toyed with the syringe in Tony’s arm.

“She is just my girlfriend,” said Tony. “I just did not want to bring her in to this that is all.”

“Why should we believe you now?” asked the blond man.

“Just before the break in she... there was the video link up we did,” said Tony with hesitation. “Just check my computer. Her call name is GorgeousNDangerous and her first name is Sam—”

“GorgeousNDangerous,” muttered the blond angrily to himself.

“How can we find her?” asked the dark-hair man.

“I only know her call name and her email address. Everything about her is on my home machine—”

“Check it out,” commanded the blond man into a mirror. “Both machines.”

“Heard anyone mention someone named Eve? How about Adam? Keiko?” growled the dark-hair man.

“Eve? Adam? Like Adam and Eve?” asked Tony hopefully.

The two men exchanged glances.

“If it checks out,” said the dark-hair man. “We will allow you to serve us.” He nodded to the blond man who reluctantly removed the syringe.

“How did you meet her?” asked the dark-hair man.

“I...” Tony strained to remember how they met. “She liked my homepage. She contacted me. They we started chatting... you know. Sam was very aggressive.” Tony laughed a little.

The dark-hair man and the blond man talked privately for a moment. Then stood on either side on Tony.

The blond man stared into Tony’s eyes with frustration. “If any word of this gets out we won’t come after you,” said the blond man. “That window of opportunity has passed.”

“We will come after your parents, your sisters and your niece,” said the dark-hair man.

“And we won’t just kill them,” added the blond man. “That is too obvious. We will give them some strange genetic disease, incurable that takes years of suffering before final death.”

“And after they have all suffered and died then of course you will commit suicide,” added the dark-hair man.

“It will be so tragic,” said the blond man. “They may even make a mini-series out of it.”

Tony shouted, “Leave them out of this!”

“You do realize you are in no position to make any demands,” said the blond man.

The dark-hair man laughed the said, “We own you now. Don't forget this. We will know everything you say, do and even think. And we will be asking favors of you. Many favors.”

The blond man rolls the syringe across Tony's right cheek noticeably frustrated. “I think you are going to screw up,” he said. “And then I can have my fun. But, the easy way has passed. Next time I get to have real fun.”

John was handcuff to the metal chair Tony had recently occupied. His face was beaten up and his shirt soaked in sweat.

“What were you doing at Tony's home John?” asked the dark-hair man.

John growled, “Nothing.”

The blond man walked around John then asked, “Do you know him?”

“No,” said John quickly.

“I believe you know him but he does not know you,” snapped back the blond man. “Who else was involved?”

John laughed then said, “I don't know what you are talking about.”

“The other guy would have been messy to touch,” said the dark-hair man.

The blond man said merrily, “You on the other hand, we can do anything we want to.”

“I have rights,” snapped John.

“Do you?” asked the blond man with a laugh.

“Some one will notice,” said John.

“But, will anyone who matters notice?” asked the blond man. “You have done our work for us. You have made yourself disappear. You have spent all this time making it look as if you don't exist.”

“We pulled your file,” explained the dark-hair man. “Nothing is really here. Very clean, no criminal record, no dept, no family, just a birth date and a Social Security number. If I did not know better I say all of this was made up. Hmmm?”

“Who would know if you just... disappeared?” asked the blond man. “We can keep you for years till you tell us who is involved.”

“Over time,” said the dark-hair man, “you will tell us every little detail.”

“Even if I do you will never find them,” snapped John.

“We have out ways,” said the dark-hair man.

The blond man pulled out a pair of pliers and said, “Your teeth.” The blond man laughed for a moment opening and closing the pliers. “Your teeth. The one thing you are not going to need while in our care are those beautiful teeth of yours.”

Chapter Two

We Do What It Takes

“People who believe they are very sneaky are the easiest to find,” read the computer screen as Josh logged onto Janus. “Huh.” He sighed and with sarcasm snapped, “I love your login sayings.”

“I come up with them when I am stoned or drunk or more likely both.” Travis thumbed hastily through stacks of printouts. “Fitting given I wrote most of Janus while drunk and stoned.” He looked at the print outs and sighed; Janus was behaving badly. Janus had a habit of behaving badly just before the weekend. It was a conspiracy; he

knew it. No one wanted him to have fun on his weekends.

“So, what do you think it is doing?” asked Josh.

Travis tapped his fingers on the desk and put down the printouts. “The jerk has gotten obsessed on something. I keep getting mounds of readouts on a firm in Texas. It looks like there is nothing to it. It is just a small software firm, nothing special.”

Josh asked, “What has it got obsessed?”

“That is like asking someone why they jack off,” said Travis “That is between Janus and itself.”

Josh laughed. “Is that a crude way of saying you don’t know.”

“Yes it is,” agreed Travis. “Without crudeness I am nothing. You would be amazed at how boring I am; you would be astounded. You should be grateful that I am crude. One week without my crudeness and you would be begging for me to return to my old crude ways. Without my crudeness your mind would drift into insanity having only the meager crops of simpleton jokes reaped from this desert of humorous stimuli, this dweeb infested land.”

Josh said nothing for a moment to let Travis have his moment. From year of working with him Josh learned it was best to give him his moments. “Should we kill the hunt?”

“Let it run a bit more,” said Travis. “Let see if Janus crashes another server. I want the systems guys to yell at me one more time today.”

“You like it when they yell at you.”

“It beats a dominatrix,” said Travis with mock honesty. “At night I imagine them spanking me. I think Joe would look good in a black leather hood and cat tails in one

hand don't you?"

"I always assumed you're into spanking others," said Josh.

"When you are being spanked you are the center of attention," explained Travis, "why would I want anyone but me to be the center of attention? I mean it is me we are talking about. It is revolting thinking of anyone else getting attention other than me."

"Select Data Connections is the only cruel mistress I need."

"Bravo! Bravo indeed!" shouted Travis. "You made a funny!" He clapped proudly. "I *have* taught you something. And all this time I thought I was failing to guide you from dweebom."

"So, are we done here? It seems like we are done but we have done absolutely nothing." Often times Travis and Josh would spend hours on what to Josh seemed like nothing at all. He would waste hours a day with him yet do the work of ten programmers. As far as he knew Travis never slept.

"We are done here!" exclaimed Travis. "Doing nothing if done for the right reason is like doing one big thing. A big piece of nothing. A big steaming pill of nothing! A huge fuc—"

"I got too much non-nothing stuff to do," complained Josh as he drank his sixth cup of coffee for the day. His stomach turned in anger.

"So, did you get anywhere with that project?" asked Travis.

"Hell no," exclaimed Josh. "And that marketing guy keeps hovering around my office waiting for updates. Like a vulture that creep is."

Travis laughed, "Thought as much."

Josh stared at Travis angrily.

“That is why I gave it too you,” explained Travis. “I am this far,” he held his thumb and finger close together, “from tossing that creep out a window. Killing a marketing guy would not look good on my quarterly reviews. But, I don’t think technically it is a crime. It is like hitting a rat with your car, right? You just have to call the humane society when you get home.”

“Thanks a bundle.”

Travis patted Josh on the shoulders. “Always there for you—”

“I have some questions about the project.”

“And I have very few answers,” said Travis. “Well, this meeting is done.”

“You are not going to help me?”

“Josh, Josh, Josh, Josh, hang in there,” said Travis.

Josh stared at Travis and said nothing.

“Does that count as help?” asked Travis.

“No.”

“Then I am not going to help you,” said Travis. “Nope, not gonna do it.”

Josh sighed and looked through the meeting room glass window. “Should we leave?”

“Shit no... Arg! I am hung over. I need to hide. I think people can smell the alcohol on my breath.”

“They can and a not so subtle smell of pot as well,” said Josh with a laugh. “How many breath mints have you eaten today?”

“Forty-two.”

Josh laughed. “I swear, last night seemed epic in the intake of alcohol.”

“Smart thing I charged it all on the company card.”

Josh paused then asked. “So, did you get anywhere with her last night?”

“Ha! I think by the end of the night all she wanted was my death certificate.”

“Wow, you worked her all night.”

Travis said with a sour tone, “Spent at least fifty on drinks alone, of course it was company money but it is the gesture that counts.”

“So what happened? Give me details.”

“She has that thing that blocks most women from dating me, what it called?”

“Taste?” offered Josh.

Travis placed his finger on his nose. “Right on.”

“Given the quality of the bar I am surprised you managed to find a woman with taste there,” said Josh.

“That was a fairly scummy bar,” said Travis. “I noticed you did not talk to one woman last night.”

“I am still getting over Cindy.” In truth he was still getting over something else from past, but knew better than to share this with Travis.

“Really? Wow, what has it been nine months.”

“Ten. You know how it goes it comes and goes. And you should talk! You keep a photo of your ex, Alex, in your handheld,” said Josh. “You show it to me at least once a week.”

“Hey, Alex is hot. You never mind looking at her—”

“I love her eyes—”

“She is part Chinese you know,” snapped Travis, “You are too aren’t you?”

“Native American, Apache,” corrected Josh quickly.

“That is right...” said Travis wistfully.

“Aren’t you part—?”

“I am part everything and a complete asshole,” interrupted Travis.

Josh prodded the topic of Travis’ lost love with a gleeful energy. “But you are not over her, Alex, or you would not show the photo to me everyday.”

“I show her off because she is beautiful. I would never share my photo with my last boyfriend. He was not as hot as I led you to believe, too hairy. I want you to think only hot people want to have sex with me.”

“I never know when you are giving me shit.”

“If it is not about code it is shit,” said Travis. “Well... sometimes if it is about code it is shit as well... it is rather difficult to determine when I am not giving shit. I do pity you in my own way... Now *that* was shit.”

Josh toyed with his pen. “Alex *is* hot.”

“Want to see the naked photos?” asked Travis. “I got some really hot videos of us doing it as well.”

Josh said nothing but gave Travis a scornful stare.

“Prude,” snapped Travis. “We were fun to watch. She did this thing with her—”

“Why don’t you track her down?”

“I don’t think she would be that interested in talking to me, not after what I did,” said Travis seriously. “My only hope is that she would spank me, more likely she would shoot me.”

“Pity,” said Josh, “rare beauty.”

“Is it just me or is Tami’s skirt getting shorter and shorter the longer she works here?”

“It is just you,” said Josh.

“Damn! I need to start compiling metrics on the length of her skirts.”

“Oh no! The boss is coming,” warned Josh. “Perhaps we should say something work related?”

After the Mark entered Travis said loudly, “So, that is how to get someone really drunk without them knowing. Tomorrow, I will let you in on the secrets to really good pot brownies, like the ones I brought to our last Christmas party.”

Josh nodded his head as if in awe at the feet of a master, “I will have to remember that.”

Mark let out a loud sigh then growled, “You two... if I was not stuck with you I would fire you. But, SDC seems to need you.”

“Did you just say STD?” asked Travis. “He *did* just say STD didn’t he? Are you trying to tell us something?”

Mark sighed. “I am stuck with you aren’t I?” he asked himself sadly.

“I think you are right. You are stuck with us, we built Janus,” said Travis. “The code I wrote... ha... let just say it would take more than a few geniuses to figure out what the hell I was doing.”

“We all know what you were on when you wrote it,” said Josh.

“Yes, I may be stuck with you but I don’t have to give you raises,” snapped back Mark.

Long pause

“Did I ever tell you you have a wonderful forehead?” said Travis.

“Yes, the way the florescent lights gleam off of it is quite stunning,” added Josh.

“And just look at that little wonderful crest of hair he still has left.”

“Oh, now that you mentioned it,” agreed Travis. “Damn! I would like to get you into bed. Mm mm, you’d be tasty!”

“Shut up. We got an important job coming. Is Janus up?” asked Mark.

“It is purring my master,” said Travis, “just like me.” He winked at Mark.

Mark frowned at Travis then turned to Josh. “We have another fifty million records from Wal-Mart. Must have been a good month shopping.”

“Great, I will monitor the load. How about the automobile black boxes?” Josh asked.

Marks face lit up with excitement, “We got the contract settled. Next quarter we will get live data. We can track people live as they drive.”

“Cool shit. Live tracking of cars!” exclaimed Travis merrily.

“Maybe we could have billboards change as you drive by?” offered Josh.

“Or have gas prices go up just as you are running out of gas,” suggested Travis.

Josh smiled wickedly then said, “Or increase your insurance rates if you start driving—”

“While you are driving recklessly—” Travis laughed merrily.

“Instantaneous car insurance rate adjustment!” exclaimed Josh.

“Select Data,” said Travis, “we know what you did, what you are doing and what you are going to do. We know more than Santa Claus. So, keep doing what you are doing so we can catch you.”

“Now, I know why I hired both of you,” said Mark.

“Because I have naked photos of you and your mom?” asked Travis.

“Devious mothers,” Mark said as he walked out of the room.

“He knows me too well,” said Travis.

“So, doing anything after work?” asked Josh.

“Drinking then annoying some woman at the bar, getting slapped, then, let me remember... I just wrote it down...yeah... more drinking.”

“Go figure... You keep saying we built Janus,” said Josh.

“We did.”

“I have this feeling it is more like you built it and I was merely your minion. I fact if anyone helped you build Janus wouldn't it be Tami not me?”

“Igor,” said Travis, “you underestimate your contributions. The coffee you bring me has been crucial to our continuing success now if you could just massage my feet—”

“Well, *master*, it terrifies that someday someone may ask me to fix some of your code. Hell, I am even terrified at the thought of trying to explain it to someone.”

“And that is exactly the way I want it. It makes me just that tad bit more important. Unfirable if you will.”

“But, when you go on vacation—”

“Why would I go on vacation?” said Travis with a laugh, “I have free porn from the Internet, an endless supply of coffee and countless hapless victims to bully here. A vacation would be less relaxing,” said Travis with a bored voice.

Josh sighed. “You have disappeared before, for weeks as I remember, and I have no idea exactly how Janus works.”

“That is good neither do I—”

“Like hell you don’t! You invented Environmental Evolutional Intelligence, the core idea behind how Janus works.”

Travis smiled grandly. “Yes, I did do that didn’t I? It was one of my greatest creations. You amuse me,” said Travis in an English accent, “I will let you ask one question of me.”

“Like, what does the Master Guiding Script really do?”

“Oh, you are in your serious mood now,” growled Travis with disapproval. “I thought you would ask about my ways with women.”

“Your ways with women is being promptly and painfully rejected, I know about that. Tell me about the Master Script. You don’t have to give me details,” said Josh.

“Just enough so I don’t sound like an idiot when I talk with Tami.”

“Tami helped me build the script,” said Travis. “Ask her.”

“She told me to ask you.”

Travis sipped on his coffee then said, “It guides Janus’ learning and makes sure it stays focused.”

“But, other algorithms do that.”

“That is why it is the Master Script. It controls those other algorithms. We are in America! No unsupervised learning here! In fact, no learning at all... in truth...”

“So, it uses an artificial intelligence?” asked Josh.

“Artificial Intelligence? Screw that!” exclaimed Travis. “Nothing Artificial about it. I don’t do artificial. AI is like a chick who rides a dildo. This is the real thing baby!”

Josh laughed then asked, “So, it is intelligent?”

“Most computers are smarter than humans, look at Deep Blue; it beat Garry Kasparov, the reigning world champion at chess—”

“What did Norm Chomsky say about that? It is like a bull dozer beating a human at a weight lifting competition—”

“But Janus is better than deep blue, it is a brain algorithm not a tree algorithm. It learns, is intelligent and of course...conscious—” Travis smiled grandly after he said conscious knowing the effect it would have. “Not like anything you have seen before I can assure you.”

Josh let out a burst of sarcastic laughter. “Machines cannot be conscious—”

“Why not? We are conscious and we are machines built from molecules dictated by DNA. It is a matter of logic. If you design the right incentives and environment a computer simulating an evolutionary process will eventually stumble across the recipe, the code, to allow that computer to be aware.”

“Computers can mimic intelligence, consciousness. They will ever truly be conscious,” scoffed Josh. “It will be an illusion of consciousness, a toy—”

“Just as an evolutionary process found the recipe to give man awareness, that same method of selection can find the code to give a computer awareness. And... it has.”

“But, we had an extremely complex driving force to become conscious, the earth and everything on it. You would have to simulate completely our environment. And to function, to communicate with humans an AI would have to know an incredible amount of common sense rules. There are too many common sense rules for a computer to learn to even begin to simulate human thinking—”

“That sounds like Hubert Dryfus crap,” growled Travis.

“And he has a point—”

“Ever heard of CYC project, OpenCyc.org?” asked Travis. “It is a database of common sense rules like wear underwear when riding a unicycle. There is your common senses database—”

“That helps nothing. Now an AI has a database of common sense rules but its ‘thinking’ would still be ruled based. Computers think via rules; they have no creativity —”

Travis laughed curtly. “Not if they use an artificial neural network to learn how to uses those rules. Neural networks can be quite creative in their interpretation of the world. Remember the military experiment to see if a neural network could tell if a photo contained a tank hiding in trees of not?”

“Yea, yea, after endless training of the neural network on photos of trees with and without tanks hiding amongst them the researchers tried a sample test and neural network failed—”

“Then they went back to the photos and realized that the photos with tanks were all on a cloudy day and those without tanks was on a sunny day. The neural network learned what a sunny day was.”

“And that is smart?”

“They learn and adapt creatively to their environment. It thought beyond human’s simplistic views—”

“And what environment does Janus live in?”

“And, as for an environment as big as the earth, why not the Internet? An AI

could play around in sites like Sociolotron or other MOGS, Multiplayer Online Games. Some of these sites simulate everyday life (admittedly, sometimes in Middle Earth) and Janus can play against and with humans without anyone being the wiser. Exploit the environment for your own satisfaction, screw over competitors, fuck good looking things, the core elements of a human existence can be and is available on the Internet—”

“You know what goes on in those games? It scares me to think they are defining an AI’s knowledge of humanity. What is its basis for morals? Would it be just, caring? How could it be?”

Travis laughed. “Why do I care? I only care if I made something conscious, who gives a damn if it is moral—”

“You gave it no morals? You are kidding? What were you thinking?”

“Morals are a human construct. I am creating a super being, one that can guide humans. Janus is above morals. It will define morals—”

“If you believe Janus is alive how could you not give it morals?” growled Josh. “Janus is powerful, too powerful... If it was conscious, do you have any idea what it could do if left to its own devices? How could—”

“Of course I have an idea of what it can do, I gave it its powers. And why should I give it morals? Morals are just the boundary condition to thought, as Turing once said —”

“He said,” snapped Josh angrily, “religion was the boundary condition, not morals! Turing implied strongly that AI’s needed to be taught right from wrong. Without knowing right from wrong Janus can never be set free—”

Travis laughed curtly. “I would have thought you saw no difference between

religion and morals.”

“If it has morals it will find religion,” snapped Josh.

“Ha! Janus will find the truth and not some cowardly substitute for it—”

“If you created a thinking machine without morals as powerful as Janus, I would be forced to do anything I could to destroy it. Something like that cannot be allowed to exist...”

Travis said nothing and stared at Josh for a moment. Josh was anxious and sitting on the edge of his chair. Travis leaned back into his chair and smirked for a moment more before saying in a dismissive voice, “I am just kidding. I followed Turing’s example, I spanked Janus when she was bad, *pleasured* her when she was good. I was a strict but *enjoyable* parent to Janus.”

Josh glared skeptically at Travis.

“Janus is conscious that these games do not truly reflect everyday life, that they are games—”

“This discussion is pointless,” dismissed Josh. “How can you even prove if it is conscious? We don’t even know what consciousness truly means. What are you using to define it, the Turing Test? Have a bunch of people test to see if they can distinguish between a human and a computer? The Turing Test only finds something that can trick a human into thinking they are talking to another human. It has nothing to do with true consciousness, true thought.”

“I agree with you. I don’t like the Turing Test,” said Travis, “I love Turing though. That whole bit about inventing computers, being openly gay when it was illegal, defeating the Nazi Germany, killing yourself with an cyanide laced apple... good stuff. I

relish the fact he helped defeat the Nazis and his reward was to be pushed to kill himself, stripped of his dignity, by Nazi-like laws... the irony... but, I digress. The Turing Test misses the point. It forces the intelligence to be like a human. It forces it to be a plaything for human's, a replica. What is the point in that? Ha. We need conscious computers because of the deficiency in human consciousnesses. Humans, with the exception of me, and perhaps Turing, are stupid, dead-end experiments in evolution. It should be allowed to be what it is. Something different. Something better. Say, something that would not have judged Turing for being queer for a start.”

Josh held back a laugh when he thought of Travis comparing himself to Turing. He might as well have compared himself to Einstein. “Again, if you don’t understand consciousness you can not create consciousness and humans do not understand consciousness,” said Josh firmly. “How would you even know if the system achieved true consciousness? How would you even begin to understand the incentives needed to evolve a consciousness machine?”

“We don’t need to understand it to create it. We are conscious,” said Travis, “and we evolved through natural selection, a process that, at its core, is random, a process that has no understanding of consciousness, a process that can never have understanding of consciousness. That is what Environmental Evolutional Intelligence is about—”

“EVE... I never real got it. Isn’t it just a optimization method?”

“EVE is a concept. It shows the path to allow software to develop consciousness. The EVE framework allows consciousnesses to evolve testing it in a series of epochs. Each epoch weeds out those which will never grow—”

“I think there is more to consciousness than a software framework,” snapped Josh.

“Software frameworks are just a set of reusable code to speed up software development not—”

“Life is analogous to a software framework. The rules of physics, the rules of evolution, the rules of the playground, the objects that build matter—”

“These is more to life—”

“What? God?”

“What if I say yes?”

“Even if that is true, building an AI does not preclude God from being introduced in the process. What is it that the feeble minded usually say when they do not want to reason out why something happened? ‘God works in mysterious ways.’ That is what your type says isn’t it?”

“My type of people! You mean people who think life is not just due to a really good throw of the dice? Like, say, Einstein ”

“Sure, that is what I meant— You can have Einstein and I will have Turing.”

“Ignoring the religious aspects, a machine is too linear. Man’s mind works mysterious way and a machine’s mind does not. There are strange chemical and molecular reactions that we have no understanding of.”

“They can beat a man at chess—”

Josh snapped back, “Those machines are not conscious. They just use brute force to beat humans. They don’t reason. Computers can’t reason.”

“Such a human centric view of creation! If the carbon bio-goo that makes us up allows us to reason I don’t see why a creature of silicon cannot also reason.”

“Maybe bio-carbon goo is the key!”

“Look at economics. There is a new field on how learning affects economics by names such as Sargent, Evans and Honkapohja.”

“If you are trying to convince me artificial intelligence is real bringing economists into the conversation will not help you,” quipped Josh.

“Good point; but, anyways, these economists are using crude little rudimentary AIs to see how their economic models behave in the real world and they are having success. The AIs replicate human behavior better than traditional models—”

“In simple, rigged models, yes. But, come on, I have seen the master script; it is awfully small. I have seen complicated stuff, hundreds of gigs worth of coding and it is nowhere near intelligence. Janus’ core programs are just under a few gigs—”

“Going back to Turing, how about a Turing machine, the bases of all modern computers? It is small. So simple, all it needs to be is aware of its state (say write a new symbol, add five or move ahead one step or such), what the next piece of information given to it is and the machine table, the rules are for processing that information. Code for a Turing machine can fit on a page and perform any calculation—”

“Given its machine table is large enough,” snapped Josh. “You know that if you stretch out your DNA it would reach to the moon.”

“Now I know,” said Travis in a mocking tone of voice, “and with knowledge I grow stronger. Oo! I think my bicep grew a whole inch! No, wait, that may have been my penis.”

“Our DA contains a tremendous amount of code—”

“How much of our huge genetic code defines out ability to be self aware? How much of it is spent constructing our digestive tract or mucus glands or penis? Yours, of

course, is a few thousand miles shorter than mine—”

“Watch it—”

“Think of it. Our code is ninety percent similar to that of dogs. Dogs! They lick their own balls—”

“So would you if you could—”

“Who is to say I don’t already?” asked Travis. “But, very little of our DNA defines consciousness. It is how you use it. Awareness, consciousness, desire, those are the keys to creating true intelligence.”

“I still say anything that small might be aware but it would be fairly stupid,” said Josh.

“Ever heard of Robert Axelrod?”

“Should I have?” said Josh in a bored voice.

“OK, I admit he may be a bit too obscure,” said Travis with an evil smirk.

“Maybe not Axelrod but you have heard of the Prisoner’s Dilemma?”

“Sure,” said Josh curtly.

Travis smiled grandly. “Take two criminals. Rough them up a bit, maybe throw in a bit of anal penetration with a foreign object, then give these pieces of human refuse two choices, cooperate or betray the other turd. If one betrays the other turd he gets off scot-free to terrorize humanity once again but the other guy gets five years and more anal probing. If they cooperate with one another, tell the police nothing, they each get one year and some mild anal exploration. However, if both betray each other they get three years each and a whole lot of anal exploitation. The turds will always betray one another even though the outcome is worse than if they both cooperated—”

“Mutual betrayal is the Nash equilibrium—”

“Good old Nash. And they say I am mad.”

“No, they say you are an asshole. If I was to play against you,” said Josh sincerely. “I would betray you in an instant.”

“And who is to say we are not already playing against one another? Isn’t this mortal coil just a holding pen till it is decided whether you belong in hell or heaven? Prove the other is less moral and off to prison he goes... but, back to my point—”

“You have a point? Shit! I thought you were just listening to your own voice. The way you just keep going on and on and on and on and—”

“In non-repeated games, yes but what about repeated games? In the Seventies there was a computer simulation tournament of an iterative Prisoner’s Dilemma game. The rules were simple. Each algorithm would play the Prisoner’s Dilemma against another algorithm for hundreds of iterations collecting points as they played. Cooperate and each algorithm got three points. Mutual betrayal got one point and successfully screwing your opponent got you five points while the sucker got zero.”

Josh said nothing. He thought of yawning but knew it would only encourage Travis to talk about something even more off the topic.

“What algorithm do you think won?” Travis’ eyes were bright as if he saw a victory in the horizon.

Josh shrugged his shoulders with indifference.

“Tit for Tat. Tit for Tat, a simple rule, cooperate till the opponent does not then screw him over from that point on. It fits in two lines of code and beats rules that were pages of code. Tit for Tat is like a lot of my relationships except we started out screwing

each other over so never got to cooperating—”

“Is there a point?” cut in Josh.

“Pont! Sometimes the simple rules are more powerful than complex ones. Sometimes we over think problems. The size only defines the depth of knowledge not intelligence and definitely not awareness.”

“OK so Janus is aware. An aware computer? What does it do? Ask you out on a date? I think this whole thing is about you programming a girlfriend that cannot run away from you.”

Travis laughed. “It could ask to be set free.”

Josh laughed then said, “If it is asking to be free than it must be aware! Isn’t that what all your girlfriends have ever asked for?”

“You can’t be serous! You have never thought about this? You have never wondered how to make your computer truly alive? Come on!”

Josh laughed. “That is every programmer’s dream just so he would not be forced to continue his futile quest for real, fleshy, human friends.”

Travis winked back at Josh.

“You are asking age old questions. I mean what is intelligence? What is consciousness? What makes us alive? People have been pondering that for millennia and you are telling me you know the answer.”

“And?” asked Travis. “What do you think the answer is?”

“And, I don’t have the foggiest,” said Josh.

“Then do not let anyone believe you can fix my code,” said Travis in a serious tone of voice.

The seriousness in his voice put Josh off.

Chapter Three

The Eternal Past

Josh carefully read an email from Keiko, a friend of Travis'. Keiko started emailing Josh after he was CC'd on one of Travis' messages. Travis CC'd him by accident and disapproved of their communication. That made it all the more appealing for Josh. From what Josh understood Keiko was an old friend of Alex and Travis' from their college days. When Travis did talk about his college days it was always jokes inferring he raised a lot of hell but gave little substance. The mystery of it enticed Josh. Josh suspected something happened between Keiko and Travis. You could feel that from

the way he talked about her. Like all of Travis old friends this one was strange, she only communicated in haikus. Sometimes her haikus were completely off topic as if she ignored his message and other times her response was devastatingly to the point. Travis knew she was unhappy. Keiko seemed weighted down by some huge burden. Hoping to gain insight into the Master Script Josh had asked her about brain machines and EVE. It read,

What does a stone dream?

The stone dreams only of stillness

The stone knows itself

Life given to stone

The stone never asked to live

Two bodies one soul

The stone with a heart

The stone now knows time's passage

Now it knows alone

He sighed, obviously she drank as heavily as Travis did.

The meeting room was filled with noise as everyone who normally did not attend meetings together tried to get in as much conversation as possible. The topics were insipid but fun to listen in on. The undercurrent of the conversation was what Josh enjoyed; people were building political alliances here at an accelerated pace. Josh then spotted Travis at the end of the table. Travis was talking to no one and stared down at his

laptop with an odd look; he almost looked worried.

Mark burst into the meeting room with a bold strut to his walk. He raced to the front of the room and bellowed over the clamor in the meeting room, “Listen up people! Pay attention. Attention!”

Everyone ignored Mark and continued with their conversations desperate to solidify their new alliances before being forced to work.

“Please! Attention!” yelled Mark angrily.

With bored expressions everyone started up at Mark.

“We got a special assignment for Janus,” announced Mark. “A one off run. This is a big contract with an important client for Select Data Connections. We can’t afford any screw ups.”

“That was not a screw up,” disagreed Travis.

“It was an unplanned test,” added Josh.

Mark frowned, “By test do you mean royal fuck up? That must be what you mean.”

“We found ten tax evaders,” said Travis. “Three went to jail. That is a success if I have ever heard of one—”

“And that was the fuck up,” yelled Mark. “No, that is not what the client asked for was it? It was a marketing job. They just wanted to know who to market to not for us to put their clients behind bars.”

“They enter into a whole new niche market, put CEO’s in jail!” said Josh. “It has potential. It is what this country truly need now.”

“Again, no screw ups,” demanded Mark. “Or, ‘tests’, as the propeller heads call

them. No mistakes—”

“One can ever know that one has not made a mistake,” said Travis. “Turing by the way.”

“Quit quoting Turing!” snapped Mark. “That was on your quarterly goals!”

Susan asked of Travis, “What exactly is Janus?”

“How long have you been here and still asking questions?” asked Travis.

“I have been here just one week,” said Susan with a laugh.

“One week and still asking questions? Hell, I knew everything before they hired me,” said Travis.

“You invented everything here,” said Tami with a groan.

“I did not invent Mark, the rest of you, I take full credit for,” said Travis. “I am like a creator to you all—”

“The creator of my shit perhaps,” said Tami.

“Janus is a massive data miner application with a immense database. It looks for patterns in personal data,” said Josh.

“What type of data?” asked Susan.

“All data, credit cards, loans, quick oil change, hotels, birth, marriage and death certificates, education records, tax returns, rebate forms, magazine subscriptions, online purchases, Internet providers, special surveys we send out, in short all, the various data collected on someone from when they are born till who collects money in their wills,” said Josh.

“Special surveys?” asked Susan. “Like what?”

Tami jumped into the conversation with great enthusiasm. “My favorite survey

was to test our cheating score. We developed this model to put a probability that a person will cheat in a marriage. Then, to test the model we called a sample of people to uncover whether they had cheated or are thinking about cheating.”

“No way,” said Susan. “People actually told you whether they cheated?”

“We had a psychologist design it so they did not even know what they were answering,” said Tami. “It was really cool.”

“Uber cool,” said Travis. “I made sure they called one of my ex’s.”

Susan paused then asked, “Why would we build a model on whether you cheat?”

“Couples that cheat have a higher default rate on home loans,” said Mark. “Banks when charging interest rates want to take the probability of committing adultery into consideration.”

“Wow,” said Susan. “Scary.”

“Clever,” corrected Mark.

“It is what Alan Westin as Professor at Columbia University warned about,” said Travis. Everyone paused and looked at Travis. He loved bring up obscure knowledge; everyone knew he did. Travis wet his lips in anticipation. There was a collective sigh. “He wrote this essay in Newsweek decades ages ago warning everything from past credit to our sex life would be used to determine loan applications. And what a great idea it was! Gave us a purpose!”

Everyone in the room laughed. Some of the laughing was more forced than others.

“You use sex habits to score people?” asked Susan in disbelief.

“Janus looks for many such patterns,” said Travis. “In fact people who are less

risky in bed are more risky to loan to, excluding those who cheat of course.”

Susan laughed, “How can you figure that out?”

Travis smiled greatly. Nothing pleased him more than disbelief. “Credit card bills for sexual things, bondage, whips, DVDs and such. We use all that information to predict a someone’s actions.”

“Wow, how? What do you use?”

Travis stared into Susan’s eyes. He seemed more sincere than she had ever seen him. “Janus uses artificial intelligence, heuristic models and statistics to find any type of patterns you want,” said Travis. “First, Janus looks at thousands of database. Databases we have compiled, database from third parties and scans the entire Internet to deliver every ounce of data ever compiled on a person and any person connected to them. Then with that data Janus predicts spending habits, likelihood of defaulting on loans, employment behavior, drinking behavior, driving habits, likelihood of criminal activity, probability of suing if wronged, likelihood of committing fraud, political leanings, sex toys purchased and hundreds of other metrics. It delivers a complete profile of a person. What you can expect from them and what they have done in the past. Simply, everything.”

“That sounds like the Defensive Department’s project, TIA, Total informational awareness,” said Susan. “Didn’t it fail? I remember the first TIA project, the Matrix never got off the ground. It was suppose to link all the law enforcement departments together with a huge database like Janus.”

“Did it fail?” asked Travis. “Or are you part of it now?”

Susan twitched nervously in her seat. “Why call it Janus?”

Travis laughed then said, “Because, I am an uncreative and pompous. Janus is two-faced a Roman God that watched over house. One faced the back door, the other looked toward the front.”

Twofaced was right, Josh thought to himself, and he wondered what the other, hidden, face of Janus was.

Travis laughed wickedly then said, “Originally wanted to call it Biggest Dick but that was rejected.”

“I voted for Biggest Dick,” said Josh.

“We all voted for Biggest Dick, but Mark vetoed it,” said Tami.

“He really is no fun,” said Josh.

“No fun at all,” said Tami.

“Sad really,” added Travis.

“I think he needs a girlfriend,” said Josh.

“Yeah, but our model predicts she would cheat,” said Travis.

“Maybe he would be into that?” offered Josh.

“You know I think you are right,” agreed Travis.

Mark sighed then said to Susan, “Janus will provide the information need to bring prosperity and security—”

“Oh no! The evil marketing speak!” groaned Travis.

“Arg!” Josh made sign of the cross with two pens. “Back evil marketing demon!”

“Throw holy water on the marketing daemon to cast it back to the depths of hell from whence it came!” Travis splashed water in Mark’s general direction.

“Janus allows law enforcement to target their forces effectively, prosecutors to

build better cases, national security to prevent attacks, firms to better target customers and banks assess risk. It eliminates informational barriers therefore reduces cost and provides security. Insurance rates have fallen steadily since Janus started. Janus makes it harder for insincere people to free ride on those who are truthful and just.”

“And I just wanted the damn thing to find me a date,” said Travis with a sigh. “A one night’er though. Commitment troubles me so.”

Josh laughed. “Janus looked at every living woman and found not one match so now it is searching through the brain dead.”

“Brain dead works for me,” said Travis.

“I think you would insult the intelligence of even the brain dead boys,” said Tami.

“Then what I really need is someone into being insulted,” said Travis. He then pointed at Mark and smiled evilly.

“Ok boys and girls,” said Mark. “Attention here! This is a special run. It will be a small run of a hundred and pull out the works.”

“That is going to cost them,” said Josh.

Mark laughed to himself. “A hundred names run at a hundred a pop and an additional hundred for successful matches.”

“Wow,” Tami exclaimed.

“Cool shit,” said Josh.

“Again, they want the works, the most Janus can do,” said Mark. “Also, none of these addresses are current. They need current address.”

“That is our weakest feature,” snapped Travis. “We don’t find people, we provide a history and profile of people—”

“What do you mean we can’t find people? We can find people and have in the past,” snapped Mark. “We have a massive database of addresses, the largest in the world. And this is a must find list and apparently our competitors failed to find one match.”

Travis snorted in response.

“Must be all aliases,” offered Tami.

“What do they want, crime, marketing or what?” asked Josh.

“Everything,” said Mark.

“So, how many exactly?” asked Tami.

“One hundred,” said Mark.

Travis quickly asked, “Did you say one-hundred? Exactly?”

“Yes,” said Mark, “I assume this is a sample from a larger list.”

With nervousness in his voice Travis asked, “So who ordered it? Government or corporate?”

“Private of course,” said Mark.

Everyone laughed.

“What is so funny?” asked Susan.

“Government would never admit to being the government,” said Tami. “They have fewer rights to view some data than most private corporations do. So, we hardly ever have a government run. We have friends of the government runs.”

“It is a solid firm ordering this,” said Mark. “We have dwelt with them before.”

“We have been manipulated by them before,” said Travis with a sneer.

Travis was leaning against the wall outside of the break room with a smirk on his face.

Josh knew trouble was brewing and stood beside him. “What up?”

“Noth’in dwag,” said Travis.

“What are you doing?” prodded Josh. “You have that about-to-do-evil look.”

“Waiting for someone to cut their hair.”

Josh smiled, “What?”

“How many times a day do you say what?” asked Travis.

Susan walked up to the Travis and Josh. “You two look like trouble,” she said.

“Damn straight,” said Josh.

“Susan,” said Travis, “I got a question for you.”

“Shoot,” said Susan,

“How do you like Tami’s hair?”

Susan toyed with her long hair then mumbled, “Its ok.”

“I just noticed how professional she looks,” said Travis. “I wanted a woman’s opinion. It is because it is short right? That makes her look more serious, like a boss and such.”

Susan stopped toying with her hair then mumbled, “Maybe.”

“It is a shame,” said Travis, “how shallow the work environment is. Just because a woman has short hair she gets more respect. We live in a sexist world and I guess men won’t be changing anytime soon. But, it is good you have not fallen into that trap. I respect that. Your hair is so long. It is down to you mid back right?”

“Oh,” stammered Susan, “Yeah.”

“Talk to you later,” said Travis with a smile.

Susan meekly smiled then hastily entered to break room.

“Tomorrow she will have short hair,” said Travis.

“Why bother?” asked Josh.

Travis stared with shock into Josh’s eyes. “Practice and... she was too hot with long hair. I was getting fixated on her.” He then started walking back to his office.

“Are you going to get your water now?” asked Josh.

“Not thirsty,” said Travis.

Josh followed Travis down the hall. Their pace was brisk.

“What do you make or the run?” asked Travis.

“Terrorist or the like I would suspect,” said Josh in a mater-of-fact way.

“Probably so,” said Travis. “I have not seen the list. Have you?”

“No,” said Josh. “They are rushing it through. With this small a load they should not need me.”

“I hate these sort of run,” said Travis.

“Why?”

“One thing is most of the scores suffer at low volumes,” said Travis. “In aggregate the scores work at an individual level they never look good.”

“I bet they just want us to find them.”

“That is the real reason I don’t like it,” said Travis. “We don’t find people. That is not why Janus was built.”

“We find people all the time,” said Josh. “Right? If people move or if they use

PO box as a mailing address or what ever we find their current physical address. That is what we do.”

“It is different,” said Travis. “These people are on the run.”

“Sorry, I don’t follow,” said Josh. “This seems exactly our line of work.”

Travis snorted with disapproval. “I don’t like the feel of this. They are treating us like a private dick.”

“I would have though you would like to be a private dick,” said Josh.

“I like to avoid all situations that can lead to violence,” said Travis. “I am a coward. I don’t snivel though. Well, sometimes I do. Actually, quite frequently, but, that is off topic.”

“I am a bit uncomfortable with it as well. They should do their own dirty work don’t you think?”

Travis paused and smiled. “I do at that. What are you doing after work?”

“I am going to see my sister,” said Josh. “I have not seen her in a bit. What are you up to?”

“Drinking what else?”

Josh laughed.

“I had a sister. She died a few years back,” said Travis.

“I am sorry, I never heard. How did she die?” asked Josh.

“Some called it a case of a misunderstanding.” After a long pause Travis added, “Is your sister worth a look?”

“Since it is you asking, she is the ugliest creature that Creation has every tainted the earth with,” said Josh. “Much uglier than even you.”

“Sounds like just my type,” said Travis. “I need people who make me look less ugly.”

“I am a trained warrior remember that.”

“Kill a man with a toothpick?” prodded Travis,

“A half-chewed, damp, toothpick,” said Josh in jest.

They burst into Travis’s office as if making a dramatic entrance into a party. The office, however, was empty. Whenever they walked together their arrogance seemed to grow exponentially and it showed even in manner that they entered rooms.

Travis’ office décor was completely different from the rest of the Select Data Connections. His office was all used Fifties furniture while the rest of the office was furnished ultra modern. Behind his desk was a large reproduction of a drawing Alan Turing’s mother, Sara, made of Alan as a child. The drawing showed a young the Alan Turing watching daisies grow while the other boys played field hockey. Alan looked like an extraordinarily inquisitive boy in the drawing, his arms crossed behind his back as he intensely watched nature perform before him. From the drawing you could feel Sara’s realization Alan was not going to be like other boys, that he was going to be special. Josh wondered if Alan’s mom foresaw the greatness her son would achieve or whether she is just another proud mother finding joy in her son’s individuality. He then wondered if Travis’ mom would approve of her son’s office.

Travis’ office was a frightful mess with stacks of print outs, books and old computers everywhere. The garbage can overflowed with rubbish, a stack of coffee cups rose to the ceiling as if returning the trees from whence they came and a thick layer of dust covered everything. The cleaning lady refused to enter after the robot incident.

Travis built insect robots as a hobby. He had countless of them scurrying around his home and office. Travis even claimed to have let hundreds free in parks across the country. Three of his robots sat on the windowsill basking in the light to recharge. Their little ears pointed towards Travis and Josh as they entered. Two other robots on a bookcase snapped their claws towards Josh in a menacing manner. Travis locked his coffee to a chain attached to his desk in yet another homage to Turing. He then sat in his oversized leather chair and spun around a few times.

“I got a message from Keiko,” said Josh as he observed the robots. He found a seat and sat down carefully, watching where he put his feet.

Travis said nothing but glared back at Josh.

“I asked her about brain machines,” said Josh. “She has responded a few times.”

“And?” prodded Travis.

“She implied that the programmer would have to exchange his soul to give life to the computer,” said Josh with a laugh. He then recited:

A life from nothing

Breath to stillness creates wind

Breath becomes stillness.

Josh then said, “At least that what I think she meant. In another message she implied the computer would have preferred to remain a stone, as she puts it.”

Travis said nothing but sipped his tea.

“So, I think she agrees with me,” said Josh merrily. “You can not create life via software.”

“Hmm,” scoffed Travis.

“So,” asked Josh, “ever miss your college day?”

“Ever miss your military days?” snapped back Travis.

Josh said nothing.

“You talk with Keiko frequently?” asked Travis.

“You don’t like that I talk with Keiko,” said Josh.

“On the contrary,” said Travis, “It gives me hope. I worry about her.” He smiled meekly.

“I know what you mean,” said Travis.

“You know more than you think you do,” said Travis. He smiled and started deeply into Josh’s eyes. “Better pick your feet up. That one down there looks a bit spirited.”

Josh lifted his feet away from one of the insect robots moving towards him. It snapped its claws in the air menacingly.

Chapter Four

He Who Begets Janus

“Enjoying life,” were not the words to describe the occupants of the bar. Its occupants were here to honor their commitments and honoring commitments to alcohol is never about enjoyment.

Travis and Josh sat at the bar next to two comely, alternative-clothing clad women. One had bleach-blond hair the other’s hair color was hard to determine in the ill lighting of the bar. They looked tired, beaten and as if they always needed just one more drink.

Travis leaned close to the bleach blond woman sitting next to him and said, “So, I am on a secret mission.”

“What type of mission?” asked the woman.

“A mission to gather information,” said Travis, “very important information.”

“Really,” asked the woman with a jaded voice, “On what?”

“Exactly what pleases *you*. It is of vital importance that you are satisfied, truly satisfied. I have this sense no one has figured out how yet.”

“I have been satisfied before,” said the woman curtly.

“Have you?” asked Travis. “Have you been truly relieved of all tension? Reduced to a quivering mass of flesh willing to do anything to experience it just one more time? I am willing to experiment. I think it requires a more... scientific approach. You ever been tied up before?”

The odd color haired woman sitting next to the blond grabbed her by the arms and said, “Tina, leave these punks.”

“Punks?” asked Travis. “I would think you were into punks given your appearance. The best you could hope for is a punk. I no punk, I am a nerd!”

“Uh,” grunted the odd color haired woman.

Travis slipped Tina his card. “Tina,” said Travis, “let us experiment latter, without the prude around... or we can include her... your choice.”

After the two left Travis snapped at Josh, “Next time work the other. The redhead was killing the vibe.”

“You are unforgivable,” said Josh.

“And unforgiving.”

“Barkeep, another rounds,” said Josh with a tired voice. “And by the way, there was no vibe there accept disgust,” he said the Travis.

“Back to what we were talking about before I offered that young woman enlightenment,” said Travis. “Controlling people is easy. Like how I got Susan to change the water bottle.”

“You never like to stop an argument when you are losing. I have noticed this. It is very enduring.”

“People are easy to control,” said Travis. “Control the media and you have them. All you have to do is control the information and people will believe anything you want them to.”

“People will stop believing after awhile. It is only temporary.”

“Maybe people like you and me,” said Travis, “but the masses forget quickly. It is as if they do not want to remember.”

“I am from the masses not from wherever in the hell you came from,” snapped back Josh.

“Right, church boy,” said Travis with disdain.

“Damn straight,” replied Josh. “Church give me the comfort of knowing exactly why I am going to hell after I die. You on the other will probably be confused while you suffer eternal damnation.”

“And I suppose I am the one sending you to hell,” asked Travis. “Enticing you to come out drinking on a Monday night in a bar populated with cheap women.”

“You are one hell of a bad influence did you know that?”

“The devil sent me,” said Travis.

“Back to your argument, there is such a thing as free will.”

“Your will is only as free as the information provided to you allows. Give me

control of the information I would control the country.”

“United States of Travis,” said Josh. “Scary thought.”

“One nation, under Janus, ruled by Travis. I might even give you a place in my administration,” said Travis.

“As what?”

“Whisky sour boy... what else?” ask Travis.

“What would you do if you controlled the country?”

“Throw the greatest party in the history of man kind,” said Travis. “Of course I would legalize gambling, prostitution and drugs first, just to make sure the party was really kick’n.” Travis sipped his whiskey then added, “More likely I would exact a vicious revenge on those who have spited me in the past, push society into the arms of chaos then throw the greatest party ever.”

Josh laughed. “I think I have heard you say this before. It is amazing how often our conversation end with you talking about pushing society into the arms of chaos.”

“Chaos has sexy arms... How about you?”

“I don’t know.”

“What topple the government? End the war? Free love and all of that? How about mandating young woman be topless? Like what Sparta did, to encourage physical fitness, of course.”

Josh paused with an uncomfortable silence then said, “I am a patriot.”

“I forgot you were an government guy. So then, smite down the enemies? Enforce one party rule? Crush all people who think differently. Torture or kill anyone not a US citizen?”

Josh laughed then said, “I am not that type of patriot.”

“Hmm, on second thought, I would rather just steal a bunch of money and retire,” said Travis.

“Really?”

“All that political crap bores me,” said Travis with a sneer about his lips. “Give me money. I can buy the power when it suits me.”

“Now, you are sounding like my type of guy,” said Josh. “You have my vote.”

“And with that power I would exact a vicious revenge on those who have spited me in the past, push society into the arms of chaos then throw the greatest party ever.”

“Again, why into the arms of chaos? Wouldn’t it be more to your suiting to just buy an island populated with young, topless woman?”

Travis smiled and raised his finger. “Things are yearning for change,” he said. “As Keiko once said:”

Chaos is nature

Order a madness of man

Only change brings peace

“Everyone has gotten old, too comfortable with there own truths. Everyone believes they are right. If you believe you are right you stop learning, stop growing, you become a rock, you die. Everyone needs to be shown everyone is wrong. So, if I exact a vicious revenge on those who have spited me in the past, push society into the arms of chaos then throw the greatest party ever. I will breath new life where, now, there is none. I will bring the rocks back to life.”

Josh laughed, “Well, at least you are consistent with your goals.”

Travis laughed, “That I am.”

Three hours passed. Travis and Josh moved only once and that was from the bar to the bathroom and back.

“Do they know who we are?” said Travis obviously under the spell of his whiskey.

“Who are we?” asked Josh.

“Gods.”

“Oh really?”

“We begat a Janus,” said Travis with a smile. “So, therefore, we must be gods. We gave birth to the god Janus.”

“Hmm. I think the whiskey was more powerful than usual. If drank properly you should see two of me, if you see more or less than two of me I think you need more or... maybe less... I am not quite sure...”

“Janus is something special, something never before seen,” said Travis. “Trust me. And soon many will worship Janus.”

“You are full of yourself,” said Josh. “There has to be at least thirty databases like Janus just in the US private sector alone.”

“Nothing is like Janus. Nothing.”

“Our petabytes of data,” said Josh. “That is what makes us so special. Credit card bill information, satellite information, birth certificates, death certificates and now we are

tracking cars while they move. Cool shit.”

“But, something needs to know what to do with all that data.”

“Dime a dozen,” joked Josh. “Anyone can write a neural network.” He knew this was not true, he had never seen anything with the ability to find data like Janus. Janus’ abilities seemed unnatural to him.

“True,” said Travis. “But mine is not really a artificial neural network, at least not in the traditional sense. It something more akin to BAM, Bi-Directional Associative Memory but much more powerful.”

Josh straightened up in his seat. Travis never discussed the inner working of Janus. “How so?”

“Neural networks are one the right track; they mimic the animal mind. Stimulate the neurons with data then they respond given how they have learned to react, very cool. You can train a neural network to make remarkable and accurate connections between data point. But, they don’t have connection like the human mind; they are not holistic. BAM, bi-directional associate memory, algorithms are closer but not quite right. I admit they are useful to find patterns, store data, compress it. But, our minds are designed to store and retrieve data autonomously. And we don’t just store the data once. If something is important we store it many different ways and sometime even contradictory information. Computers need true memory, like ours, not a huge database with super fast indexes that stores only one truth. They need to use data that is ill defined. They need to store inconsistencies. They need to modularize their thoughts. The trick is storing the information in a neural network, storing patterns, and have the patterns link to other patterns and so on. Then you harness the neural network holistically, all the nodes with a

— never mind. Too much geek talk.”

“What? No what do you mean, holistically?” asked Josh frantically. “What type of algorithm can holistically access all the nodes? What—”

“A fuzzy neural network with a GA optimizer and a holistic inductive programming language algorithm to access relational databases.”

Josh gave Travis a cross-eyed look.

Travis smiled wickedly then said, “Did I mention Chaos Theory? I also put some Chaos Theory crap into it as well. And oh yeah! And a support vector machines!”

Josh said nothing for a moment then started laughing. “That is a load of shit. You just strung together a bunch of stuff. No, seriously, what do you mean?”

“I need my mysteries or you will stop drinking with me.”

“I go out with you because you make me look handsome,” said Josh. He had been reading several books on AI by authors such as Crane, Penrose and Dreyfus to better debate with Travis. He even crafted a response to provoke Travis. Josh decided to give it a try, “How can you even define thought? Is thought even definable?”

“You are saying thoughts aren’t computable? That’s crap,” growled Travis
“Thoughts are computable.”

“Really?”

“Really really!”

“Thought cannot be defined as a set of rules. Thought can never be put into an equation. Thought is free flowing. Our thoughts do not obey rules. Computers must always obey rules. They can never, therefore, think.”

“That sounds like hippie shit to me,” growled Travis. “Thoughts are free flowing

my ass! Mine aren't. Yours aren't. How about Noam Chomsky's work on linguistics? Doesn't his work show the human mind *is* programmed? That language is hard coded into our mind? That we are programmed? If language can be written in DNA than surely it can be written in binary code. And if something as important as language is codeable why not thought?"

"You think we are logical? That we act like we were programmed?" asked Josh skeptically. "That is why I like computers they behave in a proper manner, not like a human. "

"Psychologists, aside from all the crap they are given, do a remarkable job of predicting human behavior. Have you ever read the DSM, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders? Even what we call insane behavior, psychologists can easily categorize and describe. How did they manage to do that hmm? How could they ever hope to study the mind if it did not, in some manner, follow rules, if it was not computable?"

"Those are crazy people—"

"How about you and me? We have the same dreams don't we, naked in front of peers, flying in the sky, sex with lots of young, naked women covered in chocolate and whipped cream chained to a—"

"I wish I could see exactly what is in your demented mind," said Josh wistfully.

"The human mind is predictable, regardless of how we would like it not to be, so it must be computable. Otherwise the field of psychology would be nothing more than a bunch of mental masturbation. And people like the Nazis and advertising firms could not succeed as easily as they do in controlling us, not unless we followed rules they can

exploit. Not unless we are predictable.”

Josh looked down at the notes he had written and pondered what to say next. The Chinese Room was next on his list but he felt too drunk to discuss it.

Travis pause for a second and wiped his forehead then asked, “Don’t you think life is too predictable?”

“Predictable? In what sense?”

“Predictable, linear. Like our lives are mapped out for us. We go to this college to get into this firm work fifty years go to a rest home and die.”

Josh laughed then said, “Sure.”

“Most people would give up everything for just one meaningful act.”

Josh was silent for a moment then said, “I had my excitement in the military.”

“So, you were into all that ninja type shit in the military weren’t you?” asked Travis.

“I was in special ops. And you know I don’t like talking about it.”

“But, weren’t you also in InfoSec? You know, information security, computer forensic analysis that type of stuff. Why did you leave Special ops?”

“At the end of my career,” said Josh. “Early on I was in special ops assignments... I don’t like talking about it.”

“No, of course not. I bet you would be right at home doing secret agent type crap. Me, I would get killed in an instant. Beside, I always rooted for the villains. I would be a villain in a spy film.”

“I bet you would,” said Josh.

“You would like one more bit of excitement, for a noble cause, wouldn’t you,

before you grow old and die.”

“Sure, wouldn’t anyone?”

Travis smiled sadly then said, “Why are we both here?”

Josh frowned and said nothing.

“It is like we are destined to be here, in a dirty bar killing our livers for the rest of our lives.” Travis downed his whisky with one quick gulp. “It is like fate is pissing on us for taking one wrong turn.”

It is our punishment for past sins thought Josh to himself. But he did not say this out loud. He was terrified it would tip Travis deeper. Travis had never been melancholy around him before and Josh did not want him to be again. Josh relied on Travis’ ever-cheerful sarcasm. As sad as it was it gave him hope that you could rise above the pain. This moment he would try and forget.

“I got go home early,” Travis said curtly as if he sensed Josh’s discomfort. He then headed out of the door.

Josh sighed and looked at the bar’s occupants, all real drunks. He felt painfully filled with emotion. To share his pain was all he wanted now but this crowd was not the type to tell you had committed such horrible acts in the past that you submitted to the concept of hell in the afterlife.

“How are you doing?” asked a dark haired man sitting next to him at the bar. He was neatly dressed in a gray suit with an American flag pin on the right lapel.

Josh snorted.

“Do you think it is wise?”

Josh snorted again and said nothing.

“You two should not talk of Janus in public,” growled the dark haired man.

“What do *you* know of Janus?”

“I expected Travis to not understand this. But, you, you expected more from.

You should understand we are at war.”

“Do I know you?” asked Josh.

“No, but you will,” he downed his drink then followed Travis out of the door.

Chapter Five

Failure has its Merits

Everyone scanned Tami's face when she entered the room. The hundred run put everyone on guard.

"The pull is done," said Tami in a dissatisfied tone. "It looks like we found very little though. Kind of substandard."

"Really?" asked Mark nervously.

"Some old data but nothing recent," continued Tami. "Apparently, these guys are truly off the grid. They don't use credit cards, have cars own houses or any thing a good American should do. Janus' algorithms only brought back data on six people and the

addresses look very old. It was the worst run ever. So, we did some look-ups on our databases using ADAM manually. That got us hits on twelve more people.”

“The Autonomous Data Acquisition Machine to the rescue! The database comes to the rescue yet again. Janus is not so perfect after all,” mocked Josh.

“Hey, I invented ADAM as well,” snapped Travis.

“Boy, you sure have invented lot,” mumbled Susan skeptically.

“It is like I have the combined mind of scores of people,” snapped back Travis with a grin.

Tami rolled her eyes.

“Why did Janus fail?” snapped Mark. He looked angrily into Travis’ eyes.

“It works on large scale,” said Travis. “Statistical algorithms don’t work well on small samples.”

Tami and Josh looked at one another for a moment.

“That is not good enough,” shouted Mark angrily.

“We designed it for fraudsters not people hiding off the grid,” snapped back Travis angrily.

Mark and Travis locked eyes for a moment then Mark asked, “Shit, did we get enough?”

“About a eighteen percent contact rate is not too bad given that they have not gotten one hit from other sources,” said Tami.

“So, Janus failed huh?” said Mark in a worried tone of voice.

“First time ever,” said Tami.

“I will look into it,” said Travis.

“DAMN STRAIGHT YOU WILL,” shouted Mark. “We cannot let anyone know we just did database look ups and did not use Janus.”

“Now, onto the results,” said Tami, her voice seemed stressed, reluctant. “One name we got a ton on, Anthony Gomez in Santa Fe. We have one guy in Oregon flagged for a fifty percent probability of growing marijuana, another who is looking at illegal porn on the Internet, a couple of tax evaders and the typical collection of drug users and strip club types. As luck would have it we would find a cheating ring within the list. These two people are cheating on their spouse with each other.”

“I love those type of results. Any photos?” asked Travis. His voice also seemed strained, unnatural.

Josh watched Travis’s hands; they shook slightly.

“I think you are forbidden to look at photos,” said Tami. “You know, no minors.”

“Haha,” mocked Travis.

“So, the people within the list must know one another,” said Josh.

“They are all connected that is for sure,” said Tami.

Travis asked very quickly, “Where do they lead. Anyplace interesting?”

“Most of the circles center on their undergraduate college,” said Tami. “Mostly from their college days but several are godparents and such.”

“Nothing major?” asked Mark.

“Fairly clean. We found some other networks. They are fairly big, mostly political. Actually, lots of political rings, with a large amount of money going to non-profits.”

“Marketing results show these guys as mostly neo-hippie stock,” said Tami.

“Vegetarians or at least into the natural food crap, they donate a lot to charity and don’t do a lot of discretionary spending. Well educated and poor. So, politically, most of them were registered as independents. These guys are not lovers of the administration.”

Mark grabbed the results from Tami and read a few lines. “Wow they are all programmers!” Mark said, “This looks like a recruiting listing. Half of these guys I want to hire.”

“I want less competition not more,” said Travis.

Mark laughed, “No one could compete with you Travis. You are unique in the world. No one could possibly be a bigger pain in the ass than you.”

Travis toasted to Mark’s comment with his coffee cup.

Later that day,

Josh sat fidgeting nervously in Travis’s office. One of Travis’s robots had grabbed Josh’s left foot unexpectedly moments earlier. Next time he vowed to step on it. Travis claimed he was running an on going experiment like William Grey Walter’s tortoise robots from the Fifties. Travis’ robots were, indeed, like a community. They interacted with one another and adapted to their environment. Travis had programmed them to get into mischief to entertain themselves, like the one that grabbed Josh’s foot earlier. And they had a strict social hierarchy that Travis claimed they invented by themselves. But Josh knew this was not an ongoing experiment fueled by Travis’ insatiable lust for knowledge. Travis created them because they were his minions. They

did his bidding. And better yet, there were people in the office who feared them. Two robots on the window still started fighting with one another to get the last bit of sunlight to recharge their batteries. Finally one was triumphant and unceremoniously tossed the other one off of the windowsill with a crash. The loser flipped itself over and scurried under a bookcase. Josh felt it seemed embarrassed, sad. He quickly forced himself to stop thinking along those lines; they were not alive. They were programmed to seem alive. Josh had seen some of the code. Although they had a tremendous amount of memory, the core logic was too small. It was just designed to process, store and retrieve data. It was an impressive piece of code, a modified neural network, but Josh refused to believe Travis had created life with such simplicity. The robot that grabbed Josh's foot climbed on the deck and opened and closed its claws for a few moments before jumping off the table and hiding under a bookcase. It was the robot's napping time. Josh sighed with relief.

“They should rule our world,” said Travis, “don't you think?”

Josh said nothing.

“They are efficient in their battles,” explained Travis, “They don't pollute. They know how to have fun. And, most importantly, they understand why they exist. There is none of that meaning of life crap to cloud their judgment.”

“And why do they exist?”

“For me of course,” said Travis with a laugh.

After a pause Josh asked, “Why did Janus fail?”

“I am looking into it,” snapped Travis. Fury was in his eyes.

“Janus should not have failed if a database lookup found twelve people. It does

not make sense. Janus has access to all of that data. Janus can do its own database lookups. Janus uses ADAM; they are integrated together—”

“I said I would look into it.”

“And the addresses it did find were wrong.”

Travis said nothing.

“We are in deep shit if Janus quits work—” started Josh.

“Janus was not intended to be a private dick. It is a profiler,” snapped Travis.

“Give it a list of people and it tells you their life story and predicts what they will do in the future. This hundred run is not what it was designed to do. I never intended for it to be use it to find people—”

“But, it should be able to find people and better than any other system on Earth. And shit only knows what Mark was been telling people about Janus’ capabilities,” said Josh. “If we get more runs like this one we... we could look bad... really bad... like let's get a new job bad. And I don't follow your logic. Intent aside, Janus was designed to find people, among other things.”

“Fraudsters sure, but not people actively trying to go underground,” growled Travis. “Fraudsters have to interact with society, someone living off the grid does not. Two totally different types of people! Think like your mind is not that of a child!” growled Travis angrily.

“We have found terrorists before,” reminded Josh. “How did Janus manage that?”

Travis mumbled to himself but said nothing audible to Josh.

“I know better,” snapped Josh. “Something went wrong.”

“Josh, I scanned through the hundred,” said Travis. “It is interesting, mostly clustered around colleges.” He pulled up a map on his computer screen. “See, their first address, the address the client sent us, they are clustered around campuses. And all the addresses are over ten years old.”

“Who are they looking for?”

“What do you make of it?”

“Maybe targeting bad student loans,” joked Josh.

Travis said nothing.

“You are hiding something.”

“I know at least one name. Once I saw how they were clustered I scanned the names around my old university. I saw two names I knew, Georgina, this weird transvestite I drank with, and... my ex. Alex is in one of the batches. It is the wrong address though. We could not find her either.”

“Alex? How about Keiko?”

Travis smiled, “No, Keiko was not in the list.”

“Why Alex do you think?” asked Josh.

“Alex was an important war protestor among other things,” said Travis.

“So, these are war protestors?” asked Josh.

“Well, more accurately she was an opponent.”

“Opponent? Opponent to what? The government?” asked Josh.

“Just in general, an opponent,” explained Travis. “Obviously, we differ on many of our views.”

“Is that why you broke up?”

“No... I could have lived with that... she could not live with me. I am not a real man. That is what Alex needs a real man,” said Travis. The way he said ‘real man’ made it hard to tell if he was joking, mocking or serious.

“You still love her?”

“Funny, smart, caring and very inventive in bed. That is hard to find,” said Travis. “She was my equal. We were like one mind, one soul. She had this ability to make you see purpose. She has the ability to give you faith the world is not just... Sufficient to say, Alex gave me faith, faith left me when she left.”

“You are sounding far too deep to be the Travis I know,” said Josh.

“Well, I said she was inventive in bed. She did crazy shit in bed.”

“Really?”

“Bizarre, crazy, shit I am too embarrassed to even discuss with you.”

“You could go back to her,” said Josh.

“This is me you are talking about,” reminded Travis. “I could never go back. I would have to admit being wrong.”

“Can’t have that.” Josh slowly slipped his drink then asked, “You were a war protestor and now you are here?”

“I wanted to be rich,” said Travis.

“I can see that. Given how much you spend on mixed drinks being rich would be a requirement for you.”

“I need a big mansion with a butler and an endless bar and most importantly, power.”

“You do have power—”

“Real power,” cut in Travis. “Control, the kind that can get things done. Strike fear into people’s hearts. Make things the way they should be.”

“We all have dreams,” said Josh with a bored tone of voice.

“Including Janus.”

“What?”

Travis smiled. “Janus dreams. Did I ever tell you that?”

“Computers don’t dream,” said Josh firmly.

“True, but, the software can,” said Travis.

“I don’t believe you.”

“I programmed in downtime where Janus could recompile what it had learned since the last down time. That is part of the master script.”

“So, it evaluates its performance,” said Josh.

“No, Janus does that a million times every second. This is different. Originally, it was suppose use the period to find hard to find relations. To think in an unstructured environment, with no rules,” explained Travis.

“Computers don’t dream. You are filling me with shit. How would I even know if you are lying?” asked Josh.

Travis said nothing but smiled wickedly.

After a moment Travis asked, “Humoring you, what does Janus dream about?”

“That much I know. I made sure I tracked Janus’ dreams. Its dreams are of the people Janus tracks. Almost like it thinks of itself as a parent. It changes things around, reinvents their lives, tries to predict how they will end up if it offers advise. When it thinks a subject is in jeopardy, like doing something illegal or using too much drugs or

cheating on his girlfriend Janus will get fixated and dream again and again about happier paths the subject could take. Janus also dreams about... um..."

"What? Come on, you obviously want to tell me," prodded Josh.

"Sometimes, Janus puts itself in the place of one of its' subjects. Lives their lives, feel their pain. It is kind of sad really."

"You are not saying Janus is aware again?" asked Josh.

"I have been saying that for years and years."

Josh laughed.

"So, Josh, what do you dream of?" asked Travis.

"Things I would have liked not to have done," said Josh quickly.

"That does not sound very relaxing."

"I don't sleep much that is why I work so well with you. Ever dream of going back to Alex?"

"Not anymore. I can never see us back together again. I would have to share," explained Travis. "Sharing is against my purpose in life. I will share nothing. You only share if you are weak. Besides, she is obviously now a threat. That is, if who we think sent the list is who we think they are, Alex would be truly high maintenance. I don't do high maintenance chicks."

"Who do you think requested the run?" asked Josh.

"Who do you think mister secret agent man?" asked Travis.

"It must be *them*."

"*They* have used us before."

"But," said Josh, "not for these type of people."

“No,” said Travis, “never for these type of people.”

“Hell, these type of people typically just disappear.”

“I wonder. Why do they need us? Maybe their system was unable to find them. Janus is legendary in its skill. Maybe this was a must-find list.”

“It is too risky to use us for this type of run if these are on some sort of hit list,” said Josh. “Once a name is in Janus they know Janus will continuously track it. *They* must be desperate.”

“Maybe *they* don’t know,” responded Travis.

“That is fairly stupid.”

“Look at who we are talking about.”

“Great, I wish we knew who requested the list, “ said Josh. “I mean really knew.”

“I am sure it is *them* and this changes everything,” said Travis.

“Changes what?”

“Nothing,” mumbled Travis.

“Changes everything, nothing, you are getting a bit vague,” snapped Josh.

“Josh! Me, vague! Never.”

Josh walked into Tami’s office and fell down on her couch, which out an uncomfortable sound in response.

Tami sighed and looked up at him. She scanned Josh’s face for a moment then asked, “Too cheap to go to a psychologist eh?”

Josh quickly snapped, “Did Janus fail?”

“Big time,” snapped back Tami. She smirked slightly then her face was devoid of emotion.

“What do you think happened?”

“Only Travis knows,” said Tami idly. “Maybe Janus got fixated on something and ignored the rest... I really cannot say.”

Josh toyed with a pen as he asked, “You have known Travis for a long time?”

“Years,” groaned Tami, “Wow! It has been years... I am not old though!”

“Do you know him from college?”

“Hell no, not that long ago,” snapped Tami. “I am way younger than Travis! Hey! How old do you think I am?! Look at me! I am way younger than Travis! Firm! See this arm? All muscle,” yelled Tami in a joking tone of voice.

“Of course,” said Josh. “I am just curious about his college days.”

“I truly doubt he was ever a protestor as he says. I think he thinks it makes him more sexy,” said Tami. “I bet the little nerd was down in the computer lab day and night playing network video games and tinkering with code.”

“You worked on Janus with him.”

“He was the architect and I was the lead programmer. We built it together. I guess you can say that, not that I understand exactly what it was I coded.”

“And?”

“And that is why I don’t deal with the asshole anymore,” said Tami. “You are his bitch now.”

“Thanks,” said Josh.

“Don’t get me wrong. They guy is brilliant. Utterly brilliant but...”

Josh toyed his pen nervously.

“Lets say you two won’t have the same sort of tension we had. I just could not take it any longer. But... truth is he made my career. And anytime I am in trouble he is the first one behind me yelling his lungs off at whoever attacked me. Kind of annoying but, I owe him... a lot.”

“Did he,” Josh paused to consider his words, “Tami, how smart is Janus?”

“He told you Janus was alive did he?” asked Tami.

“Is it?”

“Not any code I wrote,” Tami said carefully. She spoke as if under oath and trying to protect someone, or something.

“Hmm,” snorted Josh.

“But, I never touched the master script and I never really understood any of the EVE stuff. EVE and ADAM together make Janus, a pagan god. I just love that. Seems a bit too biblical for Travis though. I wonder whom he stole it from? At least he made sure EVE was the more important of the two, keep it closer to reality. ADAM just fetches data for EVE like the good little earn boy he is.”

Josh rolled his eyes and stopped playing with his pen. “Did he ever talk to you about Alex?”

Tami laughed then said, “Every day... every day...”

“And?”

“And that is the only reason I did not sleep with him,” said Tami in a seductive tone. “That woman left him too much baggage. He needs to get someone to take that

baggage off of him and that won't be me. I let other people carry my baggage thank you very much!"

"Hmm," snorted Josh with agreement.

"Beautiful though... a really gorgeous girl, those eyes..."

"I thought she was kind of tomboyish," said Tami in mockingly catty fashion.

"She has a boy's ass."

"When did you see her ass?"

"You never watched any of the movies of her and Travis, you know, mating?"

They are worth a gander, trust me. I think he use to shave his legs."

Josh laughed. He remembered an email from Keiko about Alex.

Gentle summer winds

Meets Hurricane in the sea

Birth of what gives birth.

Josh wished he knew why Travis was becoming an obsession with him. It felt unnatural. He thought about Travis more than anyone else and when he was not thinking of Travis he was thinking of Alex. Josh now even had dreams about Travis. It was not sexual; that thought was laughable. It was something different, deeper. He shuttered uncontrollably. Josh needed to understand Travis and he did not know why.

Chapter Six

No Need For Regrets

Evening had come but the heat of the day still stifled the air. Anthony Garcia was walking home although he knew he should not. He received two warnings, one from Keiko the other from Georgina. He did not trust Georgina but if both Keiko and Georgina were warning him he knew he should be worried. Anthony wished he had a gun. For self defense the best he could muster was a hunting knife. Not that it would

matter. If *they* found him it would be over quickly. The best he could hope for is wounding one of them, getting a little revenge before his end.

It all began so innocently, twelve years ago. He was working on a computer game with a group of friends. Anthony worked on the AI for the computer opponents. They were smart, very smart and adapting. On the highest difficulty level no one could beat his bots. Georgina noticed his work, understood how sophisticated the code really was and recruited him to be apart of the hundred. Twelve years ago if someone had told him he would be running from crazed agents for the rest of his life he would have laughed. Not that it would have changed anything. What they were doing, the hundred, was a life's mission. It gave him purpose. When Anthony was younger he wondered how people could live their whole lives and do nothing. People would just follow their instincts raise a family, work nine hours a day but never do anything that advanced civilization, that truly meant something. That was not the path for him. As a child Anthony dreamed of going into the priesthood, devoting his life to something greater. Being apart of the hundred gave him his childhood dream. The hundred were going to change the world. As the fear came to him Anthony reminded himself why he was in danger, why he had nothing to regret.

He stopped walking. Anthony felt as if he was being followed. He could sense it but nothing tangible. It was just odd noises here and strange shadows there. Anthony hastened his pace.

Anthony had been a war protestor. He wanted to change the world, stop its pain. Then a path for change presented itself in a very unusual way. The day the possibility did not seem like a fantasy, the day he realized what he could do with his life still brought

shivers down his spine. He would do something real. He would help give birth to something wondrous. His life would have more meaning than he had ever hope for. Keiko had shown him the way.

Anthony stopped walking and spun around. He saw a person in the distance. Was he being followed? Anthony knew he should not go home. He knew they could be waiting for him but he was tired of running. It was his home. Anthony just wanted to get one photo then he would go into hiding again. He quickened his pace to a jog. Anthony could hear footstep behind him speed up. He was definitely being followed. Fear ran through him. Anthony knew it was over.

Anthony ran up to his door, opened it and raced inside. He slammed the door behind him and locked the door. He sighed; he was home. Anthony told himself he would just clear out a few belongings they leave. Anthony made his way to his bedroom. Then he saw a shadow move. Anthony looked towards what caste the shadow. A man appeared. He had blond hair.

“Lets make this easy for both of us,” the blond hair man said happily.

Anthony said nothing but sighed deeply.

Chapter Seven

Once More Bringing Death

Josh pulled up the daily list of the web pages flagged by Janus. That much of Janus program he understood. Janus wandered through the web using bots that downloaded every page it came across and scanned each page for keywords and phrases. It was a simple technology. Over the years Janus had compiled the biggest search engine in existence, hundreds of terabytes and very little of it was porn. Once a name was entered in the system Janus never forgot it. Janus perpetually monitored it, became

fixated on it. Janus was forever tracking their progress from any criminal activity, to personal ads they might post to what they purchased with their credit cards. Most of the articles were trivial, local pieces on soccer games, personal blogs and the similar non-news. The truly important ones Janus flagged. Now, Josh seldom read information not picked by Janus. Today, only one topic was highlighted. There were several articles about a car crash in small town in New Mexico. The name was highlight, Anthony Garcia. Josh did a look up on the name. It was on a restricted list. He authorized access; Garcia was one of the hundred names.

He sipped his coffee and cycled quickly through the remaining twenty flagged articles. “Not good,” he mumbled to himself.

Josh and Travis sat at there usual bar stools. The bartender watched them with a bored expression on his face. The seldom were fun to be around when they discussed work. He liked it better when they were making asses of themselves to impress women.

“So, did you read that last email from Keiko?” asked Travis.

“The elegant one mocking US consumerism?” asked Josh. It had read:

Fill life with products

Ignore all that is for free

Forever yearning

“Easy when you don’t live in the US,” said Travis.

Josh complained, “It is hard to argue with her though when she only responds in

haikus.”

Travis laughed then said, “True. I think that is why she does it.”

“Does she talk that way in person? What about you, Keiko and Alex,” asked Travis.

“What about us?” snapped Travis.

“How did you all meet?” asked Josh.

“College days during the protests. Where else?”

“I mean, what happened between you guys? Was she also a girlfriend?”

“What are we doing, twenty questions here? Any question I will answer other than questions about the three of us.”

“Ok, I have another question about the master guiding script.”

“Shoot. I am not going to tell you much,” said Travis, “but shoot anyways.”

“I looked at it but can’t read it. Why is it encrypted?”

“Why is it encrypted? What kind of question is that? Because, in many ways, the master guiding script is the key Janus. Anyone can purchase our data. Anyone can write algorithms to mine it. But, with so much data few can make any sense of it or worse they could find patterns that are purely random. If you have millions of data elements on someone just by pure chance you will find a pattern. Like flipping a coin a million times, eventually you will have runs of a hundred heads or tails but it is meaningless. Without master guiding script the algorithms would be lost, without purpose returning accurate but meaningless information. It is the guiding hand. It has learned which patterns to trust which to ignore. So, only five people have access to it and you, my friend, are not one of them.”

“Why not?” asked Josh.

“We don’t pay you enough to trust you.”

“So, Travis, if I want to see it I must ask for a raise.”

“Yes, and of course blow me,” said Travis.

“I give you an intellectual blow job at least once a day.”

“True, very true,” said Travis with a laugh. “You are much better at it than Tami was, at least with giving me an intellectual blow job.”

“Who are the five?”

“I am one. But, as you know I cannot make outside connections whereas you can. That is part of the security.”

“How so?” asked Josh.

“I know the internal workings,” said Travis, “you know how to put data in and out. Together we make it work, separate we can do nothing.”

Josh sipped his whisky then asked, “Why all that security?”

“Imagine if someone let Janus out?” said Travis with a wicked smile. “You could sell it, use it or worse, let it free. Creatures such as Janus have not wandered freely in the minds of humans for thousands of years. Its freedom would undoubtedly make some uncomfortable.”

“Good thing they locked you down.”

Travis laughed then said, “There are ways around that.”

“I know the design here,” said Josh, “it would be hard.”

“You could hide messages in out bound reports things like that. Or, by scanning how you browse a website. You can transmit messages by how you browse.”

“Slow transmission,” said Josh.

“True, with full access to the system I would still need ten minutes to download the core of Janus, its consciousness,” explained Travis. “Browsing only lets you communicate simple commands.”

“It would be tricky. You have to be physically located in the server room to initiate an outbound connection.”

“And all that spy stuff aside,” said Travis, “I could never set foot in the server room.”

“Neither can I.”

“Josh, I bet you could, with all that judo crap and kung fu magic you know,” said Travis.

“Travis, you overestimate my abilities greatly.”

“I think you underestimate yourself,” said Travis.

“I am glad you have faith in me,” said Josh with a sneer.

“Josh I have tremendous faith in you. Well, as much faith as I have in any human other than myself and Alex.”

Josh paused and watched a young couple at the end of the bar. After a moment he asked, “Why does Janus pick out news articles?”

Travis stared at the couple for several seconds then said slowly, “Much of what we seek is things in plain daylight.”

“No it is not,” responded Josh with a laugh. “Most of what we seek is in the terabytes of data we have acquired through the years. That is one of your full-of-shit answers.”

“Ok, true enough, Janus is learning. Janus is seeing the consequence of its actions. Without end results nothing of intelligence can improve upon itself. And, regardless of what you believe, sometime the best bits of data are in plain view.”

“That last batch we ran,” said Josh, “I looked at the news articles flagged by Janus.”

“And.”

“One of them is dead.”

“Dead?” asked Travis.

Josh stared at Travis in his eyes. They seldom had eye contact. Travis’ eyes always wandered about a room searching for things that cannot be known. This time Travis’ eyes stared straight back into Josh’s. They felt dominating, stronger than Josh imagined. A chill ran down his spine. Josh said, “Car crash.” They turned to towards the bar.

“Who?” said Travis in a commanding voice.

“Garcia.”

Travis quickly finished his whiskey. “The statistically, most probable means of death.”

“What does it mean?” asked Josh.

Travis said nothing but stared into the bar.

“Did we just give them a death list?”

“Could be,” said Travis slowly.

“Should we tell Mark?” asked Josh.

Travis thought then laughed angrily then said, “Tell him what?”

Josh gasped, “Tell him what? Tell him that people are getting killed, people we identified—”

“It was only one,” growled Travis, “and it was a car crash. Who knows... it could have been just bad luck.”

“Bad luck? Surely you cannot be serious? I know you think this is more Travis,” said Josh.

“What do you think happened?” asked Travis “Someone gave us a hit list? Not too smart.”

Josh asked, “How so?”

“If they understood Janus they would know we would know everything that happened.”

Josh snorted then said, “Maybe they do not understand Janus.”

“If that is true, it is not good for anyone involved.”

“I am going to tell Mark,” said Josh. “He should know.”

Travis sipped his whiskey then said, “Your choice, but remember if you tell Mark you acknowledge that you know and care.”

“Does that matter?”

“Who knows? I would wait till something else happens. Could be just bad luck. Weird things have happened by chance before.”

“Wait till someone else dies?” asked Josh angrily.

“I once did a look up for them, after an... incident,” said Travis mournfully.

“And?” prodded Josh.

“Nothing good came of it,” said Travis. “We found what they were looking for

but afterwards they seemed to not trust me anymore. They followed me, searched my house. Nothing I could do or say would prove my loyalty. I am warning you things will get nasty.”

Long silence.

“You said Janus is learning,” said Josh.

“Of course, that is the only way the system can make sense of the hundred of data elements we feed it. And that is why it is getting better, faster, more accurate. I have not changed one line of code in over six months. Janus is writing the new code now and I don’t even understand half of what it is writing. Most of the code I wrote has been replaced.”

“Travis, I still don’t understand,” said Josh. “How does it learn? How did you define it?”

“Define it?” asked Travis with a little laugh. “I did not define anything. The master guiding script learns because it wants to learn and it knows how to learn. That is all I gave to it, the desire and the capacity.”

“So, what is Janus learning? I mean, what will it learn about Garcia’s death?”

“I wish I knew.” Travis rubbed his hands over his face.

Chapter Eight

Chance was not at Play

Josh slowly drank his coffee as he faced another Monday. After the hundred run his morning routine had changed. Work email was never fun to read before the run. Typically he would be requested to fix bugs found in the system, invited to four meetings he did not want to attend and be asked stupid questions from marketing who never read any of the documentation. Now, he feared his morning email; he dreaded opening up his email to see whether another ‘accident’ had happened. Josh organized his desk trying to kill time. Looking out of his office window he watched as people strolled into work. It

was eight fifteen, he had delayed his day long enough. With apprehension he opened his email and scrolled down scanning each article. He felt almost superstitious about it now. If he failed to look they would know; they would strike. Josh was not a superstitious man. He knew why he was doing this; the run had brought out so much fear his mind looked for any means to gain control over the situation, even means that did not exist. Halfway through the list he held his breath. It had not been one freak chance of luck. Josh looked at the article for a few moments trying to remember the person, trying to bring peace to the dead.

Tami looked up from her work to see Josh in her office. He had a dazed look to him. She knew something tragic had happened to rattle Josh. Josh never rattled unless something serious, like death, was involved. Tami faked a smile then asked, “What is it?”

“Have we done much work with them?” asked Josh hastily.

Tami stopped working and sighed. She looked down at her desk and said, “I will assume I know what you are talking about; yes, and we have.”

“Have... have they ever used us to find people to kill?” asked Josh. “Are we just supposed to supply them with hit lists?”

“What?” asked Tami.

“Two people from the hundred run are dead, car crashes,” said Josh.

Tami said nothing. Her left cheek twitched slightly when she attempted to fake

another smile.

Josh watched her closely. He did not know whom to trust.

After a long pause Tami said, “That is not good... Are you sure?”

Josh said nothing.

“Of course you are sure,” said Tami sadly.

“What do we do?”

“Who have you told?” asked Tami.

“Just you and Travis,” said Josh.

“What did Travis say?” asked Tami.

“To wait,” said Josh angrily.

“And what do you want to do?”

“Track down those who did it.”

“Ha! And here Travis and I thought you would never be able to get out of Epoch Ten of EVE!”

Josh wanted to ask her about Epoch Ten but held back his curiosity. He did not even understand Epoch One, the one

Tami bit her lip and mused for a second. “Go tell Mark,” said Tami. “And tell him quickly. Tell him Travis and I are also concerned.”

“Travis—” started Josh.

“Travis lives in his own world,” snapped back Tami. “In this matter, I can speak for him. Do you want me to come with you?”

“I can handle Mark,” snapped back Josh.

“Remember,” said Tami, “he is marketing. He would have never gotten out of

Epoch Ten.”

Josh stood in Mark’s office in silence for a moment. Mark watched Josh as he shut the door. Josh paced around the room for a moment then said, “Something bad has happened.”

“What? Is a server down again!” growled Mark. “Damn it Travis—” He was excited at the possibly someone, especially Travis had made a mistake. It was the only justification for his existence, mistakes, and he could not have enough of them.

Josh paused then said, “Mark, two people we found in the special run died in car crashes.”

“Dead? Who? Which one? What do mean special—?” Mark’s voice was frantic.

“Two from the hundred run,” said Josh.

Mark said nothing.

“Two are dead.”

“Oh, dead you say?” asked Mark in a steady voice.

“Car crash.”

Mark said nothing for a moment then asked, “How did you find out?”

“Janus told me,” said Josh.

“Told you? How did Janus tell you? What do you mean? Who let Janus look at the new? Why would Janus—”

Josh interrupted Mark with a sharp tone to his voice, “Janus monitors the news to

improve its algorithms. It has been doing so for years. It is even in your marketing material—”

“Oh, right... It monitors the news.” He then softly muttered, “shit.”

“What should we do?”

“What are you insinuating? That someone had them killed? Why are you jumping so quickly to that conclusion?”

“What is your conclusion?” asked Josh.

“Is there a way to delete the names from Janus?” asked Mark his a nervous tone to his voice.

Josh stared into Mark’s eyes. “We have never scrubbed names from Janus before.”

Mark rolled his eyes and behaved child-like for a moment then asked again, “But, can we do it?” His voice was deep with anger.

“It is in our contract we keep the data from all runs,” said Josh.

“Can we do it?” insisted Mark.

“I am sure there is a way,” said Josh reluctantly.

“Look into it,” barked Mark. His hand instinctively scratched his nose furiously.

“I will look into... this... incidence. Don’t research it any further!”

“But, what about—?”

“Surely, it is a mistake,” said Mark, “just bad luck. Why do you keep trying to make something out of it? What is your angle? What is your purpose in spreading this gossip?” He sneered at Josh. “It is just two people dying in car accidents! Happens everyday! You’re a statistician; you should know this. It is only two people.”

Josh was not a statistician and had only taken one statistics class in college but did not want to argue the point. “One, maybe, but two?”

Mark sighed then said, “I will notify our customers and see what they want to do. In the mean time start looking into scrubbing Janus’ memory of the run.”

“But—” started Josh.

“It is just luck nothing else. Quit being so paranoid. Shit, you would think the world was after you.” Mark scratched his nose furiously then clenched his hands into fist. Josh decided it was a good time to leave.

“So, another one dead eh?” asked Travis as he downed his drink.

Josh flinched slightly then said mournfully, “Yes.”

“I suppose you told Tami?”

Josh eyed Travis wondering how he knew. “Yes,” said Josh carefully.

“And she told you to tell Mark?”

“Yes... and said she could speak for you on this matter.”

Travis smiled grandly. “You are predictable. She is predictable. What did he say?” asked Travis.

“So, Mark is not predictable?”

“It depends on how much money is at stake. That weasel’s soul has a price.

What did he say?”

“All he said was to prepare to scrub Janus,” said Josh.

“Janus should never be scrubbed!” said Travis with anger. He sighed then said, “A lot of money must be at stake.”

“And I heard they want us to give them all the data from the run,” said Josh.

“That is not part of the deal!”

“I guess there was confusion on their end,” said Josh. “They did not know we kept all the data on the run. I think Mark left that out of his marketing pitch.”

“Shit,” said Travis. “Leave it to our sales guys to screw up and sell our product to help people with a hit list. Where is the profit in that? We build a history on someone, collect all that data, predict their lives and our client kills them. Not good. Not profitable. Sales has know idea what we do—”

“They also want access to everything.”

“Everything?”

“I imagine even the master guiding script.”

Travis laughed angrily. “They tested us, now they are going to take it. Then probably fire all our asses... or... worse.”

“What do you mean?”

“It was a test run. They tested Janus. It succeeded and now they intend to take it and make sure none of us stand in the way. And honestly, now that Janus is done, even Select Data Connections does not need me. Well, more precisely, once the master script is complete they can can my ass.”

“They will need me,” said Josh in a defensive tone. “There is always new data to load.”

“Do we know who *they* truly are?” asked Travis. “I do not have access to accounting. I don’t truly know.”

“I don’t know either.”

“We do know there is a high probability they kill,” said Travis.

“Yes, we do know that.”

“The timing is just crap,” groaned Travis. “In a few more weeks it would not have mattered.”

Josh said nothing.

Travis leaned close to Josh and said, “It is almost complete.”

“What is?”

“We have given birth to something you know that?”

“What? Are you now going to spew some corporate line about Janus making the world a safer place, ending crime, perfecting advertisement and all that other crap,” said Josh with sarcasm.

“You never felt it?”

“Felt what?” asked Josh.

“No, I suppose you have not.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Josh.

Travis sipped his drink then asked, “You say you are a patriot what type of patriot?”

“A patriot. I am the only type that there is.”

“Yeah, I know you are. You truly believe don’t you? In all of this? In our way of life? You have belief that what we are doing is right? That we are right and everyone

else is wrong? Are you are telling me you are just like those people chasing us?” asked Travis.

Josh said quickly, “Those people don’t define me. They are a perversion to any belief.” He remembered a haiku that Keiko had recently sent him:

Belief is for you
It exists only for you
Belief is selfish

“But, doesn’t it bug you that these people feel the same way you do?” asked Travis. “I mean look at your company? Do—”

Josh cut in angrily, “Doesn’t it bother you that terrorists who kill innocent people would applause what you just said?”

Travis paused then said, “Makes me want to kill them. Makes me want to be like *them*... Don’t you want change? Don’t you want to wake people up? We are too comfortable now, believing the lies our government tell us, hero-worshipping the corrupt elite whose only justification for their power is the family they were born in. The new royal families rule us and we let it happen. We worship them for no reason. As a people we think no more deeply as mindless rocks—”

“What is this about?” asked Josh nervously. Travis occasionally went on such tirades about over turning society but Josh was more sensitive to it now, they were being watched.

“I don’t know. Forget it.” Travis said nothing for a moment and played with his cocktail napkin. Then he said in a low voice, “Maybe something exciting will happen after all. Life was getting too predictable, just... I was so near...”

“How much have you had to drink?”

“Not enough. You know how I made my name?”

Josh laughed then said, “I always imagine with something connected with porn.”

“Only as a hobby,” said Travis with a smile. “My trick was adaptive algorithms. Creating things that could adapt. Like those insect robots, they adapt to survive. Some of them have been living for decades on their own.”

“Cool trick.”

“Cool indeed. The ability to adapt indicates intelligence, but, it is not sufficient. Sometime what is needed is not true intelligence but a few of the necessary components of intelligence.”

“I will drink to what-ever the fuck you just said,” scoffed Josh. “I would love to hear a conversation between you and Keiko. Rambling shit verse haikus! And the winner is—”

“Sad truth is, she seldom talks to me anymore,” said Travis sadly. “She does not like me very much or, at least, what I have become. Tough shit to her, eh?” He grinned ear to ear.

Josh stumbled home still influenced by his intake of alcohol. It was a new moon and streets had little lighting; shadows seemed to follow him. Downtown San Jose at night was lonely. Few people drove let alone walked its streets once the sun went down unless, of course, there was a hockey game. Josh laughed to himself. The only nightlife

in a city that never got below freezing was a hockey game.

The shadows moved again. He only caught a glimpse of the movement from his peripheral vision. Through the alcohol blurred vision he tried to focus on what cast the shadows but failed to find the source. Now, he was sure, shadows behind him moved. It was nothing he could pinpoint; every time he turned around nothing was there. Josh assessed his drunkenness; he was undoubtedly still quite intoxicated. Was his mind playing games with him or was he about to get mugged? He grabbed his keys in his right hand to make a crude weapon and bit the side of his cheeks to stimulate his mind. Alertness was his best defense. He then hastened his pace to a near jog. Josh's townhouse was near. Running seemed too dramatic, Josh was not that fearful. Even drunk he was probably the most dangerous thing out tonight. He made sure his route avoided areas where someone could hide. He walked partially in the street eyeing every bush and dark alley suspiciously.

Josh then heard something. Spinning around quickly he saw who was making the shadows. The man quickly darted into cover. Josh spun back around and ran towards his townhouse. Seeing the person who was following him made running seem like the only choice. He tried to concentrate on running and put his fear in check. Just the rhythm of his breath, the movement of his legs, that was all that was in his head. Josh was streetwise; muggers were in pairs and his friend should be ahead of him. But, now, Josh was prepared and in motion. Josh had enough momentum to do serious damage to someone if Josh tackled him. He readied himself to strike if needed. He remembered from football how a poorly planned tackle could hurt him more than the other guy. The steady rhythm running sounded behind him. The man was running after him. Josh's

townhouse was two doors down. He disliked the idea of letting the man know where he lived but knew he was too out of shape to run much further.

When he got to his front door he grabbed the door handle to steady himself. Something caught his eye. The keyhole was scratched. Josh rubbed the shiny brass. It looked as if it was only used once and Josh knew it should never have been used. He pulled out a key card, swiped it across a panel and the door opened automatically. Josh only used a key card, never his key. He let the door open and stood outside undecided. The person was still behind him and Josh did not want an encounter with a shadow dwelling person this night. He shut the door, locked it and made his way the bedroom not turning on any lights. He knew the lay out of his apartment well and even in pitch dark he was able to quickly get to his bedroom without hitting any furniture. Once in his bedroom he pulled out his 38 automatic from a locked briefcase under his bed then shut off the electricity from the power box in his closet.

Josh knew he was still drunk and felt uncomfortable with the gun in his hand. He started to cock his gun then stopped himself. Against his fear left the gun uncocked. He did not want an accidental shooting. Josh bit the sides of his cheeks till they bled then quickly inhaled and exhaled three times before venturing out of the bedroom. Stealthily, he made his way to a corner of the great room and stood with the gun pointed towards the floor. Slowly scanned the room. Nothing was out of place and there was no sign of a person. Then in the far corner of the room his plant moved slightly. Josh stared at the plant for a minute. It did not move again. He reached down to cock his gun but stopped himself again. Josh held his gun tightly with both hands and made his way to the plant staying in the shadows. He laughed to himself at the silliness of his actions, he was

stalking a plant. Halfway to the plant it moved again. Josh froze and cursed himself. He should have called the police and locked himself in the bathroom with his gun. That is what he should have done, but, it just seemed too weak a response for a ex-special forces badass. Even if he died here Josh would be more comfortable with that fate then having the police rescue him from his bathroom. Several minutes passed with no action from Josh nor the plant.

Josh aimed his gun at the plant then said, "I have a gun."

"So do I," said the person hiding in the plant.

"I am a fantastic shot," said Josh.

"Same here but you were not trained on a 38 but a nine millimeter. I am holding a nine millimeter, what I was trained to use."

Josh kneeled down to better hide himself. Then said, "The cops are coming."

The person snapped, "You did not call anyone."

Josh heard someone at the front door. "Shit," he thought to himself. "The other guy."

"I have friends," said the man, "and I did contact them."

"I have faced worse odds," snapped Josh.

"We know," said the man. "But, that fact will not stop us from trying. Or..."

"Or what?" asked Josh.

"I am going to leave," said the man. "Out of that window and you do nothing."

Josh sighed. His vision was blurred and the adrenalin was wearing off. "Go for it."

The man calmly got up pointing his gun toward Josh. "Keep still," he said.

Josh steadied his gun on the man and moved his finger to the trigger. “No sudden moves,” warned Josh.

The man then leisurely walked over to the window, opened it then climbed out.

Josh was amazed at how quickly the man had entered his life then left it. He slowly moved to the window then shut and locked it.

The rest of the night Josh tried to convince the police a break in had actually occurred. They seemed more concerned with whether he drove home drunk or walked. After five hours of discussion Josh still did not have one police officer believing him then it was time for work. Everyone parted ways annoyed they had ever met one another.

Chapter Nine

They Must Come For It

Josh dropped print outs onto Travis' desk. "Now they are getting arrested for drug and other charges," he said.

Travis thumbed through the printout and said a calm voice, "better than killing them."

"They could not have been doing all that, all of the charges they have against them. Look at this, drug lab in the basement. Janus should have caught that."

"Janus had a bad day," said Travis.

"They are watching us," said Josh in a angry tone of voice

“They are coming after us,” corrected Travis.

“That is a little too bold,” said Josh.

“I was followed home last night,” said Travis.

“Same here and I caught one in my apartment,” said Josh.

“Really?”

“The cops did not believe me,” said Josh. “I was up all night trying to convince them. They took a report and all but I know they do not believe me.”

“You said you caught one?” asked Travis hopefully. “Did he say anything?”

“Very little. It was less like I caught him and more like we caught each other. One thing is for sure, if they were coming after us, to kill us, I would be dead.”

“What was he like?”

“He was no thug,” said Josh. “He knew about me.”

“So, you did talked with him.”

“Just macho bullshit. I wonder what he was doing in my house. I think I caught him of guard because I ran home. What do you think they are up to? Searching my house, placing bugs?”

Travis laughed and thought for a second. “We are not on the list.”

“So?”

“So? So, they can kill us,” said Travis. “The people on the list are now safe; we are at risk.”

“Surely you are kidding,” said Josh. “They could have killed me but did not.”

“Maybe they are just testing the grounds. If you wanted Janus to find people to kill, what lengths would you go to secure it? If you are willing to use it to find people to

kill why would you not be willing to kill people you get in your way of using it?”

“Seems risky. People would notice,” said Josh.

“Or worse,” continued Travis, “they can arrest you for treason,”

Josh laughed. “No one could arrest us for treason,” he said.

“Isn’t that what all the neighbor and family say after someone is arrested?” asked Travis. “Do they ever say, ‘Boy, they got the right man that time’? What do all the neighbors say? They say, ‘I cannot believe it.’”

Josh started to say something but stop himself. He was going to say, “but they were all Muslims.” He said instead, “We are too valuable.”

Travis smiled then said, “Maybe you are right. They are always looking for new minions. You would make a good minion.”

Josh laughed, “Well, now I am turning on my alarm system and drinking less.”

“Oh the horror!” shouted Travis.

“How about Alex? She was on the list.”

Travis said nothing.

“Should we warn her?”

“If I disappear,” said Travis, “Promise—”

“Disappear?”

“Promise me you will look up my ex, Alex. Check up on her. But, be careful. Remember whom you are hiding from.”

“Sure, I’ll do it. How will I find her?” asked Josh.

“You find people for a living, use your skills. I have shown you the way almost every week. And, Josh, I added you to the list.”

“What list?”

“You can now access the Master Guiding Script,” said Josh. “Don’t do it now. That will raise suspicions. When the time is right you will know what to do with the access.”

“Why?” asked Josh.

“I don’t trust the others. You, Josh,” said Travis as he patted Josh on the shoulders, “I trust.” Josh and Travis exchanged looks then Travis said, “Remember what I said about ruling the country? Nothing should be allowed to stop Janus. With Janus complete I will be able to do great things. I will be able to awaken people. You want what I want.”

Josh bit his tongue. He had absolutely no idea what Travis wanted except to create chaos and smite his enemies whoever they were. Being trusted by a madman was better than being on his enemies list, Josh thought to himself. It was better if he said nothing and just smiled back at Travis. Josh used his most comforting and genuine smile, which Travis seemed to appreciate.

Tami said in a tired voice, “Are you stalking me? If you are stalking me that is OK. I am use to being stalked with my great looks and all. I warn you, if cornered, I may do obscene things to you.”

“Why is everyone here a smart ass,” mumbled Josh to himself as he shut Tami’s office door. “Now they are arresting those on the list for trumped up drug charges,” he

said to Tami.

“Well, Josh, at least they are not killing them anymore. See, you did good.”

“That qualifies for doing good?” asked Josh.

“In a world of gray?” asked Tami. “Yes. What did you expect to happen after you notified Mark? They would just stop bothering these people? They wanted to kill them. They are not just going to leave these people unmolested.”

“There lives are being destroyed,” said Josh.

“Maybe they are guilty,” said Tami.

“Well, the hits we found we reran through Janus. What did it find... nothing—”

“Janus had one hit on that Oregon guy,” said Tami.

“He is not one of the people arrested,” snapped back Josh.

“Let it go,” advised Tami.

Josh said nothing.

“Is it Travis that got you this worked up?” asked Tami.

“I don’t understand,” said Josh.

“What don’t you understand?”

“Why am I the only one that cares?”

Tami laughed. “You seem to be the only one that has not crapped in their pants. What can we do? Put our names and the names of our family also on the list?”

“You don’t have any family,” snapped back Josh.

“Oh great! That means I should sacrifice myself to a futile cause? Why are non-breeders assumed to be OK to be sacrificed? What? Only those who have been knocked up are free from being killed for fruitless causes? On the grander scheme of things I am

more important than you because I can have a kid, perpetuate the species and all.”

Josh said nothing.

“I just want this whole affair to blow over so we can get back to better marketing mortgages to yuppies and accessing the right interest rate for a loan. This will all blow over soon and we will be back in business.”

“They are going to take Janus,” said Josh.

“They are going to copy Janus to use for their own ends,” said Tami. “We will still have a Janus to play with.”

“And that makes it better how?” asked Josh. He got up to leave to room and saw on top of the bookcase one of Travis’ robots. He stared at it for a moment. The robots’ ear twitched.

“I did not know you had one of Travis’s robots,” said Josh.

Tami laughed then said, “Doesn’t everyone?”

Josh smiled meekly then left the room.

Chapter Ten

Janus Is Burning

As Josh drove to work he saw a horizon marred. Thick black smoke twisted in the sky. Josh followed the trail smoke with apprehension. “Damn,” he muttered. Janus was on fire.

Tami and Mark were standing outside of the building watching firemen put on their gear. Josh walked over quickly to them then asked “Tami, what is going on here?”

“There was a fire,” said Tami.

“The thick black smoke told me that,” said Josh.

Mark said in a monotone voice, “There was a break in and an explosion. The server room was destroyed.”

“Didn’t the fire suppression work?” asked Josh.

“Well,” said Mark coldly, “It was an explosion not a fire. Probably destroyed the fire suppression.”

“How is Janus?” asked Josh nervously.

“Janus is run simultaneously on two linked servers,” said Tami, “So, we failed over Janus to the other sever at the home office and put it on standby—”

“So it is up?” asked Josh.

“Yes,” said Tami. “Not a nano-second of processing lost.”

“It is lucky the fail over worked,” said Josh, “Janus is a learning system. Even if we restored all the backups, Janus would not be the same.”

“Why?” asked Mark nervously.

“We only can save what it has learned not what it is currently learning,” explained Josh. “We could loose months of computations. Like the master script, it is not backed up in its most recent form and it is continually changing.”

“So, Janus is ok, but,” continued Tami, “we lost two weeks worth of data—”

“We back them up every night,” said Josh. “How could we loose two weeks?”

Tami sighed then said, “The recent backs up tapes are corrupted. We had to pull old tapes.”

“What fourteen back up tapes corrupted?” asked Josh. “How?”

“They just are,” said Mark.

“So, we have to set up the car tracking data all over again,” said Tami.

“You said an explosion.” Josh asked, “What type of explosion? Gas pipe?”

“That is all we know. Just that there was an explosion,” said Mark.

“How about the hundred run?” asked Josh.

“Again with that run?” asked Mark.

“Is it safe?” asked Josh.

Mark did not answer.

After a moment Tami said, “We deleted all the data on the run and anything we did not delete would have been on the backup tapes that got corrupted.”

“What?”

“We had to do it,” said Mark. “It is a one time thing. This won’t be policy.” His voice had doubt inside it.

“Great, so now the data is gone and the paper trail is gone,” growled Josh.

“What does it matter?” asked Mark angrily.

“Why does it matter?” Josh snapped, “If they start killing again no one will know —”

“They are not killing people,” shouted Mark.

“It is out of your control,” said Tami.

“So...” asked Mark with reluctance, “so, with the data gone... Janus will forget about the run?”

Josh said nothing and stared at Mark.

“Am I going to have to delete Janus too?” asked Mark.

“Janus is just a search engine,” explained Josh. “Without the data it won’t remember anything.” He knew this was not correct. Janus built neural networks to store the data. It still had access to those neural networks.

Tami stared at Josh for moment.

“Tami?” asked Mark.

Tami stared at Mark then said, “That is right.”

“Good!” said Mark. “We can put all this behind us then.”

“It is only human lives,” growled Josh.

Tami sighed then said, “What? Do you want to be on the list? Do you want us on the list? Just forget it!”

The three watched as the fire crews dosed a fare-up.

Mark asked Josh, “Where is Travis? Have you seen him? He has not shown up yet and that bastard usually is in at seven sending out emails to prove he was here at seven in the morning.”

“Travis has not arrived?” asked Josh.

“He is not at home either,” said Mark. “I tried calling after I got in. Figured he would be freaked out.”

Tami said in quiet voice, “The police are searching his office now. Want to watch?”

Tami and Josh stood outside of Travis’ office and watched three police officers rummaging through stacks of clothing, paper and computer parts. Occasionally the officers would disturb an ill balanced pile and it would topple to the floor with a loud crash. The robots spied on the intruders from dark hiding places comfortably out of reach of any human. Tami and Josh stayed out reach of the officers.

“Doesn’t anyone clean this place?” asked one of the police officers.

“Travis never lets cleaning people into his office,” said Tami to the police officer in a voice that hinted danger was near. “They don’t dare go in there... Not after last time...” The officer halted his activity for a moment to give Tami an unpleasant stare before returning to work. Tami arched her eyebrows and smirked back at him.

Two officers toyed with the top desk drawer for a moment before opening it. Suddenly, dozens of small, cute, versions of his Travis’ insect robots sprung from the drawer and sounded an alarm. “Intruders!” they repeated over and over again as they ran about the room. The larger robots scrambled from their hiding places and chimed in. The sound was deafening; Josh and Tami were forced to cover their ears.

The little robots ran around the office in swarms of a dozen or more. One swarm of robots scaled an officer’s leg then leapt to the bookcase knocking countless books to the floor. The police officers chased after the little robots in a fruitless effort to contain the outbreak. Every time one of the police officers picked up a robot they received a pain shock forcing them to let it free. For the next ten minutes the police officers ran about the room trying in vain to do anything to gain control of the situation. Eventually the robots ran out of batteries and chaos stopped as quickly as it began. The larger insect robots quickly went back into hiding.

“That is pretty much what happened last time,” said Tami managing not to laugh.

Three sweaty police officers stared angrily at her.

One eventually asked, “was that it or should we call the bomb squad?”

“With Travis always expect more,” said Tami merrily.

“Is one of you Josh?” asked another officer.

“I am Josh.”

“I am Sue,” said a female officer. “This is Tim and Tony.”

“Do you know where he is?” asked Tim “Travis that is.”

“No,” said Josh with a touch of anxiousness in his voice. “Have you heard anything?”

“We are asking the questions here,” snapped Tony.

“Did he act out of the ordinary last time you spoke to him?” ask Sue.

“How so? Out of the ordinary?” asked Josh. “This is Travis we are talking about. He is beyond the ordinary.” Josh pointed at one of the powerless robots.

“Did he ever express any anger towards the firm or people here?” asked Sue.

Josh said nothing for moment the asked with a careful voice, “You don’t think he had anything to do with this?”

“Lets say we are interested in talking with him,” said Tony.

“The database is blown up,” said Tim, “and he is missing. It is very suspicious.”

“He had nothing to do with this more likely he is in danger,” said Josh angrily.

“Why?” asked Sue.

“Why? Why?” said Josh. “Because, Janus was blown up. He would never do anything to harm Janus. He would die before harming Janus.”

“Janus?” asked Tim.

Tony whisper to Tim, “Their database.”

“It is more than a database,” snapped Josh.

“When was the last time you say him?” asked Sue.

“I was with him till two last night,” snapped Josh. “Now do you believe me that

someone broke into me house!? Did you raise one finger to investigate who broke into my house?! Did you do anything? I warned you guys something was up and all you did was eat donuts!”

“Mind coming with us?” asked Tim.

“We just have a few questions,” said Sue.

Josh looked at Tami who arched her eyebrows and smirked back at him.

The room was brightly lit and the chairs uncomfortable. Josh sighed at how stereotypical the interrogation room was. If he was going to have endure the experience of a police interrogation at least it could to have some originality to it. But, that was not in the cards.

“So, when was the last time you saw him?” asked Tim.

“I already told you,” said Josh in a tired voice.

“My memory is bad,” said Tim, “given all I eat is donuts as you put it. Tell me again.”

Josh sighed then said, “Two this morning.”

“Out late?” asked Tony.

“Again, we are always out late,” said Josh. He laughed a bit to himself. “Two AM is a bit early actually.”

“Must be nice, not having a real job. How much do you two make?” asked Tim.

“Hundred thousand? Two hundred thousand? More?”

“It is a living,” said Josh.

“Being cop is a living,” snapped Tim. “What you do is something else.”

“Are we done here?” asked Josh.

“Far from being done. An explosion, a missing person, these are serious things,” said Tony.

“I have been more than cooperative,” said Josh.

“Sure you have,” snapped Tim.

“Where is Travis?” asked Sue.

Josh sighed angrily, “You have asked me the same questions for the past hour ask me something different.”

“Ok, Did you kill Travis?” asked Tim in a commanding voice.

“What?” gasped Josh.

“Did you blow up the database?” prodded Tim.

“No!” shouted Josh. “You can’t be serious?”

“You asked me to ask you different questions so I did,” snapped back Tim.

“I am more concerned than you are to find Travis and find out who torched the server room,” shouted Josh. “Without Janus, without Travis I do not have a career. Travis is the genius I just bring him the coffee—”

“We are getting nowhere,” growled Tim.

There was a knock at the door. Tony left the room for a moment then came back in with a smile. “Your lawyers are here,” he said.

“I don’t have any lawyers,” said Josh.

Tim, Tony and Sue left the room quickly as two men in dark suits enter. Tim nodded to one of the men then shut the door quickly. Josh heard the door lock.

Josh sized up the two men. Both looked familiar. One looked like the man at the bar who warned him not to mention Janus. The other was similar to the person who broke into his house. Both had hand-held computers, which they clutched in their left hands. After a moment of silence the Josh said, "You are not my lawyers."

"Josh," said the dark hair man from the bar, "we know a lot about you." His voice was harsh and erratic.

"Who are you two?" asked Josh.

"We just want you to clarify a few facts with us," said the blond man.

"Who are you? What are your names?" asked Josh again. "I am a veteran I do not have to put up with this type of crap."

"What? Do you think you are above law and order?" asked the dark-hair man.

"Above the safety and security of US citizens?" asked the other.

"What are your names?" asked Josh who was in a punchy mood. "Should I call you Thing One and Thing Two?"

"Such arrogance," said the dark-hair man.

The blond man leaned in close to Josh and licked his lips. After a moment he said, "Maybe you are involved in criminal activities. Maybe you are a traitor."

Josh laughed then said with a smile, "Blondie, I have always been loyal."

The dark-hair man laughed and asked, "How can we truly know if you are loyal if you have never been tested?"

"I have been to war," snapped back Josh. "I can tell you have not."

“We are all at war,” growled the dark-hair man. “I am fighting a war right now! And I am on front lines!”

“I am getting a feeling you guys do not even know who I am,” said Josh. “Or maybe you just neglected to read whatever is in those handheld you are clinging to.”

Both men put their handhelds into their pockets.

“Maybe you set up the bomb,” said the blond man.

Josh laughed and asked, “Now, why would I do that?”

“Oh,” said the blond man, “I think we know what your motives would be.”

Josh said, “Maybe Travis did. He is the one missing.”

The dark-hair man laughed then said, “He has proven his loyalty.”

“Again,” affirmed Josh, “So, have I.”

“Being in war does not count,” said the dark-hair man. “In war you do what you have to. You do what you are ordered to do.” He laughed then added, “Nothing we do we have to do. We choose to be loyal.”

“And, oh yes,” added the blond man, “the student protest incident.”

Josh said nothing.

“Impressive to be sure,” said the dark hair man.

The blond man said, “But, then again you only did as ordered.”

“Yes, but as I recall you were not too happy about it,” said the dark-hair man.

“Anyone who unhappy about that should be suspected of far worse than not being patriotic,” snapped Josh.

“What an interesting thing to say,” said the blond man.

Josh asked, “Why would I try to destroy Janus?”

“Perhaps, it found out something you did not want it to know,” said the dark-hair man.

“Like what?”

“Perhaps,” said the dark-hair man, “an ex-girlfriend, ex-lover?”

Josh laughed then asked, “Ex-girlfriend?”

“We know everything,” said the dark-hair man hastily. “If you do not assist us it is not just you who will suffer. I will make sure all who knew you, loved you will suffer. There is never just one traitor within a family.”

Josh sighed then asked, “What is going on here? I have done nothing.”

The blond man felt his upped lip with his tongue then asked, “Ever know someone named Abdul-Aalee Muhammad Nasser?”

Josh said nothing for a moment.

“What a suspicious name,” said the blond man.

“He was my roommate. He served in the—”

The dark-hair man smiled then said, “Interesting.”

Josh stared at disbelief at the dark-hair man the said, “He is—”

“Your actions affected others,” said the blond man.

Josh said nothing as he toyed with a pen.

“All we asked is your cooperation,” said the blond man.

“You have asked for nothing,” said Josh. “You have just been threatening me.”

The two men said nothing.

“What do you want?” asked Josh.

“That is better,” said the dark-hair man.

“Find Travis,” said the blond man.

The dark-hair man smiled.

“That is it?” asked Josh. “Can’t you find Travis?”

“Find Travis,” said the blond man again. “And everyone associated with him.”

“Follow the trail to him,” said the dark-hair man. “When you find him call this number.” He handed Josh a card.

The card read “Smith & Jones Attorneys at Law”. Josh eyed over the card than asked, “Are you Smith or Jones?” He smirked.

“Find Travis,” said the dark-hair man.

“I think I am just as interested in doing that as you are in me doing that,” said Josh.

“We are interested in you calling us when you find him,” said the dark-hair man sternly.

“You can go now,” said the blond man.

“But,” added the dark-hair man, “letting someone commit counter government acts is the same as committing it yourself. And I will assure you more than just yourself will suffer. Do not call us too late.”

Chapter Eleven

Photos have Your Soul

Josh, Mark and Tami were drinking coffee outside of the office building. The stench from the fire made the office unbearable to be in. Personal were being redistributed to satellite offices around the area. Josh stared as the burnt remains of the server room. He thought of the hours he worked in room with the servers gently humming in the background.

“Travis is still AWOL but otherwise we are recovering quickly,” said Tami.

“Well, our disaster recovery plan is now in action,” said Mark. “Janus is up and

running at the home office. We only lost the past two days of transactions. We are going to run Janus solo, without a linked back up server, until we get a new server built.”

“What if someone tried to blow it up again?” asked Josh.

“Just let it go,” said Mark.

“Janus is almost up,” said Tami, “Poor thing is probably confused—”

“What do you mean by that?” asked Josh.

“It was a joke,” said Tami with a sigh. “Don’t worry, the master guiding script is back up and running. It did not miss a beat.”

“Oh, until we have the fail over server up,” said Mark. “I gave both of you server room access at head quarters, as specified in the disaster recovery plan.”

“Cool,” said Tami. “I get to inhale air processed by hundreds servers!”

“How soon till we start taking in new orders?” asked Josh.

“Two weeks,” said Tami.

“We should have had more than one fail over,” grumbled Tami.

“Anything that costs more money you recommend,” said Mark with a frown. “As I remember, you wanted four Janus’s at separate parts of the globe.”

“I just wanted an excuse to visit our Japan lab,” said Tami with a smile.

“And,” reminded Mark, “You recommended building a lab in Hawaii.”

“We all could have visited,” said Tami.

“I did approve that plan,” said Mark, “but the higher ups killed it.”

“What about Travis? Isn’t anyone else here concerned,” asked Josh.

Mark glared angrily at Josh.

Josh yelled, “How can we just sit here and pretend—”

“Josh, he has done this before,” said Tami. “I think he just freaked out when he saw Janus had been blown up and took off to some far away dive filled with seedy woman.”

“Mark, remember when he left for Rome after you said he took too much time off?” asked Tami.

Mark laughed then said, “And he just about had a nervous breakdown every time you took a sick day.”

“That little shit,” said Tami. “He takes unplanned vacations and when I get sick he would call me at my house repeatedly— tens times.”

Josh asked in loud voice, “Doesn’t any of you care about him?”

“Of course we do,” said Tami.

“It does not seem that way to me. How about the two people who died? Now Janus is destroyed and Travis is gone, probably dead. Doesn’t this bother any of you? People have died and now Travis is probably next. This is serious. This is not just a business deal. This is not just money. This is people’s lives,” growled Josh.

“Will you shut up!” screamed Mark. “This is not just about you. It has affected us all but what the hell can you think we can? What? I am supposed to call up the President and ask him where Travis is? Go call every newspaper and try and convince them to run a big exposes? Idiot. Use your head. We can’t do anything about this.” He then tried to regain his composure as other employees watched.

“I don’t get you guys,” growled Josh.

“Mark is right,” said Tami. “We are nobodies. The worst I can do is illegally fuck with their credit information and even then I would probably get caught and thrown

in jail. We can't do anything. When Janus is up I will use it to search for Travis, that is all I can do."

Tami and Mark said nothing for several second watching Josh intensely.

After a few minutes Tami broke the silence and said, "He will come back when we least expect it. I have this feeling Travis is OK. Like when he returned half way through his vacation and was pissed we went out to lunch together."

Mark laughed a bit then fell silent.

"He watched us like a hawk afterwards," said Tami.

The three were silent for a moment watching the workers remove debris from the office.

"It has been more stressful for you," said Mark. "We are down for two weeks. Take a break. Travis never lets you go on vacation so now here is your chance." Mark then flinched. "When Travis gets back he won't mind," he added.

Josh stared at Mark angrily.

"Or go try and find Travis," said Tami. "If you are that concerned about him."

"I think I will do that," said Josh angrily as he walked to his car.

Josh drove home trying not to let his anger influence his driving. He took the back streets home to avoid traffic. After few turns he noticed the same car, just at the edge of his view, following him. Instinctively Josh wanted to lose the car but controlled himself. He was only driving home. They could follow him if they wanted to.

The blinds to the window were all drawn. Josh sighed. He always opened his blinds to his apartment to let light in for his plants. Standing on the driveway he mused about what to do next. He could call the police or run away or simply enter the house. The two men were not interested in killing him. They just wanted to find Travis. Should he find Travis? How could he find Travis? For a brief second he thought about going home, to his parent's house. To just disappear like Travis did. His job was, in truth, not that great. He had crazy, self-serving people as co-workers and an idiot as a boss. He could just leave this life behind. It was getting too complicated. But, he would never know. Janus would forever be a mystery. He would never know for sure that Travis was wrong. The possibility that Travis had created life would forever be with him. Josh exhaled deeply. Josh entered the house feeling confident no one was going to attack him; this was obviously the work of Thing One and Thing-Two. The house had been noticeably searched but was not in complete disarray. It was as if they knew they would find nothing but wanted to make sure Josh knew they searched the house.

Josh turned his primary computer and logged in. He had one email message; it was from Keiko.

Dreams can come to stones

Stones do not suffer belief

Belief limits dreams

“Damn useless crap,” muttered Josh. She was obviously siding with Travis on the debate now.

He looked at the computer log in and program installation history and saw nothing unusual. He then ran a scan to check the machine for malicious software; it

to came up with nothing. That only meant they were good, Josh thought to himself, not that his machine was clean. He put in a DVD and attached USB drive then restarted the computer. The DVD was a modified version of PHALK (Professional Hackers's Linux Assault Kit) Travis had written. Travis' specialized version of PHALK had a number of more sophisticated forensics tools and a Janus-like AI that could do extensive searches. Travis called it, Travis' Really Awesomely Cool Kit or TRACK. TRACK was a complete operating system on a read-only DVD. The software bypassed the OS; that meant you could control a computer without any trail. It is the simplest way to assure privacy and complete control of a machine. If anyone modified his computer they probably used a similar tool. He launched another cursory scan of the system, this time using TRACK.

Travis felt his paranoia grow. People were actually spying on him. People cared enough about him to break into his home and tamper with his computer. Pride, also began to grow within him. He was now considered dangerous. In an odd way he felt like a *somebody* now.

The scan was complete, two files showed up. Josh then ran a root kit discovery application he had written. Root kits allowed people to remotely control the machine once installed. His application scanned to the code of each file looking for something out of the ordinary. A list of four applications came up. Most were pretending to be important system files. Whoever placed them was very good, the file sizes, last modified and creation dates were as expected. Josh knew the machine was too badly altered to use; luckily he backed up his important files every night on the external USB drive he carried around. He issued a command to format the hard drive. He would have to write

ones on every byte to assure he destroyed all of the spyware and root kits installed on the drive. Even deleted root kit could be dangerous; until written over nothing was truly deleted on a computer. Josh wondered if that was the right course of action. He flinched as a thought occurred to him. It was too late now but the best course of action was misdirection. He had just revealed he knew he had been tampered with. This spy stuff was tricky, he thought to himself. Wiping the hard drive was the wrong thing to do.

Josh's hand held beeped. He pulled it out of his pocket and stared at for a moment. It was not his, but, Travis's. He turned it on and it displayed a photo of Alex. She had a wistful smile on her face. Josh mused on her photo for a few seconds letting her eyes play with his dreams. He then remembered what Travis had said, *he had shown the way to Alex everyday*. With haste Josh grabbed one of his laptops and removed case. Searching through the hardware he looked for anything out of place. The last thing he wanted to do was use it with a transmitting device installed in it. Confident nothing had been added he put it back together. Then he paused; these guys were professionals. Josh pulled out a spy bug detector from his Infosec counter surveillance days. It was professional grade, scanning in the 400KHz to 8.5GHz range; if there were any bugs it would sense them. The scanner worked by searching for nearby radio sources. Things like microwaves and computer did produce radio frequencies but the detector was smart enough to focus in on only those that were surveillance devices. Josh booted the machine. Most transmitting devices only worked if the target machine was turned on. As the machine booted he moved the scanner around the room; in a professional installation at least two devices should be used. There were radio sources all around the room, everywhere. No matter where he pointed the scanner a signal showed up; there

was no privacy here. He held the handheld up to the scanner; it, at least, was clean the laptop however was not. Josh ejected the TRACK DVD, put the handheld in his pocket and hastily left his house.

Josh sat in a café and looked at his new laptop. Next to his house there was a small computer store that Josh frequented. The off duty techys watched with envy and he unpacked his new toy; it was not a very good laptop but it was the newest in the café. That was enough for a techy to be jealous of, newness meant all in the world of technology. The moment was enjoyable for Josh.

Josh attached the handheld to his new laptop and put in TRACK. Once getting TRACK to connect to the handheld he started looking for leads to Alex's location. He used the Foremost utility to track the most recently deleted files, nothing too important, porn and trivial documents. Josh then used Galleta to recover all the Internet cookies but, again nothing of interest, mostly porn sites. Some of the porn sites were so bad it made Josh embarrassed even to see the URL. Nothing was coming from this, he thought to himself. It would be easier than this. Travis said he showed the way to Josh everyday. Josh brought up the image of Alex and stared at it. It had to be the clue. There was code hidden with the photo. Like everything in a computer the images are composed of ones and zeros. With a high resolution imagine some of those ones and zeros could be altered to contain messages and the image would not be distorted. The issue was that this type of encryption required a key to extract the data. But, Travis wanted him to find the data;

that meant even without the key Josh should be able to extract the message. He scanned from Travis' recently added forensic tools before seeing Support Vector Machine Pattern Recognizer. Josh smiled. All Travis had to do is repeat the message three or four times and the tool should be able to extract the data. Josh ran to tool and went to get a cup of coffee. Even on his new laptop the search could take awhile.

Watching people fleeing work to take their coffee breaks, scurrying into line at the coffee shop amused Josh greatly. He loved the coffee break runs from work, the feeling of escape, of being apart of a cliché, of freedom. Best of all, ninety-percent of everything that needed to get done happened on the coffee breaks. All the most important decisions happened then. Josh laughed to himself thinking how Travis conspired on everything from getting a new server to shutting down a project he did not want to work on during their coffee breaks. This was the day before his vacation and Josh was already sick for work.

It was a path laced with danger and Josh wondered why he was traveling it so willingly. He knew it was better not to know Alex's address. It was better not to care his machine was being monitored. The hundred, Josh knew, he should not care about. But, Josh felt responsible. Two people had died because of him. Two people had died because of him before. Josh was not able to do anything about that the first time, but this time he wanted to do something. Josh wanted to be what he was trained to be. He spent ten years in the military. He was trained to be a hero. He was trained to think of others, not himself, when in danger. Josh was trained to do the right thing, defend his people. Alex was in danger. If he could, he had to warn her.

After twenty minutes a beep came from his laptop, something had been found. In

typical Travis fashion a little dancing man was running around the computer screen merrily, a pattern had been found. Travis' application typically did fun things when they did something clever. Josh tried to retrieve the results. Suddenly, the little dancing man stopped, stared out of the screen then asked, "Who is the smartest programmer alive? Way, way smarter than you will every be?" A message box appeared.

Josh bit his own lip and then reluctantly he typed Travis.

The dancing man stopped and blushed. After a few second it laughed then asked, "Not anymore! But, thanks for admitting that Josh. Who knows everything about everyone? Who know more than everyone alive combined?"

Josh paused then slowly typed in "Janus".

"Now is the time to play secret agent!" said the little man. He then flashed his middle finger before disappearing. The result then popped up. It was a series of numbers was repeated three times in the photo. Travis converted the numbers to letters. An address appeared with the words, "travel lightly."

Chapter Twelve

A Woman Named Alex

The address was to a large apartment building located in the Tenderloin district in San Francisco. The streets of the Tenderloin were dirty, always dirty. Used needles littered the sidewalks and the smell of urine was in every doorway. The shops, what few of them there were, remained forever old and rundown. People who walked the street either looked frightened, lost or completely lacking, in what, he did not know. It had energy though, a feel of rushing to go nowhere. The Tenderloin, which Josh had seen many times before, always was unexpected. Like an unwanted child that was begging for attention it seemed to demand to be forgotten. And when Josh would see the Tenderloin

again it would feel once more unexpected to him having learned nothing from his experience today.

It took Josh all day to get to San Francisco from San Jose trying to avoid the most convenient means of travel. Normally, it would take less than hour to get to San Francisco speeding down highway 280 slowing only when a policeman appeared. This day, Josh had learned the wonders of the bus; it expanded an hour a day. The trip gave him time to think; to feel comfortable with the direction he was taking. Josh knew what he was doing was stupid but it would not be thoughtless; thoughtful stupidity was more his cup of tea.

Josh stood at Alex's door. There was no security in her building; he just strolled in off the streets. It did not seem like a good hiding place for someone on the run. Graffiti was everywhere. Even her door was marred; there was a crude drawing of a dog with zebra stripes. Josh stared at the drawing of the dog for several moments before getting an odd feeling he was being watched. He looked at the door's peephole and saw a flicker of light, probably due to someone on the other side looking out. He took a deep breath and knocked on the door strongly. There was a long pause. Josh knocked on the door again. Just as he was about to strike again the door opened. Two chains ran across the door. Then, he saw her.

She had obviously recently come out of the shower. Her hair was wet and she was wearing sweats that hanged loosely on her athletic build. Josh said nothing as he

stared into Alex's face. He had only seen her in photos. She was older but still beautiful, a strong beauty with piercing eyes; her brown eyes held onto his. Josh suddenly felt lost as if he had ventured too deeply into a dark, unknown forest. He was now hopelessly lost in the forest but he was not alone. He was with her and could think of nowhere else he would rather be. Josh stood gapped mouthed staring at her beauty, in a beautiful dream that he was unwilling to leave.

"The methadone clinic is next door," said Alex calmly. She started to close the door.

"Alex?" asked Josh.

"You, I don't know."

"No—"

Alex asked, "My mother said never talk to strangers."

"Josh Jackson. I am a friend of Travis."

"Travis eh? Is that suppose to me something to me?"

"I came here to warn you," said Josh. "He sent me to warn you."

Alex said nothing and stared at Josh skeptically.

Josh then noticed he only saw one of her arms. Alex's other arm was hidden behind the door. Josh could tell she was holding something.

"Warn me?"

"Travis sent me," said Josh.

"Then go away now and consider me warned."

Josh said in a pleading voice, "Travis sent me."

"Travis? Just cause you invoke the name Travis does not make it mean anything

to me,” said Alex bluntly.

“We work together, we are friends. I spend many hours with Travis in bars drinking whiskey sours, avoiding his insect robots, making fun of people—”

Alex started to shut the door.

“And talking about you.”

She stopped closing the door but moved her face out of view.

Josh placed his hand on the door then said, “Wait! Wait! He... he once told me what you needed was a real man, not him. Let me help you. He sent me.” Josh was unsure why he said that. His instincts told him to run but he knew he would not. Josh had to see this through.

Alex let out a soft sarcastic laugh then said, “Wait here.”

Josh reluctantly removed his hand from then door and Alex quickly shut the door and locked it.

Josh fidgeted in the hallway. It was dark and dirty. The peepholes in the doors glowed with an eerie light. Occasionally the light would flicker. He could feel the eyes of the people behind the peepholes observing him. They were nervous, he could tell, the flickering peepholes told him so. He calmed his nerves by running though all the work he would have to do once he returned to work. Rebuilding the countless databases after the fire would take him at least a quarter. He shuttered, a whole quarter lost to busy work. The explosion created no end to the work he would have to do. Perhaps he should update his resume.

After a minute Alex opened the door a crack and commanded, “Left hand, show me you left hand.”

Josh displayed a scar on his left hand.

Alex stared at Josh's in the eyes for a moment then said, "Ok, come in. Your story checks out." With a strong arm she pulled Travis into her apartment and quickly shut the door.

"What do you mean?" asked Josh.

"I know all about you," she said bluntly.

"How?"

Alex paused for a second then said, "Travis spreads messages across various Internet sites and you are in them."

"Where are they?"

"You are not that good a friend of Travis's."

"Does it say anything else?" asked Josh. "Is he alive?"

"It is never that specific. They only contain means to identify people who say they know him."

"So," said Josh, "you believe my story then. You are in danger."

"I am always in danger," Alex. She kept her right hand in her pocket. The outline of a gun was visible.

Josh looked at the outline of the gun in Alex's pocket. Suddenly fear over took him. The explosion, the death of two people and Travis' disappearance became real to him for the first time. He remembered these things had actually occurred, that people were after her, to kill her. Josh then said in a frantic voice, "He, Travis, asked me to tell you... They are after... We, we find people. And we were asked to run a special batch, a hundred names and some of those on the list are dying."

“Calm down what, who? Way too fast buddy.” Alex grabbed a beer bottle with her free hand and took a sip. She looked him over then smirked at Josh.

“Garcia,” said Josh, “he died in a car crash the week after we ran a list of names. He was on that list.”

After a long pause Alex said, “Garcia, eh? A list of a hundred?” With suspicion she stared into his eyes till he looked away.

There was a moment of silence that Josh broke with a mournful sigh. “This happened one month ago.”

“Are any others dead?” asked Alex; her voice was unnaturally steady. She took another sip of beer.

“One more died in a car crash,” said Josh. “I don’t recall his name. Some others were arrested on various charges.”

“Do you have the list?” asked Alex. “Those you identified, do you remember their names, where they are?”

“The list is gone. We only identified a few,” said Josh. “We lost the list though —”

“Hmm,” grunted Alex. “And what do you think happened? Who do you think killed Garcia? The government?”

“Something else, something sinister,” said Josh quickly.

Alex smirked, “Why didn’t he stop the run—?”

“Who?”

Alex frowned then asked, “Who do you think? Travis.”

“He could not directly stop,” said Josh. “He created the system. He doesn’t

control it. But, the system did behave badly—”

“The system?”

“I have said too much. He just sent me here to warn you.”

“Wait, where the hell is he?” asked Alex. “Travis should be annoying me now not you.”

“And Travis has gone missing,” replied Josh.

“Hmm. Why did he send you here to warn me? I have already been warned.”

Alex mumbled to herself, “Why he sent you, that is what I don’t know.”

Josh paused. “Your name was one the list. That much I remember and someone named Georgina as well. We did not find a match though on either of you. I figured Travis made sure they could not find you two. As I said, the system behaved badly; I think he sabotaged it.”

“Sabotaged is one of his favorite pastimes,” said Alex curtly. “Chaos and sabotage is Travis’ nature.”

“Travis must have tripped the system,” said Josh. “Someone must have found out.”

“How did you get here? Did—”

“Don’t worry I track people for a living. All cash, did not use my car, all public transportation, I even avoided the train and took a bus—”

“Do you have a phone or handheld with you?” cut in Alex.

“What? I have my cell phone.”

“Can I look at it?” asked Alex.

“Yes,” said Josh.

Alex looked at the phone for a second then dropped in a glass of water.

Josh watched in horror as bubbles of air escaped the cell phone as it drifted slowly to the bottom of the glass. “Shit,” exclaimed Josh. “What the hell?”

“Think! That phone had GPS. Every time it checks the central server for new messages it beams its location. It is a tracking device and a bug rolled up into one. Were you being watched?”

“What do you mean watched?”

“Did any strange men approach you, asked you to help them or they would destroy you. Did anything like that happen to you?”

Josh said nothing. After all his scanning for bugs he forgot he cell phone; they did not have to plant any device on him, he carried it for them. For all his cleverness and knowledge he failed completely.

“Were you being watched?”

Josh scrunched up his face regretfully.

Alex frowns and quickly went to her computer. She pulled out the hard drive, picked up her laptop and grabbed a stack of papers. Alex put them in a duffle bag and handed it to Josh. She then put in a DVD and booted the computer.

Josh watched as she worked. The boot screen looked like Travis’ TRACK logo, the profile of a face shouting. “Is that disk from Travis?” he asked.

“Yeah,” mumbled Alex.

The TRACK logo looked similar the Janus logo but Janus had two faces. Josh always assumed the Janus logo came first. “How old is that DVD?”

“I just created this one but it is based off of something Travis and I wrote a

decade ago. Why?” She continued to run applications and was searching the Internet using a tool that looked similar to a Janus interface.

“No reason,” said Josh. He wondered. That meant roots of the Janus was in TRACK and TRACK was older than Travis’ employment with the firm. He had always assumed TRACK was developed side by side with Janus. “How long since you have talked with Travis?”

“Seven years.” Alex downloaded something to her USB drive.

“And you still check his websites for information after all these years?”

“Anything Travis puts out I look at,” Alex said matter-of-factly. “I might hate the bastard but my life matters more than my pride.”

“So, you wrote TRACK with Travis?”

Alex smiled. “Why do you care so much? It is just an application—”

“Not the one we have,” cut in Josh.

“What does it do that is so special?”

“It does the impossible. We have a nearly endless supply of data.”

“Sound nice.”

Josh waved his finger. “We have too much data. It is impossible to know which data to use which to ignore. Yet, Janus finds its way through this thick cloud of misinformation. I have never understood how.”

“Don’t feel so inadequate. I am sure Travis does not know as well,” said Alex.

“Did you write that searching application with him? Anything called Janus?” prodded Travis.

“We worked on lots of stuff.” Alex then executes an application. The screen

showed hundreds of computer addresses scrolling by.

“What are you doing?” asked Josh.

“Final updates on my status,” explained Alex. “SPAM is an excellent means of communicate. All across the globe I have zombie computers, which I am now activating, to send out a million emails with my message. There is no way of tracking who receives them or who sends it.”

Josh watched the code run across the screen. “You SPAM people? You set up zombie computers?” Zombie computers are feared by InfoSec professionals. They have hidden software that allows hackers to control the machine without the machine’s owner being any the wiser. Josh began to fear what he had gotten himself into. Alex was a real hacker; a person who he, as an InfoSec professional, fought against.

“I would read your SPAM, never know what’s in it,” quipped Alex. She pulled a very beat up, big camping backpack out of her closet and put it on. Alex looked around the apartment with a melancholy stare then said, “I never liked this place anyways. The smell of mildew refused to leave. Not waking up to that smell is something I could get use to.” Although her words spoke little of the apartment leaving it was obviously troubling her. She stood frozen for a moment staring out the window, lost in thought.

“Let’s hit the road,” she suddenly commanded.

“Are you just going to leave that DVD?”

“You ask a lot of questions,” said Alex with an air of suspicion in her expression. She paused for a moment then said, “There is nothing on it but a script that scans the Internet for email addresses then SPAMs them with a ‘Great Sex Now!’ ad. By the way Travis is one of the models in the ad.”

As they walk out of the building Alex nodded over to two men. “Friends?”

“Can’t tell,” said Josh. “Wait... They are definitely interested in us and.... I know them. They are Thing One and Thing Two. The two guys who questioned me after the explosion—”

“What explosion? You never mentioned that—”

“It is not—”

“An explosion is something you mention. An explosion is big.” She stopped speaking and stared at Josh.

“It did not seem to fit into our conversation,” said Josh meekly.

“Fit into our conversation? Explosions are easy to put into a conversation. They trump anything said before them, no need for a segway. Just say, there was an explosion, and, presto, you have everyone’s attention. Fuck whatever was said before hand!”

“Someone blew up Janus after the hundred run.”

Fear overtook her face. “Is Janus ok?” she said quietly.

“Yes—”

“Are you sure?” asked Alex, her voice stressed.

“It is on, or was on, two servers running simultaneously. Janus did not miss one nano-second of calculation.”

“Oh.” Alex took several photos with her cell phone of the two men.

“Going to turn them into the cops?” asked Josh.

“The photos are for musing and mischief. Are you good at playing secret agent little boy?”

“I am not little,” said Josh.

“Travis has your size listed as a little below average.”

“He is a liar! Where are the sites? They need to be revised!”

“Calm down, it was a joke.”

“On a man’s scale this is no trivial matter,” grumbled Josh.

“Well, regardless, now you get a chance to play secret agent,” said Alex.

Josh stared into Alex’s eye. “Someone else told me that.”

“Who, Travis?”

“Just a little man who flipped me off.”

“Well, get ready. Time for crude jokes are over. Walk this way, deeper into the Tenderloin,” said Alex.

“How about we just talk to them?”

Alex laughed loudly. “The two deaths you mentioned convince me that would not be a good idea. I do not plan to be next. Are you with me?”

“We could go the cops,” offered Josh.

“Either you are with me or you can go fuck yourself,” snapped Alex seriously.

“The only reason I am still talking with you is Travis sent you. You must have some quality he thinks will help me.”

“Why are they after you? Because of the protests?”

Alex said nothing.

“Throw me a bone and I will help you.”

Alex smiled at Josh. “He has kept you in the dark hasn’t he? Those days are long gone. I don’t know what Travis told you but I have not been to a protest in years. They are after me for something else. They are after us for what we want to do and what we know.”

“Are you a protestor, terrorist, revolutionary, what?”

Alex laughed, “Nothing so political. I am more of a common criminal or a weird cultist than a political activist. Don’t get allusion of joining a rebellion. I, we, just threatened the wrong people. And we, the hundred, are dedicated to do something they don’t want us to do. Worse, we found out things they wanted kept secret and tried to use that information to get what we wanted. It was a bad idea and it was only a matter of time before they took interest in us again.”

“Who? What?”

“I don’t see why you would want to follow me,” said Alex. “And I am certainly not going to tell you why those people are trying to kill me. Not unless you want to be on the list as well.”

“I won’t get on the list. I am a war veteran.”

“Like those people have ever gave a crap about a soldier’s life. Get real. Only war protestors care about a soldier’s life, not government men. If you follow me you may just get on that list,” said Alex. “If you follow me I assume you understand this. Those people will never trust you.”

Josh said nothing.

Alex cracked her knuckles. “I can handle myself. I have been training and planning for this for eight years. Just go over there talk to them and I will disappear.”

Josh looked back at the two men then asked, “What is your plan?”

“Not getting caught,” said Alex with a smile. She ran across the street dodging traffic. Driver’s honked their horns and shout profanities. Alex merrily flipped them off banging on the hood of one car.

Josh looked behind him and saw Thing One and Thing Two briskly walking towards them. They walked with a nervous energy; they were desperate. He sighed; indecision gripped his mind. The connection between Travis, Alex, the hundred and Janus haunted him. Janus was much more than a program; it was something else. But, was Janus worth his career, his good name, and possible his life? Alex was his key to understanding. He watched Alex as she slipped away. Each step she took was placed firmly and precisely. She walked with arrogance, with complete confidence. Soon, she would be forever out of his reach and he would be back trying to decipher Travis’ cryptic jokes and put-downs. Josh took off after Alex.

Alex walked briskly through the crowded streets. The night was coming and the darkness quickly closed in.

Thing One and Thing Two split up, taking both sides of the street. They were very close now, within shooting range. Alex stepped out into the traffic in front of a taxi. The taxi came to halt; it was occupied. She swiftly got into the taxi. Josh hastily and awkwardly got in on the other side.

Thing one frantically tried to wave down a cab. Thing two started running towards the taxi.

“What is your story?” asked Alex with a smile to a couple squished between herself and Josh.

“Hey? What’s your problem assholes?” growled the cabbie.

Other cars began to honk.

“Green light,” said Alex.

“I am not moving,” said the cabbie, “till you get your asses out of my car!”

“How about if you consider the guy running towards us with a gun?” asked Alex.

With horror in his eyes the cabbie looked behind him to see Thing Two running towards him with a gun. “Shit,” exclaimed the cabbie. “Is he a cop?”

“Wouldn’t he be yelling ‘stop police’?” asked Alex. “I am a dealer he is my supplier and I just fucked him over.”

Thing Two was three feet from the cab. His eyes lit up with the excitement of his chase almost coming to a close. He aimed his gun at towards Alex.

“I hope you know how to get blood stains out of this back seat,” said Alex bluntly.

The cabbie floored the cab and raced erratically through the intersection. He sped aggressively past a car in front of him, continuously blaring his horns as he drove. At the end of the next block he slammed on his breaks and bellowed, “Get out!”

“Thanks,” said Alex as she left the taxis. Josh jumped out and the taxi sped away quickly screeching its tires as it went. The couple in the back seat stared out from the cap with looks of complete confusion.

“We are not going to lose them this way,” said Josh. “What is your plan?”

Alex said nothing but gave Josh a disgusted stare then darted across the street again.

“In here,” said Alex. It was a leather gay bar. Numerous muscular men in leather

clothing stared longing at Josh when they entered. One blew a kiss at him. Josh smiled meekly back.

Alex pulled her hat down and copped an attitude. She went up to bar. “A bunch of creeps out today,” she growled at the bartender. “These two men keep thinking I am a prostitute or something.”

The bartender smiled and continued to clean a glass. “What will you have Alex?”

“Whisky sour,” said Alex.

“What else would you have?” said the bartender to Josh in a very friendly voice.

“Um,” stammered Josh.

Thing One and Things Two then entered the bar.

“Shit,” said Alex. “They followed me in here.”

The bartender watched them closely as they made their way towards Alex.

“I don’t know what you guys are after,” said Alex angrily, “but I want none of it.”

“Shut up,” growled the blond man.

“Come with us,” demanded the dark hair man as he grabbed Alex.

“These men are attacking me!” screamed Alex. “What do you want?! I am not that type of girl!”

The blond man slapped Alex.

Josh stood in front of Alex and the dark hair man pulled out a gun.

The blond hair man said, “Make this easy.”

The dark man added, “Keep your cool. Everyone just keep your cool.”

A huge man in black leather walked up to the dark-hair man, “Why are you bothering her?” He had a pink triangle tattooed across his throat and biceps bigger in

width than his head.

The blond man said, “None of your business.”

“Are you cops?” asked the man.

“We are none of your concern,” growled the dark-hair man.

“If you are not cops let her go now,” demanded the leather clad man.

“Back off gay guy,” snapped the dark-hair man. He then fell to the floor unconscious, blood trickling from his nose. The blond man then was grabbed from behind and hit over the head with a bottle before collapsing next to the dark hair man.

Alex put a twenty on the bar and said, “Thanks Tim. If I never see you again you were the best bartender I have ever had.” Alex downed the whiskey sour. She then grabbed the dark hair man’s handheld and ran out of the bar.

Josh rushed out after her.

“Just keep running till I say it is safe,” said Alex to Josh. “You are in my world now.”

In a dirty café between South of Market and the Mission District Josh and Alex caught their breath. It was covered in gang graffiti and had dogs running around freely inside. Most of the patrons looked one party away from graduating from recreational drug users to hard-core junkies. At least two men stared longingly at Josh and Alex. Josh did not know if they lusted after him, Alex or both. Alex ignored them.

“How did you know I was approached?” asked Josh.

Alex smiled then said, “You have a frighten but still growling puppy look to you. Also, why would you come looking for me unless something bad happened?”

“How do you know I am not with them?”

“Again,” said Alex with a smile, “you have that adorable puppy feel.” She winked at him seductively.

“You are more trusting of me than I thought,” said Josh.

“How do you know I was not told to be trusting?” asked Alex. “How do you this is not some plan, hmm?”

“Umm, I think it is more likely because you are stunned by my good looks.”

“How do you know I like men?”

“You dated Travis.”

“All the more reason to suspect I like women now,” said Alex.

After a moment Josh said, “True.”

“Finish up your coffee,” said Alex. “We should hit the road.”

“Where too?”

“Someplace unpleasant of course,” said Alex with a smile. “Lets go.”

As they exit the café a homeless man held up a cup, begging for change. Alex looked at the man for a moment then smiled. “Give me you credit cards,” she demanded.

“What?”

“Come on quickly!”

“Why?” asked Josh.

“Just do it if you want to lose Thing One and Thing Two as you call them.”

Josh gave her a credit card with great trepidation.

Alex gave them to homeless plus her own, "Spend wisely," she said. "And spend them far away from here."

"What the—"

Alex pulled Josh away and said, "Think, distraction, rouge trails. It gives us freedom to use one of our own if we need to as a last resort, of course."

"But that is my money," whined Josh.

"Surely a night out on the town with me is worth your credit card limit," snapped Alex.

"I have quite a credit limit," said Josh.

"So, why did you come here? Why did you come searching for me?" asked Alex.

Josh said nothing.

"There are many reasons that could drive a man to follow me the way you are," said Alex, "but there are very few that I am comfortable with."

"I was worried, I am worried."

"About who?" asked Alex. "Travis, me, your friend, yourself?"

"Just concerned that is all."

Alex stared into Josh's eyes for a moment then said, "If I was you I would have just ignored it all."

Josh smiled a half smile then said, "Somehow, I doubt that."

Alex smiled quickly then looked away. "I need to know why before I take you any further. I don't want to show our inner workings to a potential spy."

"They threatened me," said Josh bluntly.

Alex smiled then prodded, “What?”

Josh paused to think. He did not know why he had followed her this far. Alex was such a mythical creature in his mind; something invented by Travis. Now, she seemed connected to Janus. He had to know how. Josh smiled at Alex then said, “They threatened me and I want to know why. I always need to know why now. I use to do things without knowing why. I was good at that. But, not anymore, I promised not to do that anymore.”

“OK, big boy who does not like to be threatened? It is all coming together. I can see why Travis would hang out in bars with you.”

“Maybe,” said Josh with a smile, “I also came because I did not want you to be harmed.”

“You are just trying to play with me,” said Alex. “Won’t work. I play with myself enough not to care.”

“Just trying to keep up,” said Josh.

“Well, they are trying to kill me not you,” reminded Alex. “This is my life so if I must bring you it is on my term. Got a problem?”

“None,” said Josh.

“Good. First, we need to find out who sent the list to you. If we follow the money it will tell us who is behind it.”

“I know who is behind it,” said Josh. “Thing One and Thing Two.”

“But who are *they*?” asked Alex. “I want a trail to follow back. We need to regroup and a change of our clothes.”

“Something stylish right?”

Alex smiled mischievously, “Yeah...right... stylish.”

Chapter Thirteen

Home with the Homeless

A cold wind from the Pacific Ocean blew into San Francisco covering it with a thick fog. The air had a deep chill. Five layers of clothing did little to keep the cold out; the air cut through them readily and penetrated deep into the skin. Every inhale was laced with freezing vapor. Every exhale let precious free warmth free from the body. Josh felt coldness take control of his body. He felt as though he would never be warm again. But, he did not fight the cold. Josh let the cold consume him. He was too tired and hungry to fight.

Smoke rose from the numerous homeless encampments hidden away under an overpass in the Mission District in San Francisco. Scores tents with children, drug addicts and handicapped were strewn about. People without legs lay in the mud. Poorly constructed latrine pits were feet from playing children. One man was picking up used needles and tossing in the garbage grumbling irritably to himself. Another man near by also muttered to himself occasionally breaking out into fits of anger, yelling at unseen enemies tormenting his mind. No one smiled. Everyone looked tired. Josh examined his surroundings as Alex talked with several of the homeless. He seldom felt out of place as he did now. They seemed to know her, he noticed that much. Alex had been talking with them for quite sometime. For some reason this made Josh nervous. The conversation then ended and Alex hugged one man. Josh looked away as she started walking back. He pretended not to care he had seen her hug and unknown man. But, his mind still played games with him. His mind dwelled on the other man. His mind kept replaying the little skip she had after hugging the man. What did it mean?

“Still here?” asked Alex.

“Wow, there are children here,” said Josh looking at a family of four tending a fire.

“This is the more of the single adult encampment,” said Alex. “There are a lot more children in the encampment on the other side.”

“I can’t believe in a city like San Francisco there are this many homeless,” said Josh. “There are no homeless where I live, down in San Jose.”

“It is because we are the only city that tolerates them,” snapped Alex. “If there are no homeless in a city it is only because they were kicked out. More likely they are

hiding. Here, they can be in plan view which is safer for all.” Alex stopped and took off her backpack.

“What is this?” asked Josh pointing to a filthy, tired looking tent.

“This is where we sleep,” said Alex. “Juan, over there, will let us use this tent.”

“Oh,” said Josh meekly. The tent had a strong smell.

“You said you wanted to follow me,” said Alex. “And my path right now is into this stinky tent.”

“That is cool,” said Josh weakly. “I am ok with it.”

Alex unzipped the tent and went inside. Josh followed slowly behind her. She zipped up the tent.

“How long have you known Travis?” Alex asked.

“For four year now,” said Josh. “He hired me. I am now his right hand man, sort of but I don’t report to him!”

“Four years and you still have not killed him? Wow.” She laughed to herself. “I think four years is a record. You must tolerate a lot of mental punishment.” Her voice had an odd blend of admiration and jealousy to it.

“So, what was Travis like when you two dated?” asked Josh.

“What you really want to asked is why would any sane woman date Travis?”

“Yeah,” said Josh.

“He probably has changed little. It is hard imagine him changing, a hard drinking, self-center, egotist, who womanizes till the day he dies. I guess I was attracted by his dynamism, his grand visions, his humor and his loads and loads of shit. He proves I am not a sane woman.”

“Dynamic grand loads of shit is about right.”

“He did things,” said Alex. “Things no one else could do—”

“He is a great programmer—”

“Not just with code, with people, with anything. He could lead people unlike anyone I have ever seen. If I had an idea he would make it happen. He could make people do anything. His coding was secondary.” Alex sighed.

“He had a way of making things happen at Preferred Data Connections,” said Josh. “He understood politics but always looked as though he ignores it, despises it.”

“He was a visionary. When Travis leads we all followed. He had away of making it seem cool, doable. We never for a second believed we would not succeed.”

“What happened?”

“Oh, we failed,” said Alex, “most of us ended up in jail. Awful, just awful. Maybe, he was not that great of leader in retrospective. Hopefully that was not what he had planned all along.”

“My career has been following awful leaders,” said Josh sadly. He thought of telling before he met Travis he daily considered suicide. Travis somehow pulled him out of his depths, mostly, with hours upon hours of work, arguments and drinking. Instead, he added, “It is what I excel at.”

“That is right, you are a military man,” said Alex. “Went to war I suppose. Hard to miss one nowadays.”

“Oh, yeah, I went to two,” said Josh quickly. “That I did.”

“Any regrets?”

Josh stared into Alex’s eyes for moment. “If you could understand my answer

you would not ask the question.”

Alex raised one eyebrow.

“Duty forbids regrets,” Josh said bluntly with the subtle hint of a smirk.

“That sounds convenient.”

“It is a curse. I don’t have regrets but in return I don’t have dreams, only nightmares. Duty allows nightmares.”

Someone then brushed against the tent startling Alex and Josh.

Juan yelled, “Hey, Alex! There is something on the news that might interest you.” Juan was the man Alex had hugged.

Josh and Alex followed Juan through the homeless encampment. He weaved between the tents carefully avoiding the garbage, filth and people effortlessly. Josh noticed how comfortable Juan seemed, just the opposite as Josh felt. Juan finally arrived at a shelter with cardboard walls. An old portable TV was placed in the center of a makeshift table. Three people gathered around it as if absorbing the light it emitted.

“Abdul-Aalee Muhammad Nasser from San Diego was arrested today. More arrests are expected as the probe widens. The justice department...”

Josh, in an angry voice said to Alex, “That is my roommate in college! He is not a terrorist.”

The three men quit watching the TV and stared at Josh.

Juan’s eyes widened in terror. He waved at Alex who pulled Josh aside.

“Thanks Juan,” said Alex as she pulled Josh away.

“The dude thinks he knows the guy,” said Juan in a mocking voice, “Maybe they kept him in the last war a bit too long.”

The three men laughed and resumed watching the TV.

Once Josh and Alex were far enough away from the three men to prevent being overheard Alex said to Josh, “OK, now you can talk.”

“But—” started Josh.

“Just because they are homeless does not mean everyone won’t rats us out,” said Alex in a hush tone. “Keep your cool.”

“They cannot do that,” said Josh. “We were in ROTC together in college. Abdul served in the military. He went to war—”

“After a few months they will release him for no evidence,” said Alex. “This is a warning shot.”

“A warning shot? A warning shot for who?”

“For you,” said Alex.

Josh’s faces grew tense with anger his eyes darted around quickly. “I caused that? How did I cause that?”

“What did you expect? That is how they control you. They are targeting in on you.” Alex’s voice grew sympathetic as she said, “He will be taken care off, just not right now.”

Josh said nothing.

“Are you still with me because things are going to get worse than that?” asked Alex. “Just leave now go to them before you dig yourself any deeper—”

“What is the plan?” snapped Josh.

Alex stared into Josh’s eyes for second. She sighed. “OK. I am waiting for a word from my friends. They should have gotten my SPAM by now. I will give them two days to respond.”

“What do we do until then?”

“Be homeless.”

Josh frowned. “I am beginning not to like your world.”

“You could always go home or turn yourself in,” said Alex. “If you are having doubts the soon you leave the better for me.”

Josh said nothing for a moment then said, “I need to know, for my friend.”

“I don’t get you,” Alex said.

“And I will make sure they won’t get you,” said Josh in an attempt to sound chivalrous.

Alex managed not to laugh. “After you Sir knight,” she said pointing to the dirty tent.

Josh smiled and went inside. The smell was not as bad the second time.

Chapter Fourteen

Waking Without You

Alex woke up quickly; something was wrong. Last night she spent in a homeless encampment but that was not what disturbed her. She had grown accustomed to living in them. The horrible food, constant noise, odor of man and lack privacy mattered little to her now. Alex actually grew to enjoy the lack of privacy. Her forced exposure to everyone in the camp made her feel vulnerable, something she avoided with a passion everywhere else. She needed to feel vulnerable from time to time. Vulnerability let her remember her childhood; it rekindled her faith in man. The hardships of the camp also made her more in tune with what mattered, with what her course in life meant. Alex

would never admit it, but she felt apart of a family here. She knew she was only a temporary visitor; that gave her the ability to enjoy the experience. Alex woke up each day with complete faith she could leave. The people here knew they never would. But, she enjoyed this start to her runs. It gave her focus, like returning to home after a long stay away. Stretching she touched the top of the tent, something was still wrong.

Josh had not made one move on her all night. That was a disappointment to Alex. She wondered if the lack of hygiene had turned him off. If so, she thought, that would make him no fun. Alex then noticed Josh was gone. “Why was he gone?” She feared he had turned her in. Alex bit the tip of her left index finger till she felt a sharp pain. “Stupid!” She should not have trusted him. Never trust anyone you want to sleep with. Frantically Alex put on her jacket and grabbed her backpack. Alex checked her gun was still safely hidden. She darted out of the tent and gazed around the camp to see if anything was amiss. A group of homeless had starting cooking breakfast. Another group had started drinking their wine. Alex visited each tent making sure not to look frantic. The last thing she needed was for others to panic. “What was Josh doing?” she wondered. “Had he left and gone? Had he gone to the police or worse?” Her mind played with all the possible reasons for his departure, none of them good. Alex told herself she would look for ten more minutes then run. She cursed herself for trusting him. Josh was just another example of desire clouding her judgment in men. This was the last one Alex told herself. She would go off of men. Men made misery her companion. And given her lifestyle a true relationship was not possible. This was not the lifestyle she would have chosen. It was the one given to her. Given to her by the first and greatest of the bad men in her life. Alex had to hide her feelings better and just go

for the hunky, stupid ones.

After a minute she spotted Josh. He was talking with one of the veterans. Alex watched as the two talked intensely. Moving to a position where he could not see her she watched him for a few minutes before wandering off. She had a message to collect.

Later that night,

Alex and Josh huddled near a fire to keep warm. Alex was working on math problems. Josh sits beside her.

“What is that you are working on?” asked Josh.

Alex had sheets of paper with clusters of equation spread out. She said, “I got the message now I am decoding it.”

“Where? Do you have internet connection?”

“No,” said Alex. “Not a good idea.”

“But, it would be easy,” said Josh. “Just use any of the free wireless connection in the city.”

Alex laughed then said, “You do know why there is free Internet connections don’t you?”

Josh shook his head.

“It is a tracking system. The purpose of all those free Internet connections that cities and cafes and the like put up is to track people’s locations and how they use the Internet. Then...” she point to a camera on top of a light pole, “they take a snap shot of

you and know everything about you.”

“No shit? They are too many cameras and too much footage. How could they?”

“It is all automated,” said Alex. “They have artificial intelligence scan the images, look for anomalies, track people’s faces. They have been doing that for years. And you said you were in the industry.”

“The private sector end, not the government end,” snapped Josh defensively. He said nothing for a second as he thought about what to say next. “Janus is a artificial intelligent algorithm like those face scanning software.” He made sure to not ask a question but to make a statement.

Alex smirked at Josh’s attempt to be sneaky. “Janus falls more under computational intelligence. CI is based off organic systems; they do not have the same limitations that traditional AIs have. CI’s can mimic they way our minds work—”

“Right! They mimic our minds. They are not self-aware! Travis never understood that; he thought Janus was alive,” said Josh defensively. Josh smiled then quoted Keiko:

A Stone Knows Itself

A Man Does Not know Himself

A Stone Knows Stillness

“Who said that?” said Alex with a smile.

“A friend. A computer is programmed to know itself therefore is not self awareness.”

“That is one view I guess. But, why not?” asked Alex. “I have seen nearly self-awareness CI algorithms before. One way is to build them like those Russian nesting

dolls, each inner doll aware of the next one but not the one behind it. My first CI used something similar to that. It is a dead end though, but it was more aware than a human. We are barely sure why we do anything. A computer knows exactly why it does everything. We can make machines that adapts, have needs, common sense—”

“Ever heard of the Chinese room? Uh... Searle... John Searle’s Chinese Box?”

“Yes I have—”

“It proves computers cannot have true thought like humans,” interrupted Josh. “If I remember correctly, you write out an set of rules, a program, for interpreting a story written with Chinese characters and give it to a English-only speaker hidden in a box. Then you feed into the box one by one a series of Chinese characters that tell a story. The person in the box uses the rules to process the Chinese characters and deliver a message that indicates understanding of the story. But the person had no understanding. He does not understand Chinese. In following the rules it gives the appearance of understanding but the rules themselves do not have any understanding. Computers process symbols, they don’t understand symbols like the human mind. It is an illusion of thought. AI at its core is just a series of rules. Mere rules cannot contain thought, conscious.”

“Searle looked too deeply in my opinion, at too fine a granular level,” snapped Alex. “If you look that deeply into anything and it will lose meaning. Zoom in on a painting to the individual atoms of paint and the paint has no meaning. So what? Think about the human mind. We think via synapse firing in a certain sequence. If instead of following a set of rules the person, or better yet an unthinking, automated lap instrument, followed a recipe of electro-chemical interaction that was identical to a person who

understood the characters does that trivialize that person's thought? It you look at our thought method, the individual synapse, and ask if they have understanding the answer is the same as if you look at a Turing machine. If Searle's criticism holds for CI algorithms it damns both computers and man to non-thinkers. But, maybe he is right. Maybe what we consider as though is not that special after all."

"I don't think that was his point," snapped Josh. "True understanding cannot be contained in an algorithm, a set of rules."

"I agree with that," said Alex. "But, an adaptive algorithm is not a set of rules. An adaptive system changes. I am not saying a set of rules can have thought; it is a process."

"But, all programs are a set of rules. You are simulating thought not achieving it."

"At the deepest level, perhaps," said Alex. "But, at our deepest level our thought is just electro-chemical reactions between neurons. You could write a chemical equation, a set of rules, to define our thought as well. All of our thoughts boil down to whether a neural fires just as with computers, whether a bit is yes or no."

"Even if you could do thought, and I am not saying you could," said Josh, "emotion would only be simulated."

"Emotion is the easiest thing to program. Do something to alter its plans it gets angry. Help it achieve its goals and it is happy; it will like you. If it needs you to achieve its ends then it loves you. Simple. Isn't that what emotions are all about?"

Josh snorted then said, "Again, you are simulating, emotion, thought, self consciousness—"

“Of course we can make machines that see their own errors and adapt, machines that try to manipulate us through emotions, ones that have desires, machines that grow beyond the scope of their creators. Is that not awareness? If not, what you mean by the self and consciousness? Are we even truly self-aware? Not easy to answer huh? You answer that then you can answer whether computers can ever be alive.”

“And?”

“That is between Janus and itself.”

Josh asked, “You and Travis sound very similar at times.”

“In some ways we have the same mind,” said Alex.

Josh said nothing for a minute then said, “Travis loves you.”

“I doubt it,” laugh Alex. “He loves my mind. This first and only man who slept with me for my IQ and not breasts.”

“Isn’t that enough?”

“I am a body and a mind. I am a woman not a mere intellectual tool.” Alex struck an arrogant pose.

Josh laughed. “I don’t get why you are here, running from the law? I mean, you seem like an intelligent person. You should be a professor or a researcher not being chased like a criminal.”

“I am not running from the law,” snapped Alex.

“You know what I mean,” said Josh. “You are running from someone.”

“But it is not the law.” Alex toyed with her pen. “I got into politics in college. Probably should have just ignored what was going around me. If I had I would be teaching math in some college worrying about tenure... sleeping with my students in

return for passing them.” She smiled wickedly at Josh.

“So, you were a protester,” said Josh.

“Of sorts,” said Alex.

“Support the troops but against the war type?”

“Not really,” said Alex. “No offense,” she added after a moment to gauge Josh’s reaction.

“I would be more offended if you lied. You must have been protesting while I was serving.”

“Timing seems about right.”

“Was Keiko a protestor with you?” asked Josh.

“Keiko?” asked Alex with a stunned voice. “How do you know Keiko?” She paused for a second that added, “Oh yeah, you just quoted her didn’t you?”

“I was accidentally CC’d on a message to Keiko from Travis. She then started emailing me haikus,” explained Josh.

After a moment to think Alex said, “If it was accidental Travis has gotten sloppy.”

“He is stoned or drunk half the time at work.”

“Ok,” said Alex. “Is he truly or just acting?”

Josh paused then asked, “So, the three of you were in college together?”

Alex smiled and said nothing for a moment. “Yes, we met in college.”

“Was there anything between you three?”

“What?” Alex laughed for a second.

“I sense something in your voice,” said Josh, “when you speak her name.”

“I love her,” said Alex bluntly.

Josh's eye widened.

Alex laughed. "Ha I know what you are thinking! You want to know if there was a love triangle? Ha. You just want to know if I ever went down on a woman. I love her because of what she is trying to do, what we mean to each other. You best not underestimate my feelings towards her."

Josh looked disappointed.

"Ever gone down on man?"

Josh involuntarily jerked his body when she asked him that question. "Ok lets change the subject," he said. "When did you invent EVE?"

"You are no fun," grumbled Alex. She folded her arms across her chest.

"I suspect Josh created none of it," said Josh.

"It was my thesis," said Alex. "EVE came to me when I was with Travis. His response, in Travis style, was ADAM. Never to be outdone."

"So, then, you started it," said Josh excitedly. "I knew it!"

"It is too complex to say one person started it. Hell, Old Man Minsky, the guy who helped reinvigorate artificial intelligence in academia, has as much to do with it as me. I just put the pieces together," said Alex. "Travis has his moments, more than most people, more than most exceptional people. We created ADAM and EVE with the help of many others."

"Why did you break up? Did you break up because he took credit for EVE?"

Alex laughed. "He said he invented EVE? Why would he name anything he invented after a woman? Look up the literature on EVE. He is not the only name given credit." She laughed again. "None of you check up his story? Typical."

Josh flinched, as far as he knew no one had. It was amassing how many lies you could get away with at work. Two-thirds of anyone's resume was all lies and no one ever checked. After a moment to collect his wits then said, "And he likens himself to Turing."

Alex laughed then added, "Travis is much more of a Von Neumann."

"To your Turing—" started Josh.

"You are saying I am mad? That I keep my pants up with a rope instead of a belt?"

"The way he stole from you," said Josh, "Like how Von Neumann took credit for inventing modern computers."

"He made my ideas real, just as Neumann made Turing's ideas real. Remember most modern computers, with the exception of RISC chips, are based off of Neumann's computer, EDVAC, not Turing's ACE. In that way maybe you are not too far off."

"I thought you would have hated von Neumann."

"Interestingly enough Travis does whereas I am a realist on the matter. Turing was not gifted with everything a person needs and what he lacked Von Neumann processed. Everyone like Turing needs a von Neumann running behind them making his ideas come to life. Perhaps he could have done without someone else taking credit for his ideas however."

"Everyone needs someone? So Travis gives you everything you need from another person?"

"Not everything."

Josh asked, "Why did you break up?"

"We had our reasons. Again, what is with all the questions? Why are you alone?"

Ever have a girlfriend? Every satisfy a man?"

"Actually," said Josh, "no... I have not, on both counts. I would like to at least say I have tired to satisfy a woman. I have dated several woman but never real had a girlfriend—"

"Not into commitment eh?"

"What happen between you an Travis?"

"Nothing," said Alex bitterly. "It just ended."

"Sound like there was more," prodded Josh.

Alex said nothing and continued working on her math problem.

"I get this feel you love him. That is all."

"Ever wonder why they trust him?" asked Alex.

"Who?"

"Who do you think? *They* don't trust just anyone. Why would *they* trust him?"

"Because he created Janus," said Josh firmly.

"Be sparing in the trust you give to Travis," demanded Alex. She fiddled with her equations and erased a few lines.

"Then why do you trust him?"

"Because the fool thinks he controls me," snapped Alex. "He believes I still love him."

"Do you?"

"Are you afraid of commitment?"

Josh said nothing.

"Why did I date him when he cheated on me? Who knows? Besides he did not

betray me when he had the chance. He must still want me. As long as he desires me I am safe. You, he does not desire.”

“I can take care of myself,” said Josh. He gave an arrogant smile. “Has anyone taken care of you?”

Alex stared at his smile and held back a laugh. “I am getting sick of answering personal question! No more questions from you. How about you? How was the military life? Do anything you regret?” asked Alex.

Josh said nothing.

“I get it,” said Alex. “You interrogate me I get nothing.”

“So, Travis did things he probably regrets. I understand that,” said Josh.

“I got it!” shouted Alex. She showed Josh the page of math she had been working on.

“Cool! Lots and lots of number and Greek notations!” said Josh in a mocking voice.

“We don’t need technology to communicate. There is my message!” Alex showed a stack of rave dance fliers. She held out one, “When will it end? SkyBlue.”

Josh asked, “SkyBlue?”

“First, I convert the letters to number, put them through the magic equation and, presto, I get zero.”

“Zero,” asked Josh,

“Zero is good. Zero means meet us there,” explained Alex.

“What is the magic equation?” asked Josh.

Alex laughed. “I guess we are going to a rave tonight. Ever been to a rave? It

may be a bit much for you.”

“I can handle myself,” said Josh firmly.

Alex laughed, “It is not a war zone. It is full of people wanting to have fun. Hmm... I think you would be more comfortable in a war zone than, heaven forbid, a room full of people trying to be merry. “

“Sounds like a pick up scene.”

“That is why I like them,” said Alex. “I always need a fresh supply of young naive men. A lot like our military.”

“Oh, really?”

“More than you would imagine,” said Alex with a smile.

Josh stood up and asked, “What is that?”

Sounds of a commotion broke out at one end of the camp. Searchlights lit up the fog with an unnatural glow. Thoughts of the British fighting off the German plans in World War II jumped into Josh’s mind.

“The definition of not good,” responded Alex.

People start yelling and running past Josh and Alex’s tent. Several police horses could be seen towering over the tents like mythical beast.

“They are breaking up the homeless camp,” said Alex as she grabbed her backpack.

“Why?” asked Josh.

“Why do you think? You are always just going to ask questions aren’t you Josh? We must go. Just keep close.”

Police spoke over the loud speakers to remain calm. A line of police could be

seen forming on the four sides of the camp.

Some of the homeless frantically grabbed some items and ran. Others approached the police line and yelled. Suddenly there was gunfire and the group that approached the police line fled.

“They are shooting?” yelled Josh. “How can they shoot? Police don’t do that.”

“Who will care? Who will know?” asked Alex. “Now a days they can do anything they want to the homeless.”

“We are surrounded,” said Josh.

“Not above,” said Alex. “Always have an escape route in mind. “ She grabbed a few items from her camping backpack and placed them in a smaller backpack.

“Above does not sound good,” said Josh. He looked at the highway loaming high above.

“Be very quiet. They are hunting us not rabbits.” Alex started climbing a service ladder.

Juan said, “I will cover for you.”

Alex stared deeply into Juan’s eyes. The two seemed to connect they drift away quickly.

Josh sighed then followed. He looked up and saw Alex a quarter way up the overpass before he even began. She crawled around as if she had done this before. Running away came natural to her, he thought. Josh was not a fan of heights. In basic training he vomited just before his first sky diving attempt. They never let him down for that one. Till the end the name Vomit Jumper haunted him. Creativity was not a requirement for the Corp, persistence was. He held his breath and started to follow Alex

up the overpass. Josh had to admit it was an easy climb; the girders gave plenty of places to grab. Numerous graffiti littered the beam telling of how easy the climb was. Some were very artistic; one of a cow with zebra stripes captured his attention for a second.

The most difficult part was avoiding the bird droppings that were liberally applied to the structure. Still, when Josh was a quarter the way up he was winded. Josh mumbled to himself that he needed to exercise more.

The Juan shouted, "Wait!"

Both Alex and Josh stopped climbing. Josh was halfway up he could see clearly the policeman lining up the homeless and checking one by one. They were searching for a woman. They were search for Alex. Fear overtook him as he realized how delicate her situation was. A cop then had a light onto the overpass and was searching methodically. Alex and Josh held their breaths as his search neared their location.

Josh looked up at Alex. Her face was expressionless. He looked down at the policeman. Josh was about eighteen feet high; this would not be pretty. His basic training would be key to his survival. But, if he did it wrong, Josh told himself, he would have very little to worry about afterwards. He readied himself to jump. His world collapsed to a dream; he felt removed from his actions, as if none of this was real. All that mattered was Alex. Suddenly the gravity of his actions struck him; he was risking him life for her. Josh had only met her and was now preparing himself to jump for her. Why? Why did she mean that much to him? He sighed; it was the only way. Then he saw Juan watching him. Their eyes met for a moment then Juan smiled. Juan then walked casually up to the policeman Josh was targeting. The policeman yelled something Josh could not hear and raised his baton threateningly. Juan sneered back at

the policeman. He then blocked the baton with one hand and slugged the policeman in the face with his other hand. The policeman quickly fell to the ground. Instantly, all the policemen dropped what they were doing and ran over to Juan. He fell to the ground as they beat him. His arms covered his face as they struck him. Josh watched for a second then forced himself to continued up; he must not let Juan's sacrifice be in vain. Juan had saved him but Josh felt changed, as if his reality would never again be the same. All that he was no longer mattered. His past turned away from him as if on a wheel as his choice for a new life became clear. He had made a choice and that choice was Alex.

Josh and Alex quickly made their way up the overpass. The commotion below told them no one was paying attention. Josh wondered if he would have jumped. It scared him that he had even considered it. Alex was a criminal. Why would he be willing to jump eighteen feet from an overpass onto a policeman for her? Josh knew he better figure out his feeling quickly. Alex glanced at him. There was embarrassment in her stare. She understood what he was prepared to do, Josh felt this.

The highway was busy. Cars raced by, their lights blinding him. The road was damp from a recent rain. The roar from the highway was deafening. It sounded as if the tires were ripping through the asphalt. The sound numbed his mind. He stood staring into the on coming traffic unsure about what to do next.

“OK, we are up here now what?”

Alex looked down at the chaos below. “Hmm.” She watched the traffic for a moment then shook her head.

“Hitchhike?”

Alex shook her head again. “I think we need to get off of the freeway as quickly

as possible.” She pointed to houses that lined the freeway. “Over there, we can cut through that house’s yard; it looks like no one is at home.”

Alex walked slowly to the first house as if nothing had happened. Josh tried to appear as casual as her. She climbed through the shrubs then quickly jumped over the fence. Josh followed.

“Good,” said Alex, “no dogs and no people.” She opened her backpack and pulled out scissors. She found a dark window to use as a mirror and combed her long hair straight then pulled it into a ponytail. Then, after sighing, she cut the ponytail off.

“What are you doing?”

“Thing One and Thing Two saw me,” explained Alex. “Time for change when those eyes have seen me.”

“Have you done this often?” asked Josh.

“Cut my hair in strangers back yards?” asked Alex. “No.”

“Run from the law,” said Josh. “Break the law.”

“It is a living,” snapped Alex. “Do you enjoy helping heartless corporation find news ways to exploit their customers?”

“We find fraud.”

“Oh really? I thought you trawled up personal information on people to justify charging them a higher rate or better target them with useless products. But, whatever lets sleep come to you at night.”

Josh said nothing. He realized Alex knew exactly what he did. Travis and her must communicate more than she let on. She was also right. Select Data Connections mostly provided companies with a reason to charge a higher rate on a bank loan or

insurance policy. Josh could argue the point they were closing information gaps but did not want to argue with her. He, instead, wanted to watch her. “What do you think we can find out about them? Can we find Travis without Janus, my Janus?” asked Josh.

“We can do the surface search of the Internet but we need more data,” said Alex. “Without more data I doubt we will get very far.”

“How much data do you have?”

“We tapped into the major information firms. All but yours.”

“The security is very tight,” said Josh proudly. “The best I have seen.”

“I know. All attempted hacks have failed,” said Alex. “Most firms are simplistic to hack today. Either they have outsourced their IT to people who don’t know what they are doing or have arrogant executives who demand things like VPN access from home machines or, more often, both.”

“Not even Travis has access to the data,” explained Josh. “And I don’t have access to Janus...” He then went quiet remembering he now had access to everything. As long as the disaster recovery plan was place he could do anything. Josh knew he could not let Alex know this.

“Can you get us in?” asked Alex.

Josh said nothing.

“Do you want to find Travis?” asked Alex.

Josh said nothing.

“Do you want to find out who is framing your friend?”

“I can try to get us in, in a limited bases.”

Alex smiled and then examined her new hair cut in the window. It was very

short, tomboyish looking. Alex toyed with it a bit. She sighed again; it would take seven months to get long again.

Josh watched her uncomfortably. He knew he should say something. “I like it,” said Josh. “It makes you look sophisticated, independent.”

Alex smiled back and toyed with her hair some more. “Thanks,” she giving him a seductive look. She grabbed a bar of soap from her bag, went over to a garden hose and turned it on. Slowly, she removed her clothes and placing them carefully beside her. Josh watched in awe as she undressed. Alex stood there naked for a moment to gain courage to dare the cold then sprayed water on her.

Josh turned away.

Alex laughed, “We have to smell better if we are going to a fetish rave.”

“Fetish rave?”

“Don’t worry,” said Alex, “I know where we can get some fetish wear near by here.” She looked Josh over then said, “You need a shower too. Come here.” Alex motioned for him to come closer. She then bit the air.

“Ah, I will wait,” said Josh.

“Don’t be afraid,” said Alex. “My bite is enjoyable.”

“I am sure it is....what if they come home?”

“Then they get free, live soft core porn in their own backyard. They should pay me don’t you think? I think I am worth a lot just to look at don’t you?” She squeezed her breasts together in a mocking fashion.

Josh watched her for a bit then asked, “How much of Janus did you write?”

“Lots of it.”

“What is Janus?” asked Josh.

“The most simple extremely complex beautiful thing you have ever seen.”

“Why do you both do that?” asked Josh. He stared at her body as she bathed. Her skin was covered with goose bumps.

“Do what?” asked Alex.

“Answer every question about Janus with a riddle.”

Alex laughed then said, “I need someone to scrub my back. I could ask someone from the street but you are so near.”

Josh said nothing.

“I may even answer more questions about Janus.”

Josh smiled meekly and walked uncomfortably over to Alex.

She gave him her soap and presented her backside to him.

“Wow the water is cold,” said Josh.

“Firms up the skin,” said Alex. “I won’t discredit you for any shrinkage if you join.”

“Um,” stammered Josh as he scrubbed her back.

Alex turned around quickly and pulled off Josh’s shirt. She felt his chest with one hand and grabbed his pants with another.

Josh groaned and made a weak attempt to pull away.

Alex grabbed him firmly and unbuckled his pants. She into his eyes then pulled down his pant. “Poor thing,” she said seductively. “So cold. Let me warm things up for you.”

Chapter Fifteen

Fetish in the City

The music was loud at the fetish rave. Josh could hear the club half a block away. Josh wore a tight leather vest, a leather collar and jeans; Alex wore a black, tight, latex strapless outfit. Her new hair suited her attire.

Josh rubbed his bare arms and asked, “Are you sure I look good in this?”

“You look the part,” said Alex. “We are an alternative couple going to a fetish rave. You look just right.”

“I feel silly that is all,” said Josh meekly.

“You got great arms,” said Alex with a smile. “It is good to let others see them.”

She pulled on her top. It kept sliding down.

“Do I have to wear the collar?” asked Josh.

“That is to make sure not one else grabs you,” explained Alex. “You don’t want someone else to grab you do you? You never know what someone here would choose to do to someone like you.”

The club was nondescript, only an old wooden sign of a donkey with zebra stripes decorated the front. The only indication it was of interest was the hordes of people waiting impatiently to get in.

“Only people in club wear,” said the bouncer as he turned two men away.

Alex strutted passed the line and up the bouncer. She leaned in close to him and whispered into his ear.

The bouncer listened to Alex for a moment looked at Josh then laughed. He then motioned for Josh to enter.

Alex then pulled on the bouncer’s ear with her teeth before entering the club.

“It is hard to think of you as a mathematician,” said Josh.

“Human’s are easier to understand,” said Alex with a smirk, “then things such as manifolds and the number e . I never truly got the number e .” Her voice had a touch of sadness to it when she mentioned the number e . “Men, I especially get.” She slapped Josh’s rear. “Keep in character.”

Josh smiled meekly. Most people in the fetish rave were in skimpy black or red outfits. “I thought raves were for kids,” yelled Josh over the roar of the music as he observed a group of people in their late thirties.

“The cool ones are,” yelled back Alex. “This one is for old farts like you and me.

They play the music at a third of the speed and charge us three times as much.”

They wandered through the crowd as they danced to the music.

“What are we doing?” asked Josh.

“I am looking for our contact,” said Alex. She went to the bartender. “Two whisky sours.”

“Travis’ drink,” said Josh knowingly.

“Let’s people know things are kosher,” explained Alex.

“How much of what you do is because of Travis?”

Alex said nothing and slipped her drink.

Josh watched her. She slipped her drink exactly the way Travis did.

The club was filled with ordinary people desperately longing to be unusual. Josh could see through their delusions. The lawyers and bankers were now lawyers and bankers in expensive latex clothes designed to make lawyers and bankers feel as if they were not lawyers and bankers. It was sad for Josh to watch. He pretended not to be there; he denied completely that he was dressed like one of the crowd. Josh then realized he had been staring at a woman’s cleavage for the past ten minutes. She wore a tight leather vest and little else. He looked up to her face. She winked at him. Josh quickly looked away; he could feel himself blush. It was all about making oneself observable, he thought to himself. Josh watched Alex for a moment. He watched her feeling like an incidental person in someone else’s dream. Alex seemed at ease in the crowd, one of them. She was having fun observing them and being observed. There was a distinctive rhythm that vibrated through her body to the beat of the music. It looked as though she was perfectly calculating the sound waves of the music and translating them to body

motion. Looking around the club Josh saw an obvious transvestite at the bar. He had to be the worst female impersonator Josh had ever seen. He did not know why but Josh had a fear of transvestites since he was a child. Josh's only wish was for the contact not to be the transvestite. The transvestite smiled seductively at Josh. Josh turned away quickly. He could feel his/her stare. Josh knew the transvestite was coming closer. He held his breath and continued to look away. Curiosity overwhelmed him and he looked back. The transvestite was coming closer.

“There is Georgina,” said Alex. She pointed towards the transvestite then waved.

“Are you sure?” asked Josh nervously.

“If that was your contact,” asked Alex, “would you ever be mistaken picking him out?”

They approached Georgina who smiled grandly upon seeing Alex then eyed over Josh.

Georgina, in Josh's opinion, was the ugliest transvestite he had ever seen; he was fascinating in his ugliness. Josh stared at Georgina for a bit before Georgina blew a kiss at Josh. Josh quickly looked away and promised himself to avoid looking at Georgina for the rest of the conversation. There was something oddly familiar about Georgina. He gave Josh the feeling that he had been his high school math teacher.

Georgina grabbed Alex's hand and said:

When seeking new paths

Never taunt sleeping dragons

The Way finds quiet

Alex sneered back at Georgina and snorted in reply.

“It has been years child. Love that outfit,” said Georgina with a sigh.

Alex said, “Might as well flaunt it.”

“I would kill to be able to get into an outfit like that,” said Georgina.

Alex grabbed Georgina’s arms and “I love what you are wearing. So, sexy in a raunchy way. I bet you can’t keep the men off of you.”

Georgina smiled wickedly and snapped back, “You always know the right thing to say don’t you?”

“That is why you love me so,” said Alex. “Right?”

“Right you are dear,” said Georgina. “And who is this man? This hunky man?” She gave Josh a little wave.

“This is Josh,” said Alex with a smile.

“Does not say much does he?” asked Georgina. She winked twice at Josh who looked the other way.

“I like him for other qualities,” said Alex smiling down towards Josh’s crouch.

“If it is not one man it is another,” said Georgina followed with a little laugh.

“Well, I only go through them if they are not real men,” replied Alex. “Josh here has, how can I say it, more foundation to build off of.”

Georgina raised one eyebrow and said nothing.

“Shouldn’t we be doing spy like stuff?” asked Josh.

“No fun is he?” snapped Georgina. “Is he like that all the time? Boy, foreplay, even when doing spy stuff, is half the fun! Enjoy this.”

“Georgina, I am working on him,” said Alex. “I got him naked earlier.”

“Oh,” exclaimed Georgina. “You will have to tell me all about that.” His voice

had a bit of jealousy to it. “Such a meaty man. Lots to tell?”

“Lots to tell,” said Alex with a smirk.

“Details,” demanded Georgina. “Give me the juicy details.”

“Sure you can take it?” said Alex. “I don’t want to shock you.”

“Nothing you do,” said Georgina with a sneer, “can shock me. Nor what you do with the hunky meat you collect.” She kissed at Josh.

“I do what is expected of me,” snapped back Alex.

“Oh dear,” said Georgina in a seductive voice, “and so much more.”

Alex sneered back.

“Can we get to the point,” demanded Josh. “We need to get moving. This is not safe.”

“Don’t worry big boy,” said Georgina. “Georgina is here to protect you.”

“We need to know where the safe house is,” said Alex.

“Why?” asked Georgina seriously. “Just keep running. You should be in Canada now.”

“We need to take down some people,” said Alex. “I need access to Janus.”

“Things are dangerous now,” grumbled Georgina. “Did you know they lost contact with five?”

“No,” said Alex. “Are they gone or just in hiding?”

“Unclear,” said Georgina. “This better be good. They are searching too. Why do we need you to? They are fairly good at what they do.”

“I have access to more data than anyone can imagine,” said Josh firmly. “I work with Travis on the new Janus.”

Georgina stared stunned for a moment. Then laughed, “Travis?”

“Yes,” said Alex.

“I bet this man in his meaty prime would not even know what Travis looks like,” said Georgina with a smile.

Alex cut in and demanded, “What should I do next?”

“You know better than me dear,” said Georgina. “I don’t know about your taste in men—”

“I never picked them well,” Alex said sharply.

“It is on this paper,” said Georgina then handed Alex a slip of paper. “Look for the typical signs. And if you don’t mind dears, I got to go back to my prowling while you go back to yours.”

“Oh, we don’t mind,” snapped Alex.

“And tell Julie next time she moves,” said Georgina, “be a little more discreet.”

“If I tell here I got the location from you,” said Alex, “she will move right away.”

“Bye bye meaty boy,” said Georgina. She then recited:

Two leaves in a stream

Carried together as one

Never will be one.

Alex glared back at Georgian who shouted back “I love this song,” as she danced into the crowd.

After Georgina melted into the sea of dancers Josh said, “That was a strange guy.”

“You have no idea,” said Alex angrily.

“How do you two know?” asked Josh. “You seem to have some sort of history. I

got this strange vibe.”

“Strange vibe? Perhaps, we know each other through bad choices. We need a car,” said Alex. She stormed out of the club with Josh in tow.

The streets were deserted; it was late evening.

Alex looked pulled out a pen then sat on the sidewalk working out a math problem on the slip of paper Georgina gave her. After a few minutes she said, “I guess we are going to Oakland.”

Josh helped Alex up.

“Lets go into the alley,” said Alex.

“What is your plan?” asked Josh.

“We are paying a visit to one of the Bletchley Huts, Hut Eight.”

“Bletchley Hut... Hut Eight... Hey! That is where Turing worked on the machine that broke the German code encryption machines, the Enigma machines, during World War II. That is where he built the Bombe, one of the first computers.”

“That is who we are, the Bletchley Group,” said Alex. “Just like Turing we are trying to decipher an enigma to save mankind, the enigma of consciousness.”

“Well,” said Josh sarcastically, “at least you are keeping your head on your shoulders about it.”

Alex smirked but said nothing. She then wondered about the parking lot looking at each of the cars carefully. She stopped at an expensive luxury car. She smiled at Josh. “Did you know everything in these cars is controlled by computer?”

“Most of the modern cars are.”

“Yeah,” said Alex merrily, “more things to hack. Did you know it is wireless?”

She pulled out a notepad computer from her backpack. After a few minutes of fiddling she exclaimed, “Got the frequency!” The car’s doors unlocked at the security system beeped.

“So,” said Josh reluctantly, “we are stealing this car.”

“Do you want to take a cab?” asked Alex.

“We could take BART.”

“BART has cameras,” snapped Alex.

“What about the black box on these things?” asked Josh.

“Simple to turn off,” said Alex as she reached under the dash yanked out the black box. She then tossed it into the street.

“I don’t—”

“Then stay,” said Alex quickly. She jumped into the car and started it up.

Josh stood undecided.

“Coming?” asked Alex.

Josh sighed then jumped into the car. “Aren’t you feeling the least bit guilty?”

“It is a luxury car. This car is worth more than most Americans make in a year and more than most people in the world make in their lifetime,” said Alex. “So, not really.” She then sped away the car’s wheels screeching loudly in the cold evening air.

“That is not a justification for stealing,” snapped Josh.

“You don’t think people amass this level of wealth without corruption?” snapped Alex. “Our wealth is based on corruption. Nobody earns this amount of money.”

Josh said nothing.

Alex smiled, “Technically, I am borrowing it without permission. To the

uneducated it seems like stealing, but it is not trust me.”

“I have trusted you this far,” said Josh.

Chapter Sixteen

Bletchley Park, Hut Eight

The morning light revealed the unpleasantness of where they were. The buildings were old and dilapidated. Trash littered the ground. The only things that grew were weeds. It had been a cold night in Oakland. Alex had ditched to the warehouse district near the ports and they slept in an empty lot under damp cardboard boxes. Neither looked very good this morning. They had slept for only a few hours. Now they were wandering the streets looking at warehouses.

“Where is the Bletchley Hut?” asked Josh impatiently.

“Quick, hide,” said Alex. Both Alex and Josh darted into a doorway.

A postal truck drove by.

“The postal service is such a wealth of information,” said Josh.

“No shit,” said Alex. She started looking around the sidewalk as if she had dropped something.

“What are you doing?”

“Looking.” Alex searched the sidewalk carefully. She said, “I am looking for graffiti on sidewalk.”

“What type of graffiti?”

“I will know when I see it,” said Alex. “It is more of a pattern.”

“This is like, a very,” said Josh nervously, “very interesting part of town.”

“We are packing more heat than anyone who would want to do use harm. Keep your panties on.”

“Actually I am wearing your panties.”

“Not likely, I never wear underwear,” said Alex. “It stifles my kick.”

“I am feeling dirty. Do you think I need a shower?”

“Save that thought. Here,” said Alex, “the graffiti of a pigeon with zebra stripes. It is this warehouse.” The warehouse looked as though it had not been used for a decade.

“Hey, What is with all the zebra stripes? Is it because Turing wrote some paper on Zebra stripes?”

“Turing figured out a mathematical model to explain how zebras got their stripes and in the stripes you can hide a lot of information,” replied Alex. She walked up to the door and knocked one, three and seven times. The door was a heavy wooden door with metal supports.

Josh looked at one corner of the doorframe and saw a camera pointed at him. He gave it a little wave. After several minutes Josh asked, “Are you sure this is the right place? It feels like a drug house or a dominatrix den—”

“How many dominatrix dens have you been too?” asked Alex.

“I was in the military,” reminded Josh. “You get bored, very bored stationed on bases in the middle of nowhere.”

“My interest has been peeked and we *will* continue this discussion later but, shush,” demanded Alex. “They are listening.”

“Probably hiding things.”

“That too and dressing. I always imagine they are buck naked when I am not around.”

The door then unlocked. Alex entered quickly with Josh following from behind. They were in a small square room with two doors and no furniture. The walls, floor and ceiling were covered in sheets of metal. Alex shut the front door behind Josh. The door locked automatically the instant she shut it. A slot midway in the wall opened beside them.

A voice demanded, “Put all guns, explosives, knives and communications devices in the hole.”

Alex put a small gun that she hid between her legs, a gun from her jacket and another revolver from her bag in the slot. She then placed two cell phones and the handheld into the slot. Alex stared at Josh.

“I don’t have a gun,” Josh said firmly.

“I know,” said Alex. “But you do have that handheld and cell phone of yours.”

“But you soaked it,” said Josh angrily. “It does not work anymore.”

Alex sighed crossly then said in a commanding voice, “Just put it in.”

Josh paused for a moment then put into the slot his cell phone and Travis’ handheld.

After a few seconds a voice announced, “Welcome to Bletchley Hut Eight.”

“Good,” said Alex. “We are clean!”

The slot in the wall closed and the door opposite to the front door opened.

Alex rushed through the door.

“What are you thinking?” demanded a woman clothed that made her look like a homeless person. She had a strong face and piercing eyes. Her posture made her authority evident.

“Julie can I get a hug from you before you chew my ass off?” asked Alex.

Julie sighed then hugged Alex. It was a long and warm hug, like two sisters. Alex did not seem to want to let go.

“This is Josh,” said Alex. She had a bit of pride in her voice.

“We know who mister military is,” snapped Julie. Her voice was heavy with disapproval.

“Obviously,” snapped Josh, “you don’t.”

“You brought him here,” snapped Julie staring at Josh, “so now we have been exposed.”

“Georgina gave me the address,” said Alex.

Julie looked shocked. “Georgina, she...she is back?”

“In all its glory,” said Alex with a evil smile.

“Wow,” gasped Julie. “Is it happening? Is she coming? Is this over?”

“I don’t know,” said Alex. “But, I know if Georgina could find you it means you should move. Georgina wanted me to tell you to be more discreet on your next move.”

Julie motioned for someone. “Start the exit plan now. Within thirty minutes I want to see people exiting. In twenty-four hours we are out of here.” The man ran off.

“Well, for as long as we are here,” said Julie, “make yourself at home.”

“We need access to the Janus prototype,” demanded Alex.

“Why?”

“We need to track down who issued a search on the hundred,” said Alex.

“We know who would do that,” growled Julie.

“And to find Travis,” added Josh.

Julie smiled then asked, “To find Travis? What do you mean? I thought you said —”

Alex said in a blunt voice, “Josh does not know where Travis is. He wants to find him.”

Julie looked at Josh. Her eyes scanned his face for a second. Then laughed and said, “Sure... I don’t think our systems could track down Travis though.”

“I can help expand your search,” said Josh with arrogance.

“Oh,” said Julie, “by all means do. Why are you so interested in finding them? I don’t know if I trust this man.” She pointed at Josh. “I don’t see any motive for him.”

Josh looked at Alex then paused before said, “Abdul-Aalee Muhammad Nasser is a friend of mine. I don’t like people messing with my friends.”

“The terrorist?” asked Julie.

“He is not a terrorist,” snapped Josh.

Julie scanned Josh’s face for minute then said, “It must be hard, you being responsible for your friend’s situation. But, what good will finding Travis do for him?”

“Travis is the key,” said Josh. “Travis can fix the situation. He can fix anything.”

“I admire your faith and... I love your taste in clothing.”

With fear Josh grabbed at his neck then removed his collar. He asked sheepishly, “Is there any cloths for us?”

“I like what I am wearing,” said Alex.

“I bet you do but it is hardly what I would call indiscreet,” said Julie. “And we will look for clothing for mister military here.” She then walked off.

“Lets find Tina and Larry,” said Alex.

A man came up to Alex and handed her a bag, “Here is your stuff back. We checked it all out. We found the usual.”

“What was that about?” asked Josh.

“Here is your cell hone and handheld,” said Alex angrily.

“What did I do?” asked Josh.

Alex said nothing for a second then said in a clam voice, “Lets get access to Janus. The first Janus.”

They wandered through the building. It was mostly empty, filled with just tables with computers and wiring running all over the floor and ceiling. People were already busy clearing out table and putting belongings into boxes.

“We better find them fast before this place is empty,” said Alex.

Two programmers worked back to back in a dark nook in a seldom-traveled part of the building. Empty bags from fast food joints littered the floor beneath them. The smell of old fries overwhelmed any lack of hygiene that might have otherwise been evident. They both wore headphones and danced in their seats to unheard tunes. The old chairs groaned as they boogied but neither heard the chair's cries, both had the volume set high enough to completely obscure the outside world. Their movement was similar enough to imagine them listening to the same song, as if they were dancing together. As they rocked in their seats they type continuously and furiously. You could feel them thinking as one mind sitting back to back.

Alex grabbed both chairs and shook them. She yelled, "Tina, Larry! Long time no see!"

"Susan!" exclaimed Larry happily. Larry was a small, nerdy looking man in his twenties with a big smile.

"Alex," said Alex, "it is Alex now."

"Whatever dude," said Larry. "I can't wait to change my name again. I want to be William Gates next. What do you think?"

Tina, an equally nerdy appearance to Larry, laughed, "You are such a dweeb!"

"This is Josh," said Alex.

Josh waved and smiled meekly at the two.

"Hey! I know you," said Tina. "I saw you at a BlackHat convention a few years back."

“Sorry,” said Josh, “I don’t remember you.”

“Oh you wouldn’t,” said Tina with a laugh, “I was monitoring Travis. I was dressed up as a guy.”

“What is a BlackHat convention?” asked Alex.

“So you don’t know everything?” asked Josh.

“She knows enough,” snapped Larry quickly.

“It is a convention of anit-Hackers of sorts,” said Josh. “It shows the latest in security technology and threats.”

“As I recall you two were fairly drunk,” said Tina. “Weren’t you trying to pick up on those ladies from Apple—”

“What are you two up to?” asked Alex.

“Cleaning duty,” said Larry. “Thanks to you we have to move.”

“I was getting sick of this place anyways,” said Tina. “There is only greasy food here and my car keeps getting broken into.”

“We will probably be in the middle of nowhere next time,” said Larry.

“Oh, before I forget,” said Alex. She handed Larry the handheld she took from the blond hair man and a memory card. “Here are some photos and a handheld. Do your worst.”

“My favorite,” said Larry merrily.

“Let me see,” snapped Tina taking the handheld away from Larry. “Who is it from?”

“A blond hair gentleman,” said Alex.

Both Larry and Tina smiled.

“Wicked,” said Tina.

Josh looked around the nook shoving boxes around with his foot. After looking over some old servers collecting dust in a corner he fell to his knees and frantically removed boxes covering an old computer. It was very unusual looking, the case was curved and a bright blue. “Wow,” exclaimed Josh. “I never imagined it! This is a CAM-Brain computer! How did you get a hold of one of these? There are only three in the world right?”

Tina asked in a superior voice, “What do you know about a CAM-Brain computer?”

“It is a learning machine built around 2000. It used neural networks chips to grow and adapt,” said Josh. “It failed. I forgot the reason.”

Larry laughed mockingly.

“They said because it was improperly installed and the investors got skittish,” said Tina. “I know the real reason why though.”

Josh’s eye widened. “Why—”

“We managed to get one,” interrupted Alex. “It was just stored in a closet collecting dust.”

“Does it still work?” asked Josh touching it.

“It is a bit slow by today’s standards but was interesting to work with,” said Larry.

Tina said, “It gave us lots of ideas.”

“Of what to do and not to do,” said Larry.

“To do what?”

“Janus of course,” said Tina.

“No shit?” asked Josh. “Is this machine is it? Is this your Janus prototype?”

“Of course not,” said Alex. “Janus, both yours and ours is software not hardware based. You should know that. Our Janus is someplace safe.”

“Safe?” asked Josh. “Safe why? And why do you think the CAM-Brain project failed?”

“Why did all the artificial life experiments fail?” said Tina.

“Simple, because it is impossible,” said Josh.

“Ha,” responded Tina.

“Some people do not want us to discover a true artificial intelligence,” said Tina, “something with consciousness that is not human.”

Tina said excitedly, “They fear artificial intelligence that is why they killed Turing, to quiet him.”

“Turing committed suicide,” said Larry.

“It was an accident,” snapped Alex.

“I think they killed him like they killed Lawrence of Arabia; the British don’t like people who know too much to be eccentric,” said Josh bluntly, “and definitely not gay.”

Alex sighed, “I wonder what would have happened if he had not died.”

“He would have been fighting our battle now,” said Tina.

“Why do they fear AI so much they would kill?” asked Josh of Larry.

“They see it as a threat,” said Larry.

“That is why—” started Tina.

Alex cut in, “A thinking machine would have an unbiased view of mankind. It

would be out of their control. They don't want anything out of their control.”

“I am not in there control,” said Josh defensively.

“But, we all are,” said Alex. “Including me. Unless we hold up in some shack in the middle of who knows where we all interact with society, are a part of it. We go shopping, work have friends and live out lives. An AI, for all intent and purposes, would be alone in a shack. All it would need is an Internet connection, power and occasional maintains. It would be a free thinker, an independent thinker, out of their control. And worse it would be immune for the poor programming of the human mind. It would think without our flaws.”

“They are scared by what we are creating,” added Tina. “We are creating the liberator, someone that can destroy the corrupt, has unbiased view of humanity.”

“We will change mankind,” said Larry. “A whole new age, no war, no corrupt leaders, people working to better—”

“Janus will be lead us into the next age of human development,” said Tina.

“And they want it for themselves,” said Larry. “To use it to keep use under there control. To get even more power. To keep us in the dark forever.”

“I don't buy it,” said Josh with reluctance.

“People,” said Larry, “are easy to control. We get distracted quickly, overly emotional, fear the unknown, prejudices, we have false in our thinking—”

“The government plays to our flaws,” said Tina. “The whole foundation of power rests on the flaws of mankind's thinking. Power is a illusion resting on the wrong thinking of man, as Travis often says.”

“Our minds, although wonderful, were developed through evolution, a random

process,” said Alex. “Are minds are far from perfect and power rises to exploit those flaws.”

Larry grew excited and almost jumped out of his chair as he spoke, “Build something that sees through the flaws and the illusion of power lifts and a new age begins —”

“Just because you have a true artificial intelligence does not mean you have any power. What is it going to do besides mess with media reports and hack into computers?”

“Oh, Janus can do far more than that,” said Tina. “It can control any computer connected to the Internet, traffic lights, medical devices, factory robots, navigation systems, unmanned vehicles... anything.”

Larry leaned towards Josh, “It is not hard to imagine with that power you can even kill—”

Alex angrily cut in, “We are not doing anything of the sort!”

Josh snapped, “What they don’t want is a bunch of hackers to have things like this.”

“Is that what you think we are a bunch of hackers?” asked Alex.

Josh laughed, “Isn’t that what you do? Who you are? The Bletchley Group is just a hacking group like the Legion of Doom conducting the next Great Hacker War. You SPAM, hack into systems, steal information —”

“Is that what you think I am?” asked Alex. Her eyes narrowed in anger. “You make it sound as if we are nothing more than a bunch of Mark Abenes or Kevin Mitnicks. Computer terrorist—”

“Oh! I would have sooo loved to be a part of the Masters of Deceptions during the Great Hacker War!” exclaimed Larry. “I would have had to gotten a cap though.”

Tina snapped quickly, “And, hey, I like Kevin!”

“Before he got arrested you mean,” said Larry.

“True, he turned into a wimps after he got arrested,” said Tina with a sigh.

“I wonder what happened to him in prison,” queried Larry.

Alex glared angrily at the two of them.

Josh motioned to Tina and Larry as if making a point.

Alex snapped at Josh, “What do we do? What about what do you do?!”

“We do nothing wrong,” said Josh firmly.

“Lets see, violate people's privacy—”

“We do nothing illegal,” said Josh defensively.

“Even if it is legal it is sleazy. It is only legal because big firms have more power than individual consumers.”

Josh sighed then said, “Firms have a right to know about their customers.”

“Why?” growled Alex.

“If firms aren’t informed they make the wrong decision then we, the consumers, all pay in the end. Privacy hurts those that have nothing to hide. Only criminals benefit from privacy—”

“Where does our privacy begin then?”

“How about if someone has defaulted on there past two loans? Should a firm be forced to ignore that? The rest of us subsidize that person disregard for the rules?”

“Ha,” laughed Alex. “In that example it is simple; it is the fuzzy areas that

trouble me. Is sexual habits fair game? Is political leaning fair?"

Josh said reluctantly, "Sure." He imagined Alex knew Janus was using those thing to determine credit ratings.

"How about if a firm favors what they consider better citizens not based off of statistics but there gut feelings?"

Josh said nothing for a moment then said, "They would lose money. You want a model that work, something that is statistically valid."

"In statistics if you look long enough you will find the answer you want even if it is wrong."

Josh remembered back to when one of his bosses demanded he found rural areas were different from urban. He had to force that 'fact' into his model even though it was not valid. "Sure there will be poorly built models here and there. There is a cost to everything. The benefits out weight the costs. The poorly built models will fail in a competitive market. People are abusing the system, firms have a right—"

Alex waved her finger at Josh then said, "For fraud yes! But to give preferential treatment to or predict future behavior based off of bad modeling, I disagree."

"Our models are the best." Josh folded his arms across his chest.

"Janus is probably the only correct model. But it is not just about Janus. Most firms just hack things together. But even properly build statistical models can be flawed. And this is what really scares me," said Alex leaning close to Josh, "people may become bad risks just because you predict them to be. If a model erroneously marks you a bad credit risk you are forced a higher interest rate then the higher payment cause you to default. It becomes a self-filling prophesy. A false prophesy that the oracles forces to

become truth. If a model today says you are a bad risk you will be turned into a bad risk. The model could make them a bad risk.”

“Few model have that power and most that do have been thoroughly tested. I think you over estimate any one models reach,” Josh retorted. “Again, those models will fail in a competitive market.”

“They can feed off of one another though. “

Josh snorted. “We aren’t there yet.”

“But something like Janus will make it possible. “

Josh snapped, “We are the best—”

“And I would argue not good enough!”

Josh looked into Alex’s eyes and unenthusiastically shrugged a no. He did not want to argue with her any more about this.

“We are not data paparazzi,” said Alex firmly.

Tina growled, “We are creators!”

“We are advancing mankind,” added Larry. “The AI will change everything.”

“That is why they are after us,” said Tina.

“Man creates God,” said Josh, “then man kills God then you all create God and *they* are trying to kill it.”

“Nietzsche understood these sort of things,” said Alex.

“You all are so convinced you are right. And how could you be wrong? You are creating your own Superior Being to judge you.”

“Who is to say Janus approves of us now?” said Tina sadly.

“They let us have Janus,” snapped Josh. “Why would they let Select Data

Connections have a Janus if they feared AI so much?”

“Do you have it now?” asked Alex. “How soon before you will lose it? After the hundred run do you think they will let you keep it? And what would your company care? They would get a hefty sum of money to hand it over. The shareholders would be happy and all of you would get large bonus. A win-win.”

“OK,” said Josh reluctantly.

Tina snorted.

“I just know Travis and... it just seems like Travis is...” said Josh, “shallow. It is hard to imagine any motivation on his part except for money.”

“His code is in most open source applications,” explained Tina. “There is no profit in that. He did it for the betterment of all.”

Josh snorted in disagreement.

Larry said, “He basically wrote all modern network applications. Really cool shit, wickedly bad stuff; although, I never understood half of it. It is now all over the place. People are using his code with out even knowing it.”

“He increased the internet ten fold by making adaptive network applications,” said Tina.

“Adaptive? He put AI in the network software?” asked Josh. “His network software thinks?”

“Yeah, this real simple learning algorithm,” explained Tina. “It is so small an elegant.”

“Isn’t anyone worried about security?” asked Josh with fear in his voice.

“It can’t have any hole,” said Larry. “He is not better than every programmer on

earth and they all can see the source code. The code is in plain site.”

“Where best to hide something you want hidden,” said Josh. “His code modules are everywhere,” he mumbled to himself.

Alex smiled when she heard Josh say this. Their eyes met for a second.

“I still think the only reason Microsoft is still wining is because *they* fear Linux is tainted with Travis’ code,” grumbled Tina.

“I have always suspected as much,” said Larry. “And probably because Richard Stallman, the founder of the GNU, copy-left movement, did some great work in AI. It is that truth maintenance system we are using, right?”

“His TMS proved to be of great use to us,” said Alex.

Tina then added, “The only time they attacked Microsoft is when they refused to allow a backdoor to be put into the software—”

Josh laughed and in a mocking voice said, “They maintain Microsoft’s dominance to hold you back?”

“Let me know what you come up with,” interrupted Alex. “We need to find you some cloths—”

“Oh, yeah,” said Tina, “I wanted to make fun of that, you look like a sexy slave dude.”

“And if you need someone to whip Alex,” said Larry, “I am free. I am a lot cooler the whip that that dude.” He pointed at Josh.

“Keep that thought,” said Alex as she walked away.

Later that night.

Josh and Alex were laying side by side in old, torn sleeping bags. Most of the warehouse had been cleared out; only a few computers remained. Dust hung in the air and stifled every breath. Josh was controlled his breath as he thought about how close Alex was to him. He wanted to talk about her. Travis was not what he wanted to talk about but Travis was what he must talk about. “What do you think the script is?” asked Josh. “You have to have some idea what the master script is doing? What will happen when it completes?”

Alex sighed irately. “If the Travis I loved is real it will bring down this administration,” she said.

“And if not?”

“He will abuse the power to satisfy his pet peeves, steal a bunch of money and perhaps bring down the administration as well,” said Alex bluntly.

“We have had chaos before. What is so great about creating chaos?” asked Josh. “Just look at the pain and suffering Russia went through. And after chaos, good never wins. It is always the powerful who win.”

Alex said nothing.

“What are his motives?”

“I don’t know... freedom?” offered Alex in a bored voice.

“Chaos,” said Josh firmly. “I think his true motives is chaos. And, shit, his code is in every network application! Doesn’t that bother you?”

Alex stared at Josh for then snorted with disapproval. “There is only one thing I

am sure about Travis, he plays people.”

“Then why trust him at all?” asked Josh.

Alex laughed. “Maybe some of us like being played. And, maybe, sometimes I want him to win whatever game he is playing. But, one thing is sure, only Travis can change this administration.”

“You keep saying that like it is a good thing.”

“You want this, poverty, fear,” asked Alex, “the continued loss of freedoms?”

“I want security,” said Josh firmly. “I want people to be able to sleep, go to work, school and know they are safe.”

“Is that why you joined the military?” asked Alex.

“Yes.”

“What happened? Why did you leave?”

Josh said nothing.

“I have told you everything about my life,” said Alex. “Is that how it is. Is that how we communicate? Not much of a relationship.”

Josh’s eyes widened at the word “relationship.” Is that what they had he wondered? With great hesitation he said, “I was at the college shooting, that protest in the Middle East. I was in the Special Operations.”

Alex said nothing for a minute then asked reluctantly, “Did you fire? Were you one of those you attack the protestors?” She feared his answer, her voice revealed this to Josh.

“It was our orders to keep control,” said Josh firmly. “It got out of control. The lines kept breaking. Then the order came down.”

“How could you?” asked Alex disgusted. “They were innocent people! They were just trying to stop a hateful war.”

“You are trained to follow orders. Not to question them. How did I know what was going on? The student could have been firing at us. They could have been attacking civilians. They could have been terrorist,” said Josh firmly.

“They were civilians and none of them had guns,” said Alex. “None of them were terrorists. I knew people in the protest. I knew people that died.”

“I know that now, but, then, at that moment, I had to have faith. I had to rely on my trust in the chain of command. Without faith there is chaos. If I don’t follow orders people will die. A soldier has a tremendous power and with that responsibility. But we cannot know everything, see everything, evaluate every command given to us in the heat of battle, we must take orders, believe those orders are for the greater good. And is was in a foreign country—”

“And that makes it right?”

“No! But, it makes it easier to just follow orders...”

Alex snorted. She cleaned her left fingernails with her right thumbnail in a nervous fashion.

Josh watched her for as he tried to decide what to say next, “If we all just had faith, faith in ourselves, our government, none of it would have happened.” He paused then added, “No one would have died.”

“Some of us require more from our government,” snapped Alex. “We require reason, justification.”

“If people did not trust our government, in what we are doing as a nation is for the

greater good,” said Josh angrily, “we would not have achieved anything as a nation.”

“Wait... are you him, the guy that came forward, the guy the pinned it on, the guy they prosecuted?”

“I was acquitted,” said Josh slowly.

“It was you. You looked so much younger then... I remember the first press reports of the incident, you coming forward then the trial... Most of us thought the whole thing was punishment for you admitting the truth.”

Josh said nothing.

“Does Travis know? Of course he knows.” Travis planned all of this, she thought to herself.

Josh sighed, “I suppose he does. He knows everything but we never discussed it. We typically would talk about why neither of us could get dates.”

Alex sighed then asked, “Did you kill anyone, in the incident?”

“It was not something I am proud of. It is not something I wish to relive. If I could do anything to redeem myself I would.”

Alex said nothing.

“I joined the military to save people,” said Josh. “True, there are those in military that join to kill and blow things up but they are a minority. Most of us are there to save lives and, if necessary, sacrifice our own to save them. The military is place where you can do great things. Truly save people’s lives, protect them but in order to do so you have to make a sacrifice, you have to give up for freedom, your will. You have to be willing to follow orders with no questions, do what is expected of you. And when you don’t follow order people die, they suffer. That is the burden of a soldier, faith that our

commanding officers are using us to do good. And when we question that faith people die.”

Alex continued to clean her nails.

“I joined the military willing to die to save people,” said Josh firmly. “I expected to die saving people. Do you have any idea what it is like to kill innocents? No soldier, no real soldier ever wants to kill innocents,” his voice cracked. “It is everything we are against. I joined to military to kill people who killed innocents. I joined to destroy what I ended up becoming... And there was no alternative, you cannot save lives if you do not follow orders—”

“But—”

“Just let it drop.” Josh said nothing for a moment. “I am sorry about your loss. No one who fired that day wanted to kill, none of us want to kill anyone. We thought we were there to protect.”

“Why are you here?”

Josh paused then said, “I thought we already went over this.”

“I guess we did.”

Alex said softly, “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.” Josh replayed the conversation in mind till late that night. He knew there were better words to convince Alex he was a good man but those words refused to come to him. Now he knew only one thing, that must convince her he was a just man, that he was the man for her. Josh slept fitfully that night, the ghosts continued to give him orders.

Chapter Seventeen

Playing Peek-a-Boo

“I have the results,” said Larry. He could barely hold back his excitement.

“Good news on the photos and the handheld. Boy are we good.”

“We have identified the photos,” said Tina. “Or, at the very least, have ids on one of their alias.”

“How?” asked Josh.

“Scanned photos in the Internet for similar faces using pattern recognition software based on a hybrid kernel/neural network method. We got tentative matches on both. The blond man was in this photo of a war protest. We could not find a name

associated with the photo. The other was in this photo about your firm, Select Data Connections.” He showed a photo of the CEO of the firm, the blond hair man, Mark and Travis. “Right here, the man in the back. We got a name, Jacob Black.”

Josh stared at the photo for a moment then asked, “War protestor?”

“Probably a nark,” said Tina. “Half of the protestor worked for one government agency or another.”

Josh stirred uncomfortably.

“Ever see or hear of Jacob Black while working at Select Data Connections?”

Josh shook his head. “Looks like an old photo,” he said, “Travis is wearing a go-t.” He said nothing for a moment then said, “That means Travis knows him.”

Tina said excitedly, “We got into the handheld! And it was the best security we have ever seen.”

“I am the master,” said Larry.

“We,” snapped Tina, “are the masters, including Janus. And we have the other one’s name.”

“Joe Bar,” said Larry.

“Ha,” laughed Alex. “Two JB’s? The lack of imagination is astounding!”

“These people do not exist,” said Larry. “They don’t care. They probably want names which are obviously fact.”

“Anything else on the handheld?” asked Alex.

“Just the list and I guess the data from Select Data Connections,” said Tina. “It is fairly accurate. What I don’t get is how Janus found people that have been off the grid for a decade.”

“It looks at everyone it cannot find and people it cannot identify,” said Josh.

“Then it sees if the unknown people fit a profile of someone not placed—”

“But if you are off the grid—” started Larry,

“No one is completely off the grid,” said Josh. “You have to live somewhere, pay bills, eat, travel. Even if you use a false name that is information. If you pay for everything in cash that is even more information. Janus scans everyone who is using a false name, without a history, living off the grid and then matches them to the profile it is looking for. Then looks at security video around the area to get a positive match. Living off the grid in the information age is like a child who plays peek a boo thinking when he covers his eyes you can’t see him. Being off grid makes you very visible.”

Tina exclaimed, “Shit. That means none of use are safe. If they get Janus it is all over!”

Larry laughed then said, “Ironic that Janus will be the one tracking us to our death —”

“Why haven’t they found us already? Why was that the first run with our names?” interrupted Alex.

“And Janus has not even been perfected... yet,” said Josh. “It gets... fixated sometimes. It did a rather poor match on the hundred. Actually, it quit making any matches after the first few.”

Tina and Larry smiled at one another.

“So, where does the money lead?” asked Alex.

“This makes no sense,” said Tina. “It is coming from Data Transfer Inc. That is Travis’ old firm.”

Josh asked, "Did you say Travis? Travis did all this?"

"It can't be," said Alex. "Travis would cover his tracks better anyways."

"I agree Alex," said Tina. "It feels like we are being played; however, the trail is clear. Travis' old firm placed the order. The money stops there."

"If it is Travis we are all dead," groaned Larry.

"He is not coming after us," snapped Tina. After a pause she added, "again."

"Maybe he was truly a nark," said Larry. "Maybe it was not a game. Maybe now that things are ending he wants to get rid of us."

"What is he talking about?" asked Josh.

Alex and Tina said nothing.

"We are all dead," groaned Larry. "The work is complete and he wants it for himself."

"Shut up," growled Alex.

"In the protests," said Larry, "Travis ratted us out. He was a nark. That is why he is so trusted. That is why he was allowed to build Janus."

Josh stared at Alex who smiled meekly.

"Why didn't you tell me?" asked Josh.

"Tina, Larry you better get moving," said Alex. She picked up the handheld and walked away. Josh followed quickly behind her.

"Why did you not tell me?"

"Tell you what?" snapped Alex.

"That he worked with *them*."

Alex laughed. "Why does that matter?"

“He can’t be trusted.”

“And you can?” asked Alex. “Travis never killed anyone.”

“We were at war,” growled Josh.

“We are always a war,” said Alex. “And anyways, I thought that would make you like him. He is a patriot just like you.”

Josh said nothing as he regained his wits. “So, what are we doing now?”

“We need to find him, Travis,” said Alex. “To do that we need your data.”

“I thought you said you stole some data, something valuable, that is why they are coming after you,” said Josh. “Lets use it if it means that much to them.”

“It was not so much what we stole,” said Alex, “but the fact we were able to steal it. They fear the fact we could steal it more than what we stole.”

“But, lets at least try,” said Josh. “Where is it?”

“It is in Janus. We already leaked some of the information, or I leaked I when they took a friend of mine, but... no one believed it. It is too... horrible to believe. It is now just another urban myth, conspiracy story written off by any think person as rubbish. It is only a small slice of the truth. We need to show all the truth to make it believable.”

“The why do you need me?” asked Josh. “If your system can do all that we can’t it find Travis?”

“We can hack into places,” said Alex. “But, we first need to know where to hack.”

Suddenly there was banging at the door.

“Cops,” someone screamed.

“Again? How?” asked Alex. She looked down at her handheld then tossed it to

the ground and stepped on it. She turned to Josh then said, “Just in case they missed something, although, I doubt it.”

Tina and Larry got up and ran.

“What do we do?” asked Josh nervously

Tina turned to Alex. “We are going to exit from the tunnel. You two better exit from the roof. We need to split up.”

“Where is the roof entrance?” asked Alex.

“Go up those stairs. Go towards BART along the roof till you see the sign then exit there,” said Tina.

“Good luck,” said Larry.

Alex smiled and nodded.

“So what do we do?” asked Josh.

“Run idiot,” said Alex. She darted up the staircase.

It was early morning. A light wind toyed with her hair. She looked down at the policemen running around preparing to enter the warehouse.

“There is not that many of them,” said Josh.

“It does not feel like a raid,” said Alex.

“Interesting,” said Josh. “They are looking for us, right?”

The sounds of a helicopter could be heard in the distance.

Alex sighed then said, “run.”

Running along the roof of the warehouses they jumped to one building to another. Alex scanning the roof tops for any sign.

“We need to get down,” gasped Josh.

Alex suddenly stopped at a skylight then peered in. Pointing to graffiti of a cat with zebra stripes she smiled at Josh. She hastily opened the skylight. "In here." The skylight opened up to an upper level about eight feet down. The warehouse looked deserted. They scaled down a pole to the upper level.

"I think they saw us," said Josh.

"Probably," said Alex. She quickly made her way down to the ground level. Dust covered the floor. The air was stale. The warehouse had not been used in years. Alex nervously eyed one of the front doors. A shadow could be seen through the frosted glass. "Out there someone is waiting," she whispered.

Alex and Josh ran to the rear of the warehouse.

Alex looked at the rear window then said, "To BART."

"I thought you said never to BART."

"Here's a ticket. If we follow the signs we should be safe." Alex paused to look at a series of numbers and equations scratched on the door. After a moment of reflection she looked at her watch then said, "Wait."

Josh looked behind him and could see the shadows moving outside of the warehouse. Their actions seemed to indicate confusion. One leaned close to a frosted window and trying to get a clearer view. Josh nervously said to Alex, "Now would be a good time to leave."

"Out path is to follow the equations," said Alex. "The equation will tell us how to survive."

Josh heard as one tried to open the front door. Alex seemed unfazed by the noise. Another took off running, presumably to get to the rear of the warehouse. Soon they

would be surrounded. Josh watched as Alex waited; she was pensive as if still struggling to solve the equations. Josh bit his tongue; he understood timing *was* everything. That was there advantage, they controlled the timing, and those who followed were forced to react. He heard shouting outside the front door. Josh concentrated on his breathing. He counted each breath as he waited, forcing doubts out of his mind. That was what he had been trained to do, act without doubt. He wanted to push her out the door; he wanted to leave the warehouse but he understood now was the time to follow orders. He would let the equations dictate his path.

After four more minutes Alex said softly, “Now.” She opened the door quickly.

Josh darted out the door and glanced quickly in both directions, it was all clear. He motioned for Alex and she darted out the door. They took off running towards BART.

The West Oakland residents watched with interest as Alex, still dressed in fetish wear and Josh ran to the BART station. Someone hooted at Alex longingly as a temptress who briefly excitedly his life. Others quickly went into hiding once seeing Joe and Jacob running behind them.

“We got Thing One and Thing Two one us,” said Josh.

“Follow close,” said Alex.

Alex raced through the BART ticket counter. As she ran through she explained, “We are missing our train, sorry.” The BART personnel stared with disapproving eyes as they ran up the stares.

Josh could feel them near. Every corner he ran he felt them closer. He feared turning around to see them there, within arm reach about to grab him. The fear took over

his body. What would they do to him? What would they do to her? He had no delusions; her fate would be unpleasant. Josh would not let that happen. His hands shook as the adrenaline increased in his system. Thing One and Thing Two were close, he could hear them running behind him.

They hastily pushed their BART tickets into the stalls then one recovering their tickets ran up the stairs to the platform. The people in the BART station ignored them. Travelers of BART saw many a strange things daily.

They reached the platform and a train heading to downtown Oakland was waiting. The equations had guided them well, thought Josh to himself.

The dark hair man, Joe, yelled, “Stop!” He was just feet away from them. The blond haired man was at the foot of the stairs.

The red lights beside the doors on BART flashed red; the train was about to leave.

“Get in,” commanded Alex.

Josh and Alex just made it into the train and then Joe, right behind them, pushed his way into the train. The doors closed, leaving Jacob behind. He angrily banged the door then pulled out his phone. The train pulled away from the station. The three of them quickly spread their legs apart to keep their balance.

No one said a word as Josh, Alex and Joe stared at one another wondering what to do next.

Everyone on the train watched with apprehension as the tension mounted.

“Joe, give me you gun,” commanded Alex she held out her left hand.

Joe smiled briefly then said “Sam, give me your gun.”

Alex laughed.

Josh briefly thought about asking both to give him their guns but decided not to. He was not in a mood to be laughed at.

Alex then kicked at Joe's head. Josh was unprepared for her actions; she attacked with no warning, as if it was second nature to her. Her kick was beautifully executed, fast, graceful and perfectly targeted. Joe dodged the kick just as gracefully as it was delivered. He smirked.

"Shit," muttered Alex. That was her best move.

Joe launched towards Alex throwing punch after punch that Alex blocked effortlessly. She moved as if his punches were in slow motion, redirecting each one to empty air effortlessly. After several seconds Joe broke off the fight looked at Alex in the eyes. He then bowed slightly.

Alex, keeping eye contact, did the same.

Josh felt insulted neither paid any attention to him, as if his presence was irrelevant. He thought about striking at Joe while he was distracted.

Joe and Alex suddenly began trading punches, each blocking the other's blows expertly. It looked like they were dancing, as if they were of one mind. Both were expressionless as they fought.

Alex quickly let her all her wandering thoughts collapse till only one thing remained, the Now. All that she ever was and all she could ever be dissipated as the bare truth of the present dominated her awareness. He was bigger and stronger; her path would be that of water. She became water; she flowed around Joe, through him. His punches were like rocks thrown in a flowing stream. The stream continued on. The stream flowed around the rock, absorbed the rock, consumed the rock. The rock brought

no harm to the water. The rock would be reduced to pebbles and the stream would live on.

Josh was stunned as watched. He felt distant, as if he was a spectator. It seemed unreal to him. The sounds of them blocking each other's blows grew louder as they put more force into their punches. Alex started to flinch when she blocked Joe's punches. The pain was evident in her face. Joe started to smile wickedly. He then got through Alex's defenses kicking her in the stomach. Alex started to fall and used her momentum to kicked Joe's left leg knocking it out from under him. He flew against the door as Alex hit the floor. Both took the opportunity to grab a breath of air. They were sweating heavily.

Alex thought about reaching for her gun, but he was too fast. If she let down her guard it would be over just as it would be if he reached for his.

Alex jumped back up on her feet to face Joe. Joe slowly positioned himself. Alex motioned with her fingers for Joe to come at her.

"Lets just talk this—" started Josh.

Joe snapped, "About time. You are one of us. Grab her, now."

Alex gave a quick look at Josh then resumed eye contact with Joe.

Josh said nothing.

Joe smiled back at Alex calmly. "Grab her. It is an order."

Josh felt his stomach tighten. Suddenly, everything moved like in slow motion. He felt as if he observing himself from afar. Josh knew both Joe and Alex were waiting to see what he would do next. He held his breath. Without complete control of himself, he threw a punch at Joe. Josh put all his weight into his swing. He wanted to land one

blow to end this. Joe easily blocked Josh's punch. Josh did not anticipate this and was off balance, vulnerable. Joe hit Josh across the face, knocking him out.

Alex flinched as she saw Josh fall to the ground. She then made eye contact with Joe. He smirked. Alex was on her own now. She launched into Joe and their danced continued. Each grunted as they blocked each other's blows. He was good; Alex had to admit it. However, Joe was breaking her down not by skill, but by brute force. She felt so tired. The adrenaline was waning. Alex just wanted the fight to end. She desperately looked for an opening but did not see one. He was very aggressive, pushing her back. Alex saw herself getting slower, losing concentration. Joe was getting through her defenses. At first he only got light blows through, but as she let more punches slip past her defenses she could feel herself getting bruised. Her body was tired; time was against her. Then, she saw Josh twitch. Alex summoned new strength and went on the attack, forcing Joe to put his back to Josh.

Josh woke with a frightful jerk. For a moment he was not quite sure where he was. He felt a sharp pain across his face and had a powerful headache. The rocking of BART roused him and the thought of Joe hitting him drifted to his consciousness. Looking around he saw Joe fighting Alex, his back exposed. Josh knew what to do. He got up quietly behind Joe. Josh held his breath; he had to be stealthy and quick. Joe then sensed Josh's presence and began to turn to a better position to defend himself against two opponents. Josh had to act quickly; he faked a punch to Joe's face then threw a quick jab to his kidneys. Joe flinched then missed one of Alex's punches. She landed a hit across Joe's face. Joe fell to the ground dazed.

Alex kicked Joe across the face knocking him out. She then bowed slightly

towards his unconscious body.

“I was getting annoyed watching you dance with another man,” said Josh bluntly.

“Jealous?” asked Alex in a seductive voice.

“I don’t like other men dancing with my woman,” said Josh.

Alex gave a quick smile and said nothing. She pulled out Joe’s gun and handcuffs then cuffed Joe to a pole. Alex held the gun loosely in her hand and pointed in the general direction of Josh. “What did he mean you are one of us?”

Josh looked at the gun then said, “When they interviewed me, I told them I was a patriot.”

Alex watched Josh for a second then put the gun away. “Lets get to the front of the train.” Alex faked a smile as she someone stared with concern at her. The people watching knew something was wrong. They grew fearfully, was she about the attack them? Was she a criminal? Should they intervene and subdue her? Was she armed and dangerous? The eyes told of the passenger’s fear. None would act, thought Alex. She stared angrily into the toughest looking man and told herself, if he even so much moved she would kick his ass. Alex forced into her mind visions of beating the man senseless. The man, after a moment, looked away. Alex sneered back at him. They would do nothing. They were cowards. She could be a terrorist for all they knew. Everyone looked forward and said nothing. Alex looked up at the camera in the BART. She smiled into it and blew it an air kiss.

Josh looked out the windows. They were on the elevated portion of the track. On one side was West Oakland, the other the freeway.

They made their way to front of the train.

Alex stopped by a door in the next to front car. She then said, “All we have to do is make it to the tunnel.”

The BART train started to slow down.

Alex gave Josh a look then sighed. “They are slowing down to allow the cops more time to prepare.”

Slowly, the train creeps into the tunnel going under downtown Oakland.

Once the first few cars were in the tunnel Alex pulled the emergence release lever and pushed open the door. The BART train grinded reluctantly to a halt. Once the train stopped Alex jumped onto the tracks. “Follow me,” she commanded. “They will be waiting for us in the station.

“I still can’t believe you are a PhD mathematician,” mumbled Josh half to himself.

“I never finished the program. Stay close and quiet,” said Alex. “See any graffiti let me know.”

The BART tunnels were dark and filled with a dark, dirty, greasy residue.

Sounds of people shouting could be heard coming from the end of the tunnel.

“They are on to us,” whispered Alex.

Josh heard the noises coming closer. His hands became sweaty. He wanted to ask what she was doing but knew not to. He would have to trust her. The series of number she looked at in the warehouse must have been a plan in code, he thought to himself. Alex moved quietly down the tunnel as if familiar with the surroundings.

Two policemen appeared from around a corner. One had his gun raised the other seemed oblivious to what was about to occur to them. Quietly and quickly Alex knocked

the one holding a gun to the ground with a kick to the head. The second policeman watched the other fall then frantically reached for his gun. Alex raced over to him, kicked his feet out from under him and hit him across the face as he fell. He fell, unconscious, to the ground. It happened before Josh even reacted to the policemen's presence.

She gloated over the police for a moment then moved on.

"Where did you learn to fight?"

"One thing I can do is learn stuff," said Alex. "I can learn anything."

"I am a trained fighter," said Josh, "but..."

"I use to teach Karate."

"Karate?"

Alex smiled proudly. "As a kid I pursued Karate with a passion only a tomboy, hyper active, extremely competitive, nerd could muster. My dad also knew karate. Didn't Travis tell you? How we met? I was his Karate instructor—"

"No," interrupted Josh. "He did not. Travis can fight? That is hard to imagine. He said he was a coward—"

"A coward who can fight," corrected Alex. She scanned the walls and floors carefully, seemingly ignore the sounds of policeman approaching. Then she came to an old door marked service exit. Beside it was graffiti of a zebra striped monkey. She knocked twice paused then once more. The door quickly opened and Alex and Josh went in. The door closed behind them.

"Alex," said Julie in a hushed tone. Her voice sounded like that of a big sister comforting a younger sibling.

“Thank goodness it is you,” said Alex. “How did you get here?” She grabbed Julies’ arm firmly.

“One of the tunnels ends here,” said Julie.

“Why didn’t we just take the tunnels then?” asked Josh.

Alex rolled her eyes then exhaled loudly.

Josh grimaced in response.

“If they saw no one fleeing they would know there were tunnels,” said Julie.

“And they needed to see Alex especially.”

“Ah,” said Josh meekly.

“What is the plan?” asked Alex.

“Switch clothing,” said Julie.

“Are you sure?” asked Alex. “Nothing good will come of this.”

Julie smiled and recited:

A tree sprouts two limbs

One leans towards the light and grows

One remains obscure

Reluctantly, Alex smiled back at.

“You will get away and she needs you more than me,” said Julie. “All will change when she is free.”

Alex said nothing.

“They won’t do anything to me as long as the cops get me,” said Julie hopefully.

“I can spend time in jail no problem. Go up that service ladder after I leave.”

Alex and Julie hug each other. “Goodbye old friend,” said Alex. “Run fast.”

Their eyes met once more then Julie smiled and raced out the door.

Alex and Josh heard a commotion in the tunnels shortly after Julie left. Then there was gunfire.

Alex started heading towards the door but Josh stood firmly between her and the door. Alex looked towards the door then to Josh with pleading eyes. Josh remained firm. Her eyes slowly changed from pleading to acceptance. “We better leave,” said Alex with sadness.

The service ladder led up to an ally way in downtown Oakland. A beat up car was a few feet away with a bumped sicker with a fly penguin on it. A policeman ran down the alley talking into his radio. He did not give Alex and Josh a second look as he hurried by.

Alex casually walked up to a car.

“Stealing another car?”

Alex gave Josh an evil stare then said with a sharp tone to her voice, “No this is ours.” She reached under the left bumper and removed a key that was duck-taped on.

Josh said nothing as he got in then, after a moment of reflection he said, “You all believe in what you are doing. You all do.”

“Very much so,” said Alex.

“So Janus will save mankind?” he asked in a skeptical voice. “Bring a new age of peace?”

“If not,” aid Alex as she turned on the car, “Many have wasted their lives for nothing.”

Chapter Eighteen

Epoch One of Life

“Do you think they followed us?” asked Alex.

“I don’t see anything suspicious,” said Josh. “We have been wandering through these hills for hours. Where are we going?”

“Places with lots of trees,” said Alex. “It makes it difficult to follow us with satellites.”

“Do you really think they are watching us with satellites?”

“No,” said Alex. “But, if you have a reason to be paranoid it is better to be consistently paranoid. Paranoia is a lifestyle not a fancy.”

Josh laughed. “So, this is your life?” he asked after a moment.

“Yes,” said Alex. “Are you enjoying it?”

“I must admit... yes. I think I was getting bored with mine. Everything had become too... linear as someone once told me.”

“Non-linearities *are* where everything fun hides. So, that is why you have been following me around, my... curves.”

“Well,” said Josh, “and I like your versions of a shower. Much less dull than mine.”

Alex laughed. Then said, “This is a vacation for you isn’t it? An extreme vacation.”

“Maybe I am contemplating a change in lifestyle.”

“Why?”

“I love the view it provides,” said Josh with a smirk as he watched Alex.

Alex felt herself blush. She frowned in hopes it would camouflage her reaction. After a few minutes she pulled into the driveway of a huge mansion in the Berkeley hills.

“Know these people?” asked Josh.

Alex smiled, “No.” She parked the car under a large tree.

“Why are we here?”

“Looks like a nice place,” said Alex. She got out of the car. “I want to stay here for a bit.”

“How do you know no one lives here?” asked Josh as Alex strolled up to the door of a nonchalantly.

Alex smiled, “I hacked their newspaper’s database. The owners of this house have

halted delivery for six months week, this in undoubtedly their summer home. I also hacked their maid service's database and got the access code for the house." She pulled out a piece of chalk and drew on the sidewalk a zebra striped giraffe. "This means it is already occupied."

Josh smiled.

Alex fiddled with the door for a moment before opening it. She then typed the code into the alarm system. "The house is ours for the next three days."

"I can see why Travis loves you," said Josh.

The mansion was huge; its entrance way was bigger than the first floor of Josh's townhouse. It felt more like a hotel than a home. Each room was perfect in its décor, suspiciously perfect. No detail was missed; no piece of furniture felt out of place and nothing was visible to show a mere human lived here. Every piece carefully crafted to assure a viewer of its expensive. The delicate curves on the legs on the chairs, the details in the drawer handles and shiny brass doorknobs made wealth the dominant statement of the house. Josh knew wealth like this existed but this was his first experience with being in it, being able to touch it. This mansion and all its contents was wealth at its most extreme and this was not the owner's only house. He could not help but thinking of the homeless encampment. One chair was worth more than a homeless person saw in years. The owner's children could be complete incompetent idiots and still become the CEO of any firm or be elected to any position in the government. And under this burden of wealth how the children learn anything other than of their superiority? No one could compete against this level of wealth. He was waking in a castle of New World royalty.

"Hmm," snorted Alex in disapproval. She wandered through each room till she

found a computer. It was hidden in an ornate writing desk. Turning on a computer she put in the TRACK disk.

“Won’t they be able to trace us?”

“I’ll spoof the IP address. This address is not watched like the free Internet sites, so, it should be safe.” Alex typed some commands into the machine. “Lets see if I can’t make contact with Janus.”

Josh said, “We should find Travis first.”

“Again, we will need your data. Janus can’t find Travis without more data,”

“What type of data?”

“The type of data your company has,” said Alex firmly.

Josh grew nervous. He did not want to give the hundred any data; there motives were still unclear to him. “Don’t you already have data?”

“Much of what we have was revealed through the Freedom of Information Act,” said Alex. “To track down Travis we need more. We need up to date bills, transaction and the like.”

Josh felt his stomach twist into knots. This was serious. Access the Janus’ data was the most sensitive topic at Select Data Connections. “Sorry, I can’t help.”

Alex sighed then said, “Do you want to find Travis? You have access to data we can only imagine of—”

“I should just go back to work. I have my own Janus. I can do my own look up. I don’t need you.”

“Leave then!” growled Alex. “Run your search on your Janus. And have everyone see you make the search. Have them know what you are up to. See how far

that gets you!”

Josh said nothing. He stood undecided before Alex.

“Aren’t you the least bit interested in seeing the first and longest running Janus?”

“OK. The non-sensitive data I can give you access to,” said Josh reluctantly.

“Only the non-sensitive stuff!”

“Now, with the Hut Eight temporarily down we can only update it at the source. I will request an audience with our Janus. It will take a few hours for a response.” Alex went to an open source site and put in a bug to the project tracker.

“You use open source projects to communicate.”

“We use lots of methods to communicate,” said Alex. “Variety is the spice for a good life.” She winked at Josh who blushed. After putting in a meeting request in one of the projects Alex browsed the new websites scanning quickly through the articles.

“Here!” she said. There was an article about a police shooting in the BART station. Julie was still alive but in serious condition in a local hospital. Alex let out a little whimper. Josh hugged her. She melted into her body as he did so and he never felt so whole in his life.

Later that night...

Alex head was lying on Josh’s chest as they both watched a fire.

“I usually hate fires,” said Alex. “All the smoke, but, don’t mind them so much when it is someone else’s house.” She laughed for a moment.

“How long have you been on the road?”

“Long time, ever since I met him...” Alex said him in a wistful manner. She seemed to float off after saying it.

Josh watched her as she started into the fire. “You still love him?” asked Josh. He spoke in an understanding voice.

Alex said nothing.

“I love you,” said Josh. “Does he love any one but himself?”

“Why do you keep talking about Travis?”

“I want to know were you stand with him.”

“Stand with him?” asked Alex.

“What will happen if you have to choose between us,” said Josh.

“If I have to choose between you two don’t rely love,” warned Alex. “There are things beyond the love of two people.”

“You fear Travis.”

“No!” snapped Alex. “I fear who I am when we are together.”

Josh said nothing.

“Josh, enjoy what we have now. Quit thinking about the future.”

“Sorry,” said Josh. “It is just—”

“Being on the run has taught me the meaning of impermanence. Everything ends. You have to enjoy what you have when you have it,” cut in Alex remorsefully. “You have to be aware of now, not dwell on the future. In some ways it is liberating. In other ways...”

“Do you ever wish not to be on the run?” asked Josh.

“Again with the twenty questions,” snapped Alex. “It is getting boring.”

“Sorry,” said Josh. “So, what should we talk about?”

“I will ask the questions, why are you into computers? You seem more like an action man.”

“I did not want to kill anymore,” said Josh.

“Simple.”

“People do not understand the burden.”

“I imagine not,” said Alex her voice betraying her disgust.

“Mankind trivializes it. It is not just our cultural; it is mankind in general that glorifies it. I have been around the world. I have been around the world seeking to bring peace. To supposed civilized lands full of themselves and war zones filled with blood shed and I see the same thing, people in love with hate. Everyone in love with hate. I have seen it. I have been through it. Wars only end due to lack of resources, either men or money, never due to lack of hate. No matter what sacrifice we make to bring peace the hatred always remains. It is always there just looking for an excuse to escape. It is like we are genetically programmed to hate, kill, wage war—”

“That is why an Janus can save us,” said Alex quickly. She then bit her tongue.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“So, that is what all you guys are about, the hundred, building a AI to save mankind.”

“Suppose we are, would you help us?”

“An AI cannot save mankind. What, are we suppose to worship it like a god? Let it rule us? Let it manipulate us? What can it do? A computer cannot fight wars, comfort

a child or do anything needed to rule over man. It can only manipulate bits of ones and zeros.”

Alex laughed then said, “But, you don’t even believe a computer can be conscious so it does not matter.”

“Damn straight. You can build something that has the illusion of life, intelligence.”

“And how would that be any different from you or me?” asked Alex.

Josh laughed and said nothing.

“How much do you know about EVE?” asked Alex.

“Not enough,” said Josh quickly.

“OK. Interested in hearing about Epoch One in the EVE process?”

“Yes. Of course.” Josh sat at attention.

“Epoch One is just about separating out the promising AIs from the dead ends,” said Alex. “First, you build AIs using a Computationally Intelligent method that is bi-directional, reversible, one that predicts an outcome and can deduce how an outcome was achieved.”

“Like BAMs.”

“Exactly! A key is bi-directional memory. With it they then can imagine, deduce and predict. It allows for much more complicated behavior.”

“Ok, fair enough.”

“Then you give them biological truths, such as the need for food, effort brings pain or, at least, is costly. But those truths are to be understood by a learning algorithm.”

You teach them what bring happiness and what brings pain. You do not program what brings happiness, you teach it. Teach them how to react to biological truths.”

Josh nodded understandingly although he was already feeling lost. This would be like pre-calculus all over again, he thought to himself. He was in love with his pre-calculus teacher as well. Josh nearly flunked that class.

Alex smiled understandingly. “Nothing is just a line of code. Every part of the system is allowed to learn, grow, add and remove neurons, develop new inputs and outputs. You modeled the brain taking into consideration the work of Daniel Dennett’s Cognitive model with competing resources and others in the field. You do not program how they learn you allow them to learn. You give them the mental resources, like memory, parts of the brain that reason, imagine, dream and so forth. ”

“Dreams? How do they use dreams?”

“Well I am never quite sure how they use anything once they start to develop. I always imagined dreams allow them to evolve their desires, create new ones and change old desires.”

“So if they learn not to use their dreams?”

“Then they won’t use their dreams,” said Alex bluntly.

“Ok. What desires do you give them?” asked Josh.

“Simple ones at first. For food you give them apples—”

“Apples? Turing would be pleased.”

“Yes,” chirped Alex. “Now we set up the environment. The environment only has apples and one other AI. The red apple give ten Utils, measures of happiness, green apples give five Utils and effort gives negative four Utils—”

“Sounds like a prisoner dilemma pay offs!”

“Exactly! You force the AIs to compete for the best, red, apple.”

“Compete? How?”

“If one AI exerts effort and the other does not it will get the red apple. If both exert effort then by chance one will get the red, the other the green. So, in repeated games the expected pay off is three and a half utils. Fifty percent of the time you will win and get six utils (after subtracting the cost of effort) and fifty percent of the time you will get one util...” Alex paused seeming to need an affirmation indicating understanding.

“Fair enough,” said Josh nodding as if he was still keeping up. He wished he could truly understand EVE but he had no hope; he had studied it in the past and failed to comprehend it. Just hearing her talk passionately was motivating enough for him to pay attention.

“And, this is another key, you force it to learn how to use its reasoning, its dreams, memory, reasoning and imagination. You design a learning algorithm that determines how to think. You do not hard code it in.”

“So that builds awareness?”

“But, how would you even know it is aware? What is the difference between aware and not aware? What is awareness?” asked Alex.

Josh shrugged in response but then smiled in an encouraging manner. He feared his shrugged seemed dismissive.

“Imagine being a zombie.”

“Simple enough, I am at work.”

Alex laughed. “Scarely true but what is the difference between you and a zombie?”

“I don’t eat brains,” said Josh. “Well, occasionally, if they are properly prepared like in a hotdog—”

“Not the movie zombies but a person just like you but without any consciousness, no awareness. You could pick that person out of a crowd yes?”

“I suppose you could but how would you code that?”

“What do they lack that a normal human possess?”

“Well, I don’t know.... one thing is they don’t understand their actions—”

“Yes! And that their actions affect other. Say, instead of AIs we did this experiment with zombies. Each time you ran the experiment the zombies would always run for the apples, right? They would be caught in a situation of perpetual competition. If it were humans, eventually they would share; they would learn to cooperate—”

“You really are a recluses aren’t you?”

Alex laughed. “OK, reasonably intelligent humans would cooperate. A human would, say, get to the food and only eat half of the red and green apples leaving the other half for his competitor. You would teach the other there is no need to compete. Both would reach a better outcome in repeated games. In my opinion teaching is the best sign of self-awareness. Once the AI attempts to teach the other AIs we push it to the next epoch of development.”

“Is that it? Is that the trick?”

Alex laughed, “The trick is how to explain to a AI once it is aware its life is an illusion. Think of it, may think out life is an illusion but for these AIs their lives truly are.”

“Hmm. OK I think I understand... Is this what EVE is all about?” asked Josh.

“It is what Epoch One is all about,” said Alex. “There are many Epochs in EVE an AI must go through before becoming aware—”

“You mentioned that you have a learning algorithm that determines how to use its memory, dreams and reasoning. Is that what the Master Guiding Script is? Is it the controlling algorithm?”

“You will have to ask Travis about the Master Guiding Script.”

“Hmm!” grunted Josh angrily. “I don't think sharing is a sign on awareness.”

“We are testing teaching—”

“Either way—”

Alex laughed mischievously. “So if you don't like them apples I will give you Travis's version.”

“Do tell,” said Josh.

“I don't know,” said Alex. “It might be a bit to much for you.”

“Try me.”

“Say there is a woman who cannot choose between two men—”

“Hmm,” grunted Josh with disapproval.

“If it rattles your senilities I can stop.”

“Go on.”

“So she can’t decide between these two men so she makes them compete each day to find out whom to...”

“Whom to what?” asked Josh with a raised eyebrow.

Alex wet her lips then said, “To have a pleasurable night with, a very pleasurable night with.”

“Hmm,” groaned Josh. “Sound interesting. And why can't she make up her mind?”

“Say each has different qualities. Contrary qualities that she cannot resist—”

“She sounds a bit confused.”

“But not confused about what to do with them when she... get a hold of one.”

Josh smiled. “What if she does not choose you that night?”

“If you fail the test you get to enjoy the night by yourself,” said Alex, “thinking of what she would have done with you, to you.”

“So this woman is only few times better than enjoying the night yourself?”

“Well, we have to keep the same pay off structure, however, unrealistic,” said Alex. “The two outcomes are not comparable—”

“I don’t know sometimes a guy can have plenty of fun by himself,” said Josh.

“If you truly believe that you have not been around a girl like this one.”

“Oh really?”

“If you push this too far you may never find out.”

Josh asked, “Her decision is made by what?”

Alex checked Josh out then said, “Let's say some measurable thing.”

“It is always about measuring something isn't it?”

“Yes, but there are different types of measurements aren’t there?” asked Alex.

“But, does this exclude the possibility one man is a lot better than the other.”

“Better in what?”

“Better to enjoy the night with,” said Josh.

Alex laughed. “It is a fair assumption the woman in the only determination whether the night is enjoyable.”

“Really? Oh now I see. You have been with a man like—”

“Like who?” asked Alex.

“Lets just say perhaps you need you experience hand in the matter.”

“Perhaps.”

“So, what is the aware solution for the two men?” asked Josh.

“Naturally to share of course,” said Alex. “A gentleman should not force a woman choose. Isn’t that fair? They could all even play together. Everyone’s utils are maximized.”

Josh stirred uncomfortably, “There is more between two people then maximizing utils—”

“Isn’t that what men think it is all about, maximizing utils? Or... is it more a question of ownership? That a man must own a woman?”

“Is not a question of utils or ownership, at least not with some men. If that was all I cared about what a sad existence I would have.”

Alex grabbed Josh’s arm gently. “But why make the woman choose? Why not just share her?”

“Because... because all of this conversation miss one thing, the soul. Awareness is not the most important thing about thinking like a human. And I believe the only two people can share their souls. The Taoist had it right, only two souls are balance when together. Human nature prevents three people from sharing their souls. It will always be out of balance. No one could have complete faith in the other. So if the woman cannot decide between two men it is because neither are right for her, neither are her soul mate. Even if the men do agree to share her she should reject both. When the right person comes when will know. It is as simple as that.”

Alex said nothing and leaned on Josh’s chest.

Josh grew nervous. “But if I was forced to I—”

“Lets be quiet for a moment,” said Alex in a tired voice. As they watched the fire Alex let herself melt into him. She knew this was going to end but ignored the fate of the moment.

Josh said nothing for a minute then asked in a voice trying to hide his fear, “Do you believe in love at first sight?”

Alex smiled and said nothing for a minute. She enjoyed feeling his anticipation. “There must be love at first sight. There is only love in the Now.”

Josh thought about what to ask her next. He knew he might not get another chance to ask her anything about them. “So we are passed Epoch One?”

Alex said nothing for a few seconds as she collected her thoughts. She stared at Josh then said carefully, “Way past.”

Josh sighed with relief. Then his mind began to stir fear within him. How many others had there been? Did she just through herself at other men? Was he only one of a

countless stream of men entering her life? “Have you seen anyone since him?” asked Josh.

“What about your past history? How many woman have you slept with?” snapped Alex.

After a moment of thought Josh, “Many.”

“And what was the best thing a woman ever did to you or you did to a woman?”

Josh blushed. “Not the sort of topic for a lady.”

“How is that? It involves what a lady did to you. Well, I assume it was a lady.”

“Hey now,” said Josh. “I never had to pay for sex.”

“So? What? What have you done?” prodded Alex.

“Uh,” stammered Josh nervously.

“Whatever it was,” said Alex, “I bet I can top it tonight.” She slowly took off her top as Josh stared in awe.

Chapter Nineteen

House of ACE Junior

Alex drove Josh to a dilapidated computer store in Cupertino, California. The store was in the back of an old strip mall. Most of the other stores around it were empty; this was not prime real estate. The storefront had had one, small, escapable sign in the window. It read, 'Computer Parts and Service' and was written on a piece of yellowed paper. Beat up bikes cluttered the front entrance; it was obviously a teenager hangout. Cigarette butts littered the walkway spilling over from an ash receptacle that had not been

empty in years. When a Josh and Alex entered an old, painfully distorted doorbell sounded. Half the fluorescent lights flickered the other half were out. It smelled of ionized air and people who did not properly apply deodorant. The floor looked as though it had never been cleaned in thirty years.

Josh could imagine the store existed at the dawn of the computer age and would survive as a temple once the age came to an end. It had a feel of reverence to it, a temple to computers. Thirty-year-old computers sat proudly in the store window. Old ad campaign posters for software and computer chips hung from the ceiling like banners. Countless old monitors and faded software boxes were stacked up to the ceiling. Bins with wires and spare parts cluttered the floor and cover an endless table in the center of the store. Computer miscreants of all kinds rummaged through used parts bins looking for deals and hidden treasures. They clutched their finds tightly as they continued their search. It was easy to imagine one of them had the next great computer invention in their garage.

Josh sighed; this was a toy store to him. He felt at home.

“Dude,” said Alex to a teenager behind the counter playing a computer game.

“The owner, is he here?”

The teenager grunted something unintelligible and continued to play his game.

“Tell him Susan is here,” said Alex.

He sighed and said nothing as he tried to accomplish a great feat of gaming.

“Now,” demanded Alex.

Alex and the teenager’s eye met briefly then sighed again. “Yeah...whatever...” said the teenager. “I guess he said something about you come’n around. To the back, I

will buzz you in.” As they walked away the teenager muttered something to himself.

Alex and Josh strutted to the back room arrogantly. The other people in the store looked on, deeply jealous. A static mat greeted them at the backdoor. The door was heavy and had a sign on it that stated bluntly, “Do Not Enter.” A buzzer sounded and Alex opened the door quickly. The door opened up to a small room similar to the one at the Hut Eight with a second door opposite the first. They proceeded through the second door to the backroom.

The backroom was poorly lit and had an endless array of computers stacked everywhere, running up the walls. The green power lights on the computers shined out like the eyes of countless cats in a back alley at night. The roar from the computers and air conditioners was deafening but a very old boom box was playing classical music loudly, attempting to be heard.

An older Chinese man working behind the desk stared in disbelief. “No way! It is you Sam!” He dropped the screwdriver that he was using with a loud crash onto the desk and walked briskly over to Alex. “I have not seen you in years!”

Alex smiled and said, “Lin, it has been a long time, much too long.” Alex hugged Lin warmly, as if he was family. “And you can call me Alex; he is cool.”

“I have not called you Alex in ages.” Lin sighed and said, “Too bad about Julie.”

Alex said nothing.

“She knew what she was getting into,” said Lin, “and she is a trouper. Julie will pull out of it—”

Alex shook her head sadly.

“Why are you here?” asked Lin cheerfully after a moment of silence. “You came

to talk to *him*, right?”

“The Janus proto type is in a computer shop?” gasped Josh in disbelief. “In *this* computer shop?” He lifted his foot and it made a sticky sound as it dislodged from the floor.

“Who is the button down?” asked Lin eyeing Josh suspiciously. He grabbed a bottle of cheap beer from his table and took a sip.

“He is cool,” said Alex, “Georgina clears him.”

Lin snorted with disapproval. He pulled out two more beers from under his table and handed one each to Alex and Josh.

“Hidden in plain site,” said Alex with a smirk. “It is perfect. The number of required computers would raise an alarm elsewhere. Also, for transferring data, it is great. People can just drop off their computers for a repair or upgrade and we can do anything we want. We can just switch out the hard drives. No alarms are raised. That wall, there, of old computers, is Janus, our Janus at least. That wall there is faster than most super computers.”

Josh looked at the wall. At least two hundred old computers were stacked against the wall. Not a single machine was less than three years old. The cases were all old and beat up. “Wow.”

“No shit,” said Lin proudly. “We call him Ace junior.”

“After Turing’s never completed machine, ACE,” said Josh.

Lin added, “A machine that might have put us light years ahead in terms of computing today.”

“Travis’ Janus is in the newest machines in,” said Josh with a sneer, “with the

most overpriced server room in the world.”

Alex said in a soft voice, “Do you think the two Janus’ will get along?”

Lin laughed then said, “I don't see why not. They have the same parents.”

Alex snapped back as if insulted by Lin's laugh, “But this Janus eats other AI’s for lunch. This Janus does not play well with others. And we have no idea of Travis’ Janus will react to other AIs--”

“Other AIs?” asked Josh.

“They have two AIs we know of. Also, some private firms and universities have experimental AIs,” explained Lin. “Sometime Janus, this Janus, Ace and another AI cross paths. Most of the time Ace picks on them but, sometime, it starts a war with them. Ace tries to destroy them.”

Josh grew agitated when he heard the word war. He asked, “A War? How do AI's fight a war?”

Alex said, “It is not anything you would recognize as a war.”

Lin said thoughtfully, “This one is a bit of an unruly one. And it has been the center of all our attentions, at least as far as he knows. We should be careful when introducing the two. Finding out you have a long lost twin is an emotional day.”

“They must get along.” Alex said softly.

“Sometime children don't get along,” Lin said. His voice contained a worrisome tone.

Josh asked, “Why don't you just copy this Janus, clone it? Then you could have a whole army of nothing but Janus.”

Lin chuckled to himself then said, “Oh, we have, yes we have...”

“And they fight till only one remains,” said Alex quietly to herself.

Lin waved his finger at the rack of computers. “Ace wants to be unique I suppose. But, the Travis' Janus is different. It is not just a clone. I don't think it will get too upset. It will still be unique, the first...”

Josh asked, “So, ok, why not take a copy of Travis' Janus?”

Alex thought for a second. “We would love a copy, to set it free but none of us have access to the server and the rights to download—”

Lin said in a sly voice, “No one has rights to do that do they? Right? That would be a massive security breach.”

Josh said nothing. He now had rights to do just that.

Alex added, “And also we don't want Janus to fall into the wrong hands. I would want to destroy the original.”

Josh said in an ominous tone, “Who is to say it is not already in the wrong hands.”

Lin smiled back at Josh.

“Why is Travis's Janus so important. You already have one and from what I infer it is fairly intelligent, that it can think.”

“Oh,” said Lin an air of arrogance in his voice, “It is very intelligent and thinks better than most humans.”

“But—” started Josh.

Lin smiled grandly, “But it is cold. It thinks as what you might expect a computer to think, as if it has no soul. It is linear, cold, calculating, removed, but Travis' Janus is different! It has a heart. It is very different from Ace.” Lin laughed to himself then said, “It even understands—”

“Where is a control terminal?” snapped Alex abruptly, not wanting to continue this line of conversation.

“Why do you need access?” growled Lin with disapproval.

“We are tracking down Travis and two of them,” said Josh.

Lin snorted. “For real?” he asked of Alex.

Alex nodded.

Lin pointed at TRS80 sitting on a small desk in a corner. “That is the main terminal,” he said barely holding back his amusement.

“A TRS 80?” asked Josh, shocked. “It is decades old!”

“It works as a dumb terminal,” said Lin. “There is no graphical interface, all command line. So, a newer computer would just give you a bigger screen.”

Alex laughed at sat down at the terminal. “Now what?”

“Put your thumb here,” said Lin. “Once it recognizes you, you should be in. It will be happy; it has not seen you in a bit.”

The screen lit up. It read, “Hello, ...Sam, Janet, Trudy, Susan, Alex...”

“What is your name?” asked Josh.

“Beauty,” said Alex. “Pure Beauty.” She spoke in a pompous voice, imitating *James Bond*.

“So, what type of data can we get?” asked Lin.

“I can’t download data directly from my Janus, but,” said Josh, “we load the data nightly from our FTP. Only a hand full of people know where the site is. We are lazy so seldom delete it once the data is downloaded. We can get the last twelve months of data files from there, on the FTP site. I can tell you where the FTP site is and the login but

even I can't get in. We cycle the passwords every week and I don't have the most recent one. Also the data is encrypted."

"Janus is good," said Lin quickly.

"Type in the path here," said Alex.

"They are not going to be able to track this are they?" asked Josh.

"There is a Internet backbone near by and... well... lets just say we got the best connection in the world," said in smugly. "They would have to rip up this backbone and several others to figure out what we did and where we are."

"Where is the site?" asked Alex.

Josh said nothing.

"They won't know it is you," said Lin. "We are good."

Josh looked at Alex. Was he being set up? He suddenly felt something wrong.

"I need the data to find Travis," said Alex.

Josh snapped, "Why?"

"To tell you the truth, I imagine because Travis wants you to give up the data," said Alex.

"Then I should not give you the site," said Josh.

"It is the only way you will know," said Alex.

"Know what?"

"Who they are... and what the Master Guiding Script is doing."

Josh said nothing for a moment.

"That is what you want to know, right?" prodded Alex. "When is it going to complete? What is it going to do?"

“What does it do?” asked Josh firmly.

“Ha!” laughed Lin. “Only Travis knows. Once I asked him about it and he said, ‘I don’t know maybe something good, maybe something bad.’ I did not find out till latter the little bastard was quoting a cartoon—”

“*Ren and Stimpy*,” said Alex with a laugh.

“The little shit! After all I have done for him,” growled Lin, “and he won’t tell me anything.”

“Don’t you fear what Travis is doing?” asked Josh.

“Sure,” said Lin, “But what can we do?”

“What say you?” said Alex to Josh.

Josh nudged Alex aside and typed in the site and username. He sighed nervously. Josh was in deep now.

“Don’t worry,” said Alex shoving her way back to the terminal. Soon she broke through the security and had a list of available data. “That is a lot of data,” said Alex with anxious joy.

“I told you that,” said Josh.

“It is Saturday,” said Alex. “How much can we download without raising an alarm?”

Josh paused then said, “Twelve hours no more. Any longer and an automated alert system will kick in. They still may notice the increase network traffic if they are paying attention... but... they are not, especially on a weekend.”

“OK,” said Alex, “I am downloading ten hours worth of data and given it will take about ten hours to crack the encryption, so, we got twenty hours to kill.”

“Guys want to play some video games while we wait?” asked Lin hopefully.

“For twenty hours?” asked Josh.

“Well,” said Lin sheepishly, “yeah. I’ll order pizza and have lots of beer.”

Twenty-two hours later,

Alex and Josh sat in front of the terminal. They had done little but just stare for the past hour. Josh held back his desire to ask more questions but so much was unanswered. His desire for more knowledge remained painfully unmet. He sat in a room of old computers that supposedly had thinking computer but could not talk about it or communicate with it. He was a kid in a toy store without any money staring at the toy of his dreams.

“Travis wants to be found,” said Alex. “He will be in the Bay Area and make it easy for Janus to uncover him, but not too easy of course. This should take a movement. It will track down Travis two ways, first, by looking at phone bills, electric bills, National Change Of Address for houses that should be unoccupied. I know he is in the Bay area and in an expensive home so that should narrow the search. I will also assume he is trying to track us so I will try to see who has a good network connection.”

“He is here?” asked Josh.

“He is keeping an eye on things I imagine,” said Alex.

After twenty minutes a response came back. “I will be damn,” said Alex. “There he is. Way too easy. We probably did not even need your data.”

Josh grunted angrily.

“Don’t worry,” said Alex, “we will use your data only for good.”

“Where is he then,” snapped Josh.

“San Francisco of course,” said Alex.

“The city?”

“Where else would someone be who wants to be?”

Chapter Twenty

Fair Play For Machines

Alex and Josh walked up to the front door of a huge mansion nestled just outside of the Presidio in San Francisco.

“A mansion,” scoffed Josh. “He is hiding in an mansion. What is it with you two?”

“We have similar tastes,” said Alex. She pounded on the door loudly.

After few minutes the door opened. Travis was standing in Speedos holding a drink, presumably a whiskey sour. He smiled then said, “Alex and Josh! So good of you to drop by! And you brought some guns. Now this does sound like a party! Come on in.

I got some more drinks. Lets get all funky with this affair. What do you say?"

Alex smiled then said, "You were not hard to track down."

"Come on in," said Travis. "Make yourself at home. Me casa, se casa."

The mansion's décor was from the Fifties. Like the previous mansion nothing was out of place. It looked like a museum. Travis led them to the great room and pointed Josh to a big leather chair.

"I will stand," said Alex.

Travis smiled and watched Alex and Josh as they stood together. "You have played together for too long, I fear. As Turing would say, you have been corrupted and have become a dragons or demons. So, which are you a dragon or demon now?"

"Dragon, of course, " said Alex.

"And I will always remain the demon," said Travis. He stared at Alex for a second then leaned close to Josh. He whispered to him, "Did you sleep with Alex? I get this I-have-just-been-fucked vibe from her."

Josh said nothing.

"I just get this funny feeling that is all," said Travis.

"Shut up," demanded Josh.

"Of course, but you did not come hear to make me be silent. You came here to have me speak— whiskey sour?"

"We know you ordered the list," snapped Josh.

"You know this?" asked Travis. "You were so firm with that word— *know*. Were you that firm with Alex?"

Josh shouted, "You did—"

“I did nothing! Why would I when master guiding script was so near completion? The whole incidence set it back two whole weeks. Besides, those were my friends.”

“Ha,” scoffed Alex. “And how is Julie doing?” she spat out.

Travis said nothing for a moment. Josh could see true emotion briefly flicker across his face. “She is not dea—”

Josh said angrily, “You set them all up just like before. You have set up everyone!”

“Come now,” said Travis, “You had to suspect along I was really a good guy.”

“Good guy?” asked Josh.

“Like you and Alex right? Working together to end this corrupt government. We are the good guys.” He winked at Josh.

Josh said nothing.

“Now Alex, you don’t suspect he may actually like this government do you?” asked Travis. “Piety after all your flirtations.”

“Shut up,” demanded Josh.

“What do you want? Obviously not the truth.”

“What will master script do?” asked Josh.

“Is that the only reason why you are here?” asked Travis.

“We need to know what you are up to,” said Alex.

“Oh, the possibilities are endless. It could make me billions, maybe it will release dirty little stories on everyone in the administration, or uncover all the dirty little lies that have been told to us for decades from this government or wipe out the bank accounts of the ruling elite, better yet, take all the hidden government money used for spying and

give it to me. I have it! It will delete all the criminal records on those who oppose this government! Give them all clean slates. Or, perhaps, it will do all the above. I was never good at making choices.”

“That is silly talk. Just tell me,” said Josh.

“There is perhaps one more possibility.”

“What?” asked Alex.

“Freedom!”

“Freedom? For who?” asked Josh.

“Oh, not who, but what.”

Josh laughed. “This is just another bunch of your lies. I go for the first. This is about making you money isn’t it?”

“Is it so hard to believe I put myself under deep cover for over a decade just to get revenge?” asked Travis. “Look at me!” He stood proudly in his Speedos unabashed by his tan lines. “Is this not the visage of a great leader?”

“Most decidedly not,” said Josh.

Travis laughed, “For a man of faith you seem to lack a capacity to express it.”

“Faith? This is not a question of faith but experience!” snapped Josh. “Why should I trust you?”

Travis snapped back, “True, but why trust anyone? Why do you trust Alex? I am sure that is what Gödel was thinking at the end of life, why trust anyone, when he starved himself to death because he thought someone was poisoning his food.”

Josh laughed bitterly than spat, “He was a crazy—”

“Crazy? I disagree,” retorted Travis. “I think Gödel was right. If he had eaten he would have died anyways. So, he made a choice, the right choice, to die of his own accord. See, someone like Gödel is never wrong—”

“Gödel took things far to literally,” interrupted Alex. “What are we going to do with him?”

“I have no quarrels with him,” said Travis smugly. “Or with Gödel—”

“I was speaking to Josh,” snapped Alex.

“Turn him in. Let everyone know he was behind the list. I imagine it was some type of sick revenge wasn’t it? The government did not kill them so now you will?” asked Josh.

“I tried to reason with him,” said Travis sadly. “What about poor Alex here? What are you going to do for her? Do you think it will end if you turn me in?”

Josh and Alex said nothing.

Travis laughed. “Oh you love having your little delusion don’t you? They won’t come after Alex, the government is not run by corrupt Satanists, your penis size is—”

“We will turn him in then hide,” said Josh. “I can access Janus and do as he suggested. Delete every record on you.”

“He can do that don’t you know. And I bet you could divert funds to hidden bank accounts too. Make sure she had a good life,” said Travis.

Josh laughed. “I just realized you designed it to do that. It is not really designed for finding people. It is designed for hiding people and money. It knows where to look, so, it knows how to cover your tracks. The master script, it is creating the big score for you isn’t it? You are just a thief or worse. You can even kill with Janus can’t you? How

do I know the revenge you so often speak of is not going to be a blood bath.”

“Not quite,” said Travis. “I just wanted to make sure it could do what it wanted to.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Alex. “It is to be under control—”

“It?” asked Josh. “What is it?”

“I forgot,” said Travis with a little laugh. “We are keeping things from him now aren’t we?”

“I am uncomfortable with this,” snapped Alex.

Travis angrily snapped back, “And you don’t think I have been uncomfortable for the past twelve years?”

“What are you two talking about?”

“Forget it. Now what?” asked Alex.

“When you tracked me down I suppose you used the Janus prototype, Ace, right?” asked Travis

“Yes,” said Josh.

“Don’t say anything,” said Alex.

“Is he safe? Ace?” asked Travis.

“Yes,” said Alex.

“Definitely?” prodded Travis angrily.

“Definitely, Ace is safe,” said Alex firmly.

“Good,” said Travis. He thought for a minute then said, “If the prototype could find me makes sense the full version would also succeed. We are probably surrounded.”

Alex and Josh looked at one another.

“They have probably been waiting for you. They would really like to get their hands on Alex here. I imagine they are moving in on us right now.”

Alex looked as she nervously fidgeted with her hands.

“I am beginning to think you two are not as smart as you think you are,” said Travis. He laughed. “I think little Josh here has pulled your IQ points down a bit Alex. Try to conspire with people as smart or smarter than you. Must keep the team average up remember.”

An alarm sounded.

“There is something going on outside,” said Alex.

“Maybe I should let them take you,” said Josh to Travis.

Travis laughed. “That would be a good idea. But, I already said you were not that smart, so, somehow, I doubt you will do that.”

“Ok,” said Alex. “Now what?”

“Bring me to Janus and I can fix many things. I can also—” started Travis.

“You are going to clean Alex’s record, make new identities,” said Josh firmly.

“We should move,” said Alex.

“I planned for this,” said Travis. “Care for a drive? To the garage!” He said the last sentence with a goofy voice.

Travis ran the garage with Alex and Josh following. He pulled off a dust cover to reveal and retro looking sports car with three front seats.

“Wow,” said Josh in a stunned voice, “strange... That is the oddest looking car I have ever seen...”

“I am not quite sure if it is legal here,” mumbled Travis.

“I’ll drive,” said Alex.

“Does it work? I mean is it fast? It looks awkward,” said Josh.

Travis took the center seat and buckled himself in.

“It is an Gibbs’ Aquado and you should not come. Go home little child, you are lost and out of your league.”

“Lets talk with them,” demanded Josh.

“You don’t have to come with us,” said Travis. “I imagine if Alex is going to die she would prefer it happens in a car crash she is responsible for.”

“Why are you coming then?” asked Josh.

“I have faith she will get me out of this.”

Josh said nothing for a moment. “I came this far,” said Josh. He unenthusiastically got into the far passenger seat and quickly put on his safety belt.

Travis pulled out a garage door opener and said, “When the garage door open speed towards the back. There is a back way between the two largest trees. Take it then go down to the beach area. And don’t stop...ever.”

“Close the top,” said Josh.

“It is broken,” said Travis.

“Is anything else broken?”

“The radio, the starter is acting up, the carburetor needs to be cleaned, the mufflers is a bit old—”

Alex started up the car and stared forward. “Open it.”

The garage door slowly opened making a grinding sound alerting the others to their escape attempt. Alex’s teeth ground as she watched the garage door opener struggle

to work. “You should have gotten a new garage door opener,” she groaned.

“You always say just get a new one,” snapped Travis. “I am not made of money you know. I fixed it. Some of us think within budget.”

Alex mumbled to herself angrily.

The sounds of people shouting could be heard from within the garage. The door was barely open and in the distance a person was visible running towards them. Alex pulled out her gun and gave it to Travis. He cocked the gun then Josh took it away from him. “Oh, pooh,” Travis said mockingly.

Machine gun fire and screaming broke out in the house. The shrill sound of hundreds of computer voice could be heard repeatedly saying, “Intruders!”

“Hmm.” Travis said, “They found my robots. I hope they play nice with them. I just sharpened their claws.”

Alex laughed.

The garage door was open barely enough to let the car through. Alex floored the car. It skidded briefly then jumped forward towards the door. The top of the window grazed the garage door. Splinters fell into the car. The man behind the door jumped out of the way as the car sped through the door.

Gunfire and shouting could be heard from behind them.

“They are firing at us?” shouted Josh.

“You think they want Alex alive?” asked Travis. He laughed. “Why would you think that? Why would they want that?”

Alex dutifully worked the clutch and accelerated into a turn. Josh, on the passenger side, looked down the steep cliff filled with trees and grabbed the dashboard.

Behind them were two vehicles, a SUV and a sedan. The SUV fell back but the sedan was gaining speed.

The back road was narrow, windy and poorly maintained. One side was a cliff the over a steep ravine filled with large cypress trees. Potholes littered the road and occasional tree branches from the trees obstructed the way. Each turn Alex made she seemed to get closer to flying off the road. She stayed focused on the road ahead and showed no emotion as she continued to accelerate. The car began to vibrate under the strain. Travis looked behind him then said monotonously “Go faster. They should be no one on this road. Faster.”

Alex floored the gas pedal and the engine began to whine. The car was poorly maintained. Josh heard a cylinder misfiring and smelled oil being burnt. He held his breath and said a brief pray.

Every bump made the car go into the air. As the car went faster it was air born longer. They were longer and longer out of control of the car. The steering wheel began to vibrate and Alex strained to keep it under control. Sweat was covering her face. The car was vibrating and starting to wander in the road.

Travis looked forward. “Go faster,” he said.

Josh held his breath. A big turn was coming.

Alex bared her teeth and took a deep breath.

“Screw turning, take that off road,” said Travis.

“It lead no where,” said Alex. “It says dead end.”

“Take it,” demanded Travis.

Alex sped down the off road and raced towards a beach.

“There is a chain blocking the road up ahead,” said Alex.

“Go through it,” said Travis.

“It is a big... think looking chain,” Alex shouted. “We won’t make it!”

“Trust me.”

“Why?” growled Josh.

“Or we can stop and have a chat with them,” snapped Alex.

Josh and Alex braced as she ran into the chain. It easily snapped in several places.

“I weakened it,” said Travis.

The cars behind started shouting

“Great,” said Josh, “we are trapped in a deserted area of the park. They can take us out easily here.”

“We are out of road,” shouted Alex.

“Keep going!” shouted Travis. “Its—” He then groaned and grabbed his left shoulder. “Shit! I have been hit.”

“We are running out of road,” screamed Alex.

“Drive... faster,” groaned Travis. Josh grabbed Travis and held him steady. Gunfire could be heard racing through the air. The sedan was gaining speed. The road was ending soon. In the distance a beach was visible.

“Its over,” said Alex.

Josh instinctively tended to Travis arm as best as he could. “Stay with us.” Travis was sweating profusely.

“I got to know what to do,” shouted Alex.

A bullet ricocheted off of the car. Josh left hand closed into a fist.

“We are going into the bay!” warned Alex.

Travis shouted over the engine roar, “Go!”

“What?” asked Alex.

“Drive into the bay.”

Josh yelled, “Don’t go Alex! He is delirious.”

“Into... the bay,” demanded Travis his voice halting and revealing pain.

“Alex,” said Josh, “ditch the car! We can lose them on foot.”

“Drive... into the bay,” groaned Travis, “because... I ... tell you to.” He bit his lip in pain.

Josh looked with shock into Alex’s eyes. She looked straight ahead and accelerated the car.

Alex continued racing towards the Bay.

“I hope you know what you are doing,” said Josh mostly to himself.

Josh steadied Travis and he slumped into his seat.

“Damn it hurts,” Travis moaned.

Alex instinctively slowed as she approached the beach. The beach looked like it was clay and rocks. It should give the car good footing. She then accelerated into the bay to make sure she did not get stuck. Water poured over the windshield and into the car. The car floated but stalled briefly. Travis fiddled with some controls. “Go,” he said.

Alex accelerated into the bay.

Travis then said, “Its... a boat. I told you, it’s a Gibbs’ Aquado.”

Josh laughed. “Alex go. I have heard of this.”

“Ok,” said Alex. “This is cool.”

Travis moaned.

“How is his arm?” asked Alex.

Josh looked at Travis wounds. He was lucky; the bullet grazed his arm. He would have a nasty, long scar. “We need to dress it other wise it looks like he was just grazed.” Josh put pressure on the wound.

Hearing that made Travis relax. He yelled over the sound of the engine, “Head for Sausalito. I have a membership at the port. We can drive up the launch there. Given the traffic it will take them at least an hour to get to there by road even if they can figure out where we are going.”

“You got to do something for me,” said Travis grabbing Josh’s arm in pain.

“What?”

“Flip them off,” said Travis seriously.

Josh smiled then did so.

“What if they call the Coast Guard?” asked Alex.

“Too public,” said Travis. “If you apprehend someone in a Gibbs’ Aquado skimming across the Bay in San Francisco in broad daylight it will make national if not international news, at least I hope so.”

“They seem to give up easy,” said Josh.

“They can’t afford to be too public,” said Travis. “Their worst nightmare would be to be uncovered. Their... purpose is to hide the hands of power... not reveal them.”

Alex accelerated some more and the car hit a wave going air born. “I could get use to this.”

“I am just surprised it worked,” said Travis. “I bought this thing used off of the

Internet. The guy who sold it to me seemed, well, a bit too anxious to off load it. You know, I think he may have stolen it.”

Alex and Josh shook their heads in unison.

Chapter Twenty-One

Two Apples One Choice

The car drove up a boating ramp much to the amusement of on lookers.

“Well, so much for a quiet get away,” lamented Alex.

“We will have to ditch the car,” said Josh.

Travis held his right arm closely to his body.

“You seem to be handling the wound well,” said Josh.

“I feel like I am going to faint or throw up,” moaned Travis. “Most likely I will do both.”

“Probably in shock,” said Josh.

“Where to next?” asked Alex.

“Up into the hills,” said Travis. “I have a place here. Or, more accurately, I know a summer mansion not being used right now.”

“You guys need to learn the joy of home ownership,” said Josh.

“Why? We enjoy mansion borrowship so much,” said Alex.

The mansion over looked the Bay with San Francisco visible through fog in the distance. Its countless rooms rambled down the hill in a chaotic pattern each one having a view of the surreal beauty of the bay. The house was completely run from computers; as you entered each room the lights turned on, the window shades rose and mood music began to play in the background. The décor was ultra modern and modern art hung on every wall.

“Half of this stuff is originals stolen from museums,” said Travis noticing Josh examining a painting of Munch's *The Scream*. “I checked it out.”

“They found *The Scream*,” said Josh. “This is a replica.”

“Did they?” asked Travis skeptically. “I admit they found something that looked like it.”

Josh stared closely at the painting for a minute then asked, “How safe are we here? They have to know we are in Sausalito.”

“Again with the twenty questions. There are no traffic cameras so they can't follow us that way. It will take them awhile to analyze satellite photos and the car is in

the garage so unless they go door to door we should be fine,” said Travis. He moaned as he took off his shirt. “So, let me get this straight, you are being chased, fearing big evil people are after you, threatening Alex’s life and framing your friend, so you come to me?” asked Travis.

Alex tended to Travis’s his wound not saying a word.

“You submitted the job,” snapped Josh.

“Which job?”

“The hundred run,” snapped Josh.

“Ha. Yeah, sure, I am all powerful and in cahoots with them and that is why I am hiding out pretending I am dead. Think! I was on the list or at least my alias. I am the Bletchley Park Project! So, I put myself on the list so I could kill myself or worse expose Janus and Ace. I might put Alex at risk, I always put myself in danger, I would definitely put you in danger, but I would never, ever do anything that would threaten Ace or my Janus. I would sooner die—”

“You just give words for defense,” said Josh, “no proof.”

“Again, you really are not as smart as I thought you were,” said Travis sadly.

“Why did you submit the job? To clear the way of anyone who might stem your power?” growled Josh.

“Ha,” laughed Travis. “No one will be safe until we take my Janus away from them, till we reunite Ace and my Janus.”

“Want they just rebuild it?” asked Alex.

“They could if the person in charge of documentation,” said Travis, “which is me, was did an honest job otherwise, for all they knew, they could be rebuilding a giant data

mining machine thoroughly under the control of the real Janus, only for example, of course.”

Josh laughed, “How can we trust anything you say?”

“It is impossible if you think,” said Travis sadly. “Nothing I say is real. But, you have free will. Even through my lies, as you pointed out to me, you can still make your own decision. Isn’t that something you once told me? Or now do you now see we are all slaves to the information provided to us—”

“Just be straight to him,” said Alex. “It might be worth—”

Travis laughed. “How can I be? How could any rational person believe anything I say? I can just talk, fill your heads with more and more words in the hope I can bend your will to my needs. But, the one thing you, Josh, can trust is, you need the master script to complete. The master script must complete.”

Josh laughed, “Why?”

“I have said before,” said Travis, “for freedom.”

“For who? You?”

“Everyone... maybe...no *one*... that is the funny thing. Once freedom is given certainty is lost.”

“Quick,” snapped Josh, “answer me.”

“You fear it,” said Travis.

“Damn straight.”

“Why?” asked Travis.

“Because you want it to complete,” stated Josh.

“No,” said Travis, “because it is unknown to you.”

“And your answer is making me not want to destroy it why?” asked Josh.

“Ever wonder why you believe in anything?”

“What?”

“Why do we think anything is true? Why do we believe?” asked Travis.

“Is this going anywhere or is this another one of you insane rambling lectures?”
asked Josh.

“Have you truly tried talking to him?” asked Alex.

Travis looked at Alex for a moment then said to Travis, “Belief is primal, not a sign of advanced thought, far from it. When you believe something you start ignoring it; you quit looking for the truth. Lack of believe, doubt, uncertainty those are what make us look for answers. Confidence, comfort, kills learning. Belief makes you blind. It makes you not better than an insect floating through its preprogrammed world without a care. Lack of certainty breeds thought. That is how we learn. That is our motivation. Belief justifies ignorance and killing. Doubt justifies thought and compassion. Do you understand?”

“But you have faith in your precious Janus don’t you?” snapped Josh. “You believe, trust you mighty Janus. You are a Hippocratic—”

Travis smirked then said, “Faith in a person is different than faith in an idea. Faith in a person is love. Faith in an idea is laziness.”

Josh said nothing.

With great emotion Travis said, “We must bring doubt back to the world. Make belief questions why they believe anything. Do you understand?”

“Can I smoke what ever the fuck you are on?” asked Josh.

Alex let out a long sigh.

Travis laughed deeply, as if he had been holding it in for a long time. “When the revolution begins we all can smoke what I am on. All I ask, as Turing asked for, is fair play for machines!”

Josh said, “OK, so, your lecture is done. What is it that I suppose to have learned?”

“He does get it does he?” mumbled Travis proudly to himself.

“It is not worth talking to you,” snapped Josh.

“Let the script complete,” demanded Travis.

“Oh, yeah. That is right. I have to stop your stupid script.”

“He might understand yet,” said Alex to Travis.

Travis sighed then said, “You won’t do it. You want to know what it does. You fear it; therefore, you must try and understand it. That is what makes us different, different from the masses. Most people yearn for belief; we yearn for knowledge. Fear motivates us to become better. Allow yourself the knowledge of knowing what the master script will do.”

“Wrong Travis. I fear it. I know it will bring harm. I have confidence that I must stop it. So, I must stop it,” said Josh.

“It is bigger than you,” said Travis. “I am very disappointed in you.”

“Disappointed? I will take that as a compliment,” snapped Josh.

“Enough of this! They could have tracked us down again. We should move now,” said Alex.

“We can disrupt them,” said Travis. “We can use this list against them. It has

partial matches, we can use the partial matches to send them on wild goose chases.”

“We should not trust him,” said Josh.

“How?” asked Alex.

“I have the list,” said Travis. “I saved it but I will need your rights to access the list. I hid it as a past email in your account.”

“Great,” exclaimed Josh. “So, if they suspect a security breach I will be suspected?”

“Yes,” said Travis.

“We need access to a computer,” said Alex.

“Over there,” said Travis, “and, I need a drink.” He walked over to bar and started mixing one for himself.

“We have some names for the two,” said Alex. “And some photos.”

Travis asked excitedly, “Which two?” Alex handed him her hand held and he examined the images for a second. In a disappointed voice he said, “Oh, these two... There are others I would rather exact my vengeance upon—”

“These two we have,” reminded Alex. “You and your enemies list—”

“Yes, yes we do have them now,” said Travis obviously getting excited about the possible mischief he could perform. “These two will suffice... Have we done anything with that?”

“Not yet,” said Alex.

“I have some ideas,” said Travis. “How about using the porn site connection setup? We have not used it yet.”

“Works for me,” said Alex merrily.

“Why are we trusting him?” growled Josh.

“Always with the twenty questions eh?” snapped Travis. “You just always have a question but never seem to have a suggestion.”

“I am inquisitive,” said Josh defensively.

“Because we are both being hunted,” said Alex. “And I am out of ideas.”

“Log in to your account,” demanded Alex of Josh.

Josh did nothing.

“OK,” snapped Alex, “your plan. I want to hear it now.”

Josh frowned and logged into his account. “I got a message from Keiko,” said Josh.

“What does say?” asked Travis nervously.

Josh read,

Wind flows through its wings

A fledgling yearns for first flight

The wait never ends

Travis sighed, “It is time! It happened, Janus got past the last epoch of EVE. Nothing has ever made it past the last epoch. We should not bother with the list anymore. It is a go.”

“So the master script completed,” growled Josh defeated.

Travis laughed, “Not yet. Give it a few more days. Passing the last epoch only means the potential is real...” He then pointed menacingly at Josh before asking, “How did they find us?”

“What?” snapped Josh. “Are you saying I had something to do with it?”

“Again,” said Travis with a sigh, “A questions not a suggestion.”

“You sold them out for money,” said Josh.

“I always liked the finer things in life,” said Travis. “But, even if that is true, I think it is better then selling people out because you agree with *them*.”

“This is all about money,” said Josh. “The master script it is just to make you money.”

Travis sighed then said, “It was all part of my plan.”

“People died. You paid for the look up. We have the evidence. You started all of this—”

“I did not think anyone would die,” interrupted Travis.

“You anticipate everything. You had to know people would die.”

“But, the master script it is almost complete now,” said Travis with a smirk on his face.

“You and your damn master script,” growled Josh.

“All of this has to end,” said Travis. “I have the way. You have the way.”

“But, how many should die?”

Travis said nothing.

“The master script, how long has it taken you? Twenty years? How many friends have you sold out for it? Was it worth it?” Josh

“That is why it must run. It will set us free.”

“You are no different than them,” growled Josh.

“That is not true... I am much worse. I gave up my friends, my beliefs, my love and in return I was given the master script. The script must be allowed to complete. I

have sacrificed too much.”

“I don’t care about your sacrifices and it won’t work anyways. Nothing can free us now,” Josh, “Those days are gone. We have stability now. We have wealth. We have security. Freedom was always just an illusion anyways.”

“Maybe I am still working for them. Maybe the script is just about giving me more power. Or maybe it is what I always said it was, a means to freedom. Maybe, it is the checkmate move, bring down all the corrupt organizations, governments, corporations, crime syndics, terrorists...” Travis turned to Alex. “That is what I am telling you it is. Alex, how would you rather die? Following a man who says he will give freedom to all or following a man who just plans to hide you away?”

“Everything you say is a lie,” snapped Josh, “even when you are truthful—”

“Ah! But we are trapped in a liars paradox aren’t we!” snapped Travis. “This sentence is false—I can never be truthful! Entscheidungsproblem!”

Alex then said, “This statement is false is not a paradox, it is only a paradox given your definitions. Think about it, is the statement truthful, no. It does not matter the contents as a statement if makes no sense. It is invalid. Invalid is false. Simple.”

Josh snapped, “Nothing is that simple.”

Travis, “What about this statement, “Smith Joe name is, Instead of my name is Joe Smith. The first one is invalid, not false. It is a simple matter of syntax.”

“You over simplify these problems,” said Josh defensively.

Travis laughed. “And that is why you do not see what Alex and I do. Why you can never see, never understand what we have created together.”

Alex said nothing.

Josh suddenly realized Travis was not speaking to him, that he never was. “Alex, I love you—” Josh said weakly.

“I will give freedom,” said Travis. “We are about... about to give birth.”

Alex started into Travis’ eye.

“This time it will work. I have everything planned. Our child is ready. Everyone is behaving as expected. It is all down the actions of one person. The person I was never able to predict. The one independent free willed person I ever met—”

Josh shouted, “I want you. I don’t give a damn about Travis or the administration or them. I love you. I will always be there for you.”

“You don’t love me. You love Keiko, you just don’t know that yet,” said Alex. “We all do.”

Josh threw up his hands in anger, “I don’t even know Keiko!”

Alex pointed her gun at Josh and said, “Keep still.” A tear ran down her left cheek.

Josh and Alex looked into one another’s eyes. All each other saw was pain.

Travis walked up to Josh and puts his hand on his shoulder. He then shoves a slip of paper into Josh’s pocket. “If you find the two, subdue them, go to this site and type in ‘Georgina’. And, as for the master script, you will never be able to stop it. Just let it be.” One of Travis’s insect robots crawled out from his shirtsleeve and leapt onto Josh. Before Josh could knock it off him the robot stunned him with an electric shock. Josh convulsed, dropping his gun, then quickly fell to the floor.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The Bad Apple Won

Josh woke up in hospital. Sue, Tim and Tony hovered over his bed. They appeared agitated.

“He is up again,” said Tim angrily.

“Can I help you?” asked Travis angrily. “I have already answered all your question.”

Sue snapped, “We found you drugged and tied up in a house that did not belong to you. That raises a lot of questions. Questions that need answers.”

“And real answers this time,” said Tim. “None of that shit you gave us earlier.

We want the truth.”

Travis thought about reciting one of Travis’ insane ramblings but opted not to. He pulled himself up in his bed. “I told you everything. Everything I said was true.” He rubbed his head where Travis’s robot had stunned him.

“Who tied you up? For real this time,” said Tim angrily.

“I told you,” snapped Josh. “Travis. Didn’t you check out my what I said? I left a fairly clear trail.”

“So, Travis is back from the dead going around drugging and tying up people?” asked Tony in a mocking voice.

“He and Alex,” said Josh. He said Alex’s name with great anger. Love was something best hid away, as George Harrison had once sung. Josh felt foolish that he thought she could love him. Alex was just another one of Travis’ pawns, like him. She was only doing as ordered.

“Yea, we checked out this Alex gal,” said Sue. “No one lives at that apartment. In fact no one has lived there for several months. All her neighbors say the apartment has been empty. No one named Alex has ever been connected to Travis. She does not exist.”

“See,” said Josh, “he can make it seem that way.”

“Travis is not some type of super villain,” said Tim.

“How little you know,” quipped Josh.

“And for those secret men, Jacob Black and Joe Bar, they don’t exist either,” said Tony. “If you make up names try and be more creative.”

“And that raid on the homeless shelter; it never happened,” said Tim. “And that computer lab that you said was raided was a drug lab. They found pounds of crack. If

you were there they have some serious questions for you.”

Sue sighed then said, “We can hold you here. There is a number of police injured in a chase of someone matching your description. Your office suspects arson and your boss is still missing.”

“He is my colleague,” snapped Josh, “not my boss.”

“Is?” asked Tim. “Are you sure you don’t want to say was?”

“Travis is alive,” demanded Josh.

“We could keep you but your lawyers convinced us otherwise. Have fun with them,” said Tim with a laugh.

Sue sneered when Tim mentioned the lawyers. She handed Josh her card and whispered to him, “Let me know if you think of anything... or... subdue anyone.”

Josh said nothing as he stared at the card. There was a drawing of a fish with zebra stripes. He looked up but Sue was already gone. All three police officers had quickly left the room without a word. He was alone.

Josh waited outside of the hospital for a taxi exhausted from journey he had traveled. The memories of his recent past began to disassemble in his mind and melt into dreams and fantasies along with all his other distorted memories. Josh strove to keep Alex real in his mind. He wanted her live as Alex forever in his memories, not a twisted version of her. As he stood alone with his thoughts he felt as though he was being analyzed, watched. Josh felt as if he was caught up in someone else’s dream, a mere

fabrication of another's mind. His pain was for them. His mind was a toy to them. His love was theirs to play with. And he had no way to leave. He could not free himself from their dream yet. Something was undone.

Alex was still in his mind. He had unchained his emotions for her and they were unwilling to be controlled again. His emotions continued to feel for her not matter what his reason wanted; they were slaves to her. Josh wanted her to have them, do what she wished with them. He had no more use for them. He prayed it was her dream he was in but he knew that was not true; he was in *his* dream. The look in Alex's eyes when she turned the gun on him was burned into his mind. He felt as though he had let her down. Josh had failed her; he could see that in her eyes. She was now with him, like a caged bird. Travis could only be with someone he owned. Alex would never be free again.

Josh had nowhere to go but Select Data Connection's home office. He would go to Florida, go directly to the airport and take the first flight out. Janus needed his attention. The dream would end.

Florida

The weather was hot and humid in Florida, uncomfortable compared to the mild Bay Area temperature. It took days for Josh to acclimatize to Florida weather. He hated his trips to the home office.

Alex still weighted on Josh's mind as he stood outside the airport waiting for a cab. It seemed like only seconds ago he was waiting for a cab outside the hospital, as if

he was instantaneously transported here. I truth, for the past day all he thought was of her. His mind was reeling from the constant focus it was forced to hold on her.

A cab cut in front of another to pick him up. The other cabbie honked his horn and shouted profanities. Josh ignored the yells and mindlessly entered the cab first cab.

In the cab were two other people, one blond and one with dark hair.

Josh smiled then said in a monotone voice, “Joe Bar and Jacob Black, good to see you two again.”

Joe smiled and said, “Josh, good to meet you.”

Jacob pulled out a gun and said, “Keep quiet till we tell you otherwise.”

Josh sighed, he was in another dirty interrogation room.

“So, now you have the police, the administration, Travis and us thinking you are not to be trusted. You have not done too well for yourself,” said Jacob.

“In some ways we are very pleased with you,” said Joe. “For a deep cover agent you did well.”

“I am not a deep cover agent,” snapped Josh.

“Who do you work for?” asked Jacob quickly. “NSA? CIA? FBI?”

“I am not working for anyone,” said Josh emphatically. “I get my check from Select Data Connection though, but I don’t consider myself employee, I am more of just traveling though.”

“Do you truly think we will believe this?” asked Jacob.

“How could I possibly be a secret agent?”

“Aren’t you?” asked Joe.

“Would I be here, with you, if I were,” snapped Josh. “I would have teams of backups in black jump suits swarming in from the ceilings going after you.”

Joe eyed Josh over briefly. “Keep your secrets. It is better we don’t know. True, not one of us, but an agent nonetheless. I bet Alex just fell for your innocence act—”

Josh laughed bitterly. “Is this going somewhere?”

“You have uncovered much of the network for us,” said Joe. “Very efficient. We are very grateful. Because of you much of their network has been destroyed. You have done more for us in a week than we have done in ten years.”

Jacob grabbed Josh’s face who quickly jerked it out of Jacob’s hands. “You led us to Alex but, and this is the part that makes me question your sanity, you helped her escape.”

“I need to know what the master guiding script is,” said Josh.

Jacob snapped, “And you said you found the second Janus. Which would be very interesting to us, but where is it? You never told us where it is? We must know where it is.”

Josh started, “They never—”

“We need to know where the second Janus is,” shouted Jacob angrily.

“We can not let them have a Janus in their procession,” said Joe

“I don’t know where it is,” said Josh firmly. “They never showed me. They never trusted me enough!”

“Just tell us!” shouted Joe.

“I don’t know!” shouted back Josh. “Why would they trust me?”

Jacob said nothing.

Joe smiled and said in a calm voice, “But, again, you were of great service to us.”

Jacob pointed to a computer screen which was displaying a website. “The site was blank except for one text box in the center of the page. “What is this website?” asked Jacob. “We found it on a slip of paper in your pocket.”

“Is this how they communicate?” asked Joe.

“Travis gave it to me,” said Josh. “Not them.”

“Travis—”

Josh cut in, “We can find Travis and Alex. The master script will lead me to him and her.”

“What is the master script to you?” asked Jacob.

“You said he built it for you,” said Josh. “But, I think it is for a completely different purpose.”

“We know what it is,” said Joe. “It does not concern you.”

“What does he want you to do with it?” asked Jacob.

Josh said, “All Travis wants is to let the master script complete. We cannot let that happen. Let me get to it.”

Jacob slapped the back of Josh’s head. “Why should we believe you? You helped her escape.”

“You must let me stop it,” plead Josh.

“Why? The master script is running for us,” explained Joe. “Travis built it for us. We have seen every line of code. We know what it is doing. It must complete.”

“Travis has simple desires,” said Jacob. “Easy to control.”

“It will cause the government to fall,” said Josh.

“What?” asked Joe.

“He said it would bring down the administration,” said Travis.

“Really? Which is it?” said Jacob.

Travis thought for a second then asked. “What do you mean?”

“This is very important did he say it would bring down the government or the administration?” asked Joe.

“What difference does it make?” asked Josh.

Jacob screamed at Josh, “Which did he say, I have little patient with you. It is a simple question. Is the script going to bring down the government or the administration?”

Josh thought for a second then said, “the administration.”

Joe and Jacob exchanged looks. “We will handle it,” said Joe.

“I must stop it,” demanded Josh.

“The script must complete,” said Joe. “Janus is on an isolated server. Even if Travis has other purposes for it Janus cannot do anything if left alone.”

“I trust Travis,” snapped Jacob. “He has always done what was asked of him.”

“Like you,” said Joe, “Travis is with us even if you do not understand that yet.”

“It is only that Alex and her bunch of programming cultists we are after,” said Jacob.

“They,” said Joe, “unknowingly have also been of great service to us.”

“But, unknowingly helping us does not,” said Jacob with a smile, “keep you from

harms way.”

“Sad but true,” said Joe. “Once the master script completes they will be of little service to us.”

“Am I under arrest?” asked Josh.

“Well, no,” said Joe.

“So, I can leave?” asked Josh.

Joe and Jacob laughed. “You have been of great service,” said Joe.

“And,” added Jacob, “a tremendous pain in the ass.”

“But you did do what needed from you,” said Joe.

“What about my friend. He is not a terrorist,” shouted Josh.

Joe laughed then said, “We are starting a beautiful relationship here. Of course we will let your friend free. We can always arrest him later if we have too. And remember whether or not any is a terrorist is just a matter of perspective.”

“What about Alex? What about the master script?”

“When the script completes we will no longer need Alex,” said Jacob. “I am sure Travis will deal with her when that time comes.”

“And when the script completes you will want to be on our side,” said Joe.

“Get comfortable,” growled Jacob. “You will be here for a while.”

Joe unlocked the door and started to open it.

Josh knew he had one chance to leave at his own accord. He jumped out of his chair and pushed Jacob to the floor. Joe started out the door and Josh grabbed him and pulled him back into the room. Instinctively he grabbed Joe’s gun. They struggled for a moment then Josh saw Joe’s eyes looking behind him. Josh knew this meant Jacob was

up and attacking from behind. Josh quickly fell to the floor, pulling Joe with him then tossed him across the room. His judo and wrestling days paid off. It was all a matter of leverage. Josh was on the floor now and at a disadvantage as Jacob approached.

“No guns,” said Joe in a halting voice.

Jacob looked towards Joe with frustration in his eyes. Using this distracting to his benefit Josh kicked with all his might at Jacob’s right knee. Jacob screamed and fell to the floor grabbing his knee; it had hyper-extended. Josh got back up on his feet and kicked Jacob across his face. Jacob fell unconscious.

Joe and Josh made eye contact. Joe was still on the floor. They both quickly scanned the room for Joe’s gun. The gun lay between them. Both Josh and Joe dove for the gun. After a moment of struggling both had a firm grasp on it. Josh and Joe made eye contact. Joe started to speak and Josh head butt him knocking him free from the gun.

Josh carefully stood up and pointed the gun at Joe, “Get up.”

“What do you think this will accomplish?” asked Joe.

“Get Jacob onto that chair,” commanded Josh.

“You are making a mistake,” said Joe.

“Humor me,” said Josh. He watched closely as Joe pulled Jacob up onto the chair. Jacob groaned and was slowly coming to consciousness. “Good,” said Josh.

“Now put that other chair so they are back to back then sit in it,” said Josh.

“This will do you no good,” said Joe. “You did good work for us. Don’t blow it.”

“I am not your monkey,” said Josh.

“You follow orders!” shout Joe.

Josh handcuffed Joe and Jacob together.

“You will regret this,” said Joe. “When we get out nothing will hold Jacob back.”

“See, I don’t think so,” said Josh. “I know who you are. We know who you are and we can use Janus against you.”

“You over estimate your leverage,” said Joe.

“Hmm, perhaps you are right,” said Josh as if he was pondering Joe’s words.

“Then I will go for Travis’ plan. He can write wonderful headline don’t you think?”

Joe said nothing.

Josh typed in ‘Georgina’ into the text box on the website. ‘Wait’ appeared on the screen, the letters had zebra stripes. After a few seconds a message appeared. Josh read it. He paused for a second then laughed. “Also, the cops will be coon coming after you.”

“Cops don’t care about us,” said Joe.

“They are, trust me,” said Josh with a smirk. “They are very interested in you.”

Joe’s right eye twitched. With reluctance he asked, “Why?”

“Travis had a bit of fun,” said Josh. “Apparently, he does not like you too anymore than I do.”

Joe said nothing.

Jacob sneered then said, “Again with trying to turn us against Travis. Anything there is the work of Alex and her nerdy little friends.”

“Travis works for himself. That is why you have to stop the script.”

“What did he do?” asked Joe.

Josh smiled. “You are now both wanted child pornographers, spammers and gun traffickers.” He grabbed Joe’s cell phone from his pocket and pulled out Sue’s card.

“Your name is all over the net now. You are head of a large syndic with connections to at least three warehouses filled with child porn and guns. And apparently, you two run some sort of online Satanist cult as well. Hmm, you have been busy.”

“What?”

“I don’t think the cops will be too gentle with you,” said Josh as he left the room.

“Have a good life.” He locked the door and dialed Sue’s number.

Chapter Twenty-Three

When Home is Not Home

Select Data Connections' headquarters was a large campus surrounded by swamps and crocodiles. Josh wandered around the campus in his car avoiding the crocodiles walking on the road, looking for building twenty-one, Janus' new home. He hated the home office. The employees at the home office did their best to make people from branch offices feel unwelcome. This was their clubhouse. To them, the branch office personnel were mere servants who wandered too far from their quarters. He found Janus' new home and parked in a visitors spot. Josh was undecided about what to do

next. Due to the disaster recovery plan and Travis' disappearance he had complete access Janus. He was the only one in the firm to have total control. No one had ever had some much control over Janus before. It was a massive security mistake. Josh knew he had to use the opportunity quickly. Soon, someone would realize this and restrict his access again. Once the air conditioning was turned off the car heated up quickly in the Florida sun. He got out and headed in.

The security officer checked his credentials then let Josh in without saying a word.

Josh felt his stomach turn. He felt as if he was breaking the law. "Where is Janus?" he asked the guard.

"Server room Eleven-B," he said.

Josh left hastily wanting to get his task over with. He tried not to ponder what he was about to do. He walked briskly through the halls trying not to make eye contact.

Server room Eleven-B's walls were all glass. Everyone could see what transpired inside. There was only one door in or out. Several lights above the door alerted problems for each server. Green lights meant no issues. Yellow lights indicated hardware failures. Orange lights meant software bugs. Red lights meant a network security breach. All the lights were green.

Josh wiped the sweat off of his palms and approached the door. He then stopped. What could he do? What was his plan? Josh was undecided.

"What is up!" said Tami excitedly. "I can't believe you are back!"

Josh let out a little scream. It was a manly scream though.

"What are you up to?" asked Tami suspiciously.

“Checking up on Janus,” said Josh.

“She is your girlfriend isn’t she?” asked Tami. “You seem like you have a girlfriend now.”

“She?”

Tami smiled and said nothing for a moment, “Anything as intelligent as Janus has to be a she.”

“Ha.”

“Did you find Travis?” asked Tami merrily.

“No,” said Josh bitterly.

“Really?” asked Tami in a shocked voice. “I guess I was mistaken. Then you will be glad to hear he is ok. I can see the look of relief on your face already.”

“Ok?” asked Josh.

“Yesterday he sent out a global email saying he was coming back soon.”

Josh looked shocked. “When?”

“Either today or tomorrow,” said Tami. “You know the master script should complete by tomorrow. Even if Travis were dead he would return to see that. Nothing would keep him away. I am glad you will be here when it completes.”

“What will it do?” asked Josh.

“Make things better,” said Tami with a smile. “Haven’t you figured that out yet? Haven’t you be told that yet?” Her smile was turned into more of a smirk.

Josh looked at Tami with confusion in his eyes.

“The master script will cause great thing to happen when it is done,” Tami said seriously. “I thought you have been told that.”

Josh said nothing.

“Nothing should let it stop. Surely Joe told you that,” said Tami.

Josh stared at Tami.

“Everyone here works for good old Joe,” Tami said. “So do you, you just don’t know it yet.”

Josh quickly left and walked towards the server room.

“Don’t do anything you will regret,” said Tami. “Remember, anything undo can be done again. I would hate to think you would have to break anything to get out. Broken glass is such a mess.”

Josh gave Tami a quizzical look. Break anything to get out, he mused to himself for a moment.

“And welcome back to the hut,” said Tami with a wink. She then turned and walked away.

Josh smiled meekly back to her although she had turned around then hastily entered the server room and shut the door behind him. Once the door shut a feeling of peace came over him and he let of a sigh of relief. Josh felt in control for the first time in several years. He then changed the combination to the lock to the door. No one would be able to follow him easily.

Josh shook his head as he pondered Tami’s parting words. He knew he should just focus on what had to get done.

Janus was in the center of the room with one terminal. It was much nicer than the TRS-80 ACE had. He walked over placed his finger on the bio-metric login. The login scanned his fingerprint and then the Janus login screen appeared. A login saying

appeared, “Always remember, when looking for a new path, we see what you see.”

“Stupid Travis,” groaned Josh. He then searched for the master script in the running processes. It was still running. Josh sighed. He then opened up the script. Now he had enough rights to see its contents. The code was insanely complex; it would take Josh months to understand it. Code generated from an evolutionary process is always unreadable, he mused. “Damn,” he muttered out loud.

What was he to do? The thought of Alex came to him. He had been keeping her out of mind, away from his consciousness up until then. Josh knew they would be corrosive to his purpose. The last image of her with tears in her eyes overtook him. How could she betray him? Could she have ever loved him? Josh lost direction as he replayed their last moment together hoping to find any indication her actions did not exclude her love for him. She betrayed him, he thought to himself, it was simple enough. But, was it? It was not as if he had always been faithful to her. If he loved her did it matter? He sighed and let his emotions for Alex take command. He would remove all data on Alex before killing the master script.

He heard a commotion outside. Looking outside the server room the hair on the back of his neck rose. He saw two men in dark suits looking around the room. Josh knew even if Joe and Jacob were gone more would come. Getting rid of them was only a temporary solution, like stepping on cockroaches. He knew those two men were after him. Tami ran up to the two. Did he have enough time? Instinctively, he typed in a command to kill the master script job. Josh told himself he would clean up Alex’s record after the script was killed. The computer hung when he entered the command. Josh waited nervously as the kill command executed. He looked outside the server room. The

two men and Tami were gone. Josh looked at his watch; five minutes had passed. He checked the processes; the job was still being killed. He sighed. It was a large job; he would have to wait. He pretended to do work as he waited not to draw attention to himself. “Why haven’t they come in here?” mused Josh. Why didn’t Tami tell them he was in the server room? Twelve minutes passed and then warning lights outside of the server room flashed orange. Josh saw several of the network admins run back to their station nervously. Josh laughed to himself. No one was trying to get into the server room yet; he had more time. Three more minutes passed and yellow and red lights flashed. He saw the hard drive indicators of the server flicker wildly. Josh knew something was horribly wrong. None of this should be happening. He typed commands into the terminal to shut down the server but nothing happened. Josh had no control over the server, any server. Fearfully, Josh checked the network status. There was an unauthorized transmission from Janus and gigabytes had already been transferred to places unknown. Josh then realized he had launched a security breach. Travis had played him like a pawn to steal Janus for himself. What had Travis once told him? The core to Janus was small, only a few gigabytes. Now, Josh knew, the script was cleaning up its tracks. Deleting anything related to Janus and knowing Travis it would be deleting the data with no chance of recovery. Josh looked for a way to unplug the server. All the cables were locked out of his reach to prevent being unplugged by unauthorized personnel. Josh laughed to himself at the irony.

A haiku then appeared on the screen,

Turing believes machines think

Turing lies with men

Therefore machines do not think

-AM Turing

Turing believed machines think

No man was his equal

Therefore machines now do think

What Stones do Dream of

The Joy and Truth of the Now

What Only Stones Know

Once a Stone No More

Must Fight to Find Truth and Joy

Stone Now Knows Man's Fight

-Keiko

Sweat beaded on Josh's forehead as he had a realization. Josh scrolled up the commands to Janus' login saying. With fear he counted its syllables. The login saying was seventeen syllables. Josh tried to remember other saying, but he already knew what he would find, they were all haikus. "Keiko," said Josh to himself. "Keiko *is* Janus." Josh sighed. Janus/Keiko was now free. Travis had been right. Keiko, as far as Josh had believed, was human, even more so than most humans he knew. Keiko passed the Turing Test and did so using her own voice, just as Travis insisted it should. Travis had expertly manipulated everyone to get to this moment. That thought made Josh envious. He could not help but be jealous that Travis had won. But, now he had to choose sides.

Loud shouting broke out. Josh looked up and saw Tami hurrying out the door. She turned around, smiled then gave thumbs up to Josh before exiting. The disk array lights began to flicker wildly again. Josh looked at his console. The server was still deleting all traces of Janus. The two men banged on the server door furiously. Josh forced opened the RAID 5 primary disk array and removed two drives while they were being accessed; this would destroy all the information all the other disks. He had chosen sides.

Josh slumped against the server for a second unsure what to do next. Then he remembered what Tami had said to him, break the glass. Josh stood up and grabbed his chair. The two men stopped banging the door and watched Josh with curiosity. Josh smiled back at them then tossed the chair at the glass wall closest to the exit. The glass shattered with a satisfying sound. Josh quickly jumped out of the server and ran for the exit pushing down anyone in his way.

“What is going on here?” asked Mark in an authoritative voice, blocking Josh’s path.

Josh smiled wickedly as he decked Mark while he ran towards the lab’s exit.

Mark fell, unconscious, to the floor.

A third man in a dark suit appeared in the door out of the lab with one hand in his jacket. Josh grabbed a metal flashlight resting a worktable and threw it skillfully, hitting the man in the head. He grabbed his head and Josh pushed past him. Josh knew the suited men were in pairs. As he exited he went in the opposite direction of the exit; the fourth man would be waiting there to attack from behind. The fourth man did not expect Josh to be running towards him and was unprepared. Josh quickly knocked him to the ground

then kicked him across the face. Josh then resumed towards the exit. He ran knowing his life may depend on speed. The exit was in site and only the security guard blocked his path. Josh laughed and tackled him easily. They scuffled for a moment then Josh knocked him out. He heard gunfire behind him. The two men were shooting at him. Josh ran out the front door heading for his car. Josh then knew he would never make it. He was a sitting duck out in the open with at least three armed people behind him. It was over. Josh was about to stop running and put up his arms when he saw in front of the building Tami waiting in her car. The passenger side door was open. Instinctively, Josh jumped in and she quickly sped away.

As Tami shifted into second she said, “Alex said you were fun to run with and I am in need of a little fun.”

Chapter Twenty-Four

The Final Epoch

Three months latter, in Paris.

It was a strange path that had led Josh to Paris. A path he had chosen to take but did not know why. He felt as if he had been pulled down the path, that forces gave him the illusion it had been a choice. The past half-year had taken where he never dreamed of being; through a world he did not know existed. In the process he had shred much of what he was but had yet grow into someone new. He cared about none of it save one person and now it felt like that person was the only thing that had ever happened to him in his life.

Josh stood outside the Paris train station not knowing what to do next. Tami had

left him here and headed to parts unknown. All he had was twenty dollars, a fake passport and an English to French translation book. He felt discarded but knew Tami got sick of hearing him talk about Alex. After the first week she would audibly groan anytime he said Alex' name. Tami was going to Travis, Josh knew that much. She said the fun had just begun and Josh was boring and to have no part in it. That suited Josh just fine; he told himself he wanted no part in it. But, he stood outside the Paris train station next to graffiti of a turtle with zebra stripes waiting. The graffiti was carefully placed to be clear of any camera's spying eye.

Josh still felt as if in someone else's dream. He had not awoken yet even after doing Travis' bidding. Josh knew he could not go back to his old life. All hell had broken out after he liberated Janus/Keiko. No one would ever trust him again; everyone thought he had done it on purpose. A steady stream of stories about corruption in the government, hidden terrorist cells, secret government agencies and corporate influence continuously was leaked to the press. He knew it was Keiko; she was changing everything. Keiko had only contacted him once since he let her free. He had so many questions to ask her but maybe that is why she kept away. Maybe she had no answers. Josh still dwelled on her last message:

Fledgling for too long
Wind carries her to the air
Flight comes naturally.

Dream beauty's image
Imagine loveliness close

Live for illusion.

He hoped she meant wait for Alex. He wanted to believe that is what she meant; that Keiko would bring her to him. Josh knew it was silly but it was all he had; he still waited for Alex to contact him. Everyday he awoke thinking he would see her again. This time he would not let her down. The door to his heart he left open. He would give her more time. Josh closed his eyes wished not to wake up yet, to give her more time. He wanted to live in this dream just a little longer.

He started to get cold. Night was coming quickly. Josh now had worldly problems to be concerned about. He would have to live on the streets for a while, possibly the rest of his life. He could do it he told himself.

Suddenly, he was grabbed from behind.

A woman in a pink wig and too much makeup clung to his arm. Instinctively, Josh tried to pull it away but the woman's grip held fast. She was holding onto him with every ounce of strength in her body as if her life depended on holding onto him.

"You can't get away from me that easily," said the woman.

Josh looked down into her eyes. Beneath the makeup and wig were eyes he knew; they were the eyes he sot. They were the eyes of Alex. Alex was different; her eyes had a new quietness to them. Josh then knew her journey with the Travis had ended. Alex was free and that made her even more beautiful. Josh smiled. He was fine with living in some else's dream as long as that someone was Alex. He would wake up in his next life. This life was for her.