

T H E R E A L

By

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The Real of The Day

The real of the day is as far away
that life can become a dream at best,
without any doubt, as to the light.
If we were, but Gods, we would know.
Or could it be so, that all is Thereal
and only the Gods are blind

Chapter One

The darkness is slowly beaten back by a distant dull light,
as a new late winter day begins its journey. The main street is

deserted on this cold morning with the only movement being a single stop light, hanging from a wire over the middle of the intersection. It gently sways in the cold breeze as it changes from green to red, signaling the two empty streets.

A stillness of unreal quality covers California Pa. A name it got from the coal that was discovered years ago, otherwise known as black gold. The coal had run out, but not before establishing the Crow Steel Co., which owned the local mill. The only place of real employment and naturally the major economic supporter of the town, as well as controlling just about everything else.

All in all the place is what most would call in that day, a one horse town. One of many that dotted the landscape of western Pennsylvania and West Virginia in the early 1930's.

A light snow had fallen the night before, which frequently happened in the dullest of months, the month of February. The time of year when winter was getting old and one wished for a sign of spring. The night snow had given everything a fresh coat of white, which transformed otherwise a poor rundown main street, into a fairy tale landscape of white and crystal.

In the distance, a movement appears in the increasing light. A single figure is visible walking in the gutter of the street, slowly making his way towards the intersection with the ever-changing light. He stops, occasionally looking down into the street as if he had lost something. Kicking the snow away with one

foot and stooping over to see what he may have exposed, while talking to himself as if there was someone at his side.

He is a short heavy man with a red plaid jacket and a blue wool cap covering his head, with large ears that stick out from under it, giving him a humorous appearance.

He stops, looking down the street in the direction of a distant sound, that only he can hear. Standing in the gutter, Murray cups a hand to one of his ears, straining to make out the almost inaudible sound.

"It must be train," he mumbles to his invisible companion, as he continues his search, kicking at the piles of snow. He continues his incoherent mumbling, making his way toward the ever changing light, occasionally bending over to examine some found object.

The stillness of the early morning is shattered as the town bell on the top of the firehouse, begins its announcement of a new day, while as if on signal, a breeze kicks up blowing the dry snow into swirls in the air like graceful winter dancers.

Stopping and turning around, Murray again listens, with his hand to his ear. This time there is no mistaking the noise. A couple of figures are coming around the bend at the intersection. Behind them are more, as the group quickly grows into a sizable crowd and they appear to be heading straight for him.

Becoming frightened at so large a group of people, at this time of day, he runs across the street, and squeezes himself into an opening along the side of the hardware store.

"I knew it," he murmurs to himself, "My mommy always said they would come and get me."

Crouching as low as he can and pulling a cardboard box over his head he struggles to keep himself as still as he can, as the fast moving mob comes closer.

"The hell with them."

"They can shove it."

"Screw the bastards," another man yells out, swinging a ball bat. Others in the crowd are carrying an assortment of clubs and placards, reading STRIKE, NOPAY NOWORK, and FUCK CROWS HILL.

The crowd grows in size as more people appear from around the corner. The mob now stretching across the street from building to building their pace and noise increasing, as Murray pushes himself further into the crevice between the buildings.

"John, I wish you would reconsider," said his wife Mary, while pouring him another cup of coffee. "Jane said that they were calling in the state troopers. There is going to be trouble..."

"Stop worrying, it's just a lot of show. Ain't nobody goin to hurt nobody. Mr. Crow himself told me, that things can be worked out. They have already agreed to some kind of pay increase..."

"There is more to this than a pay increase," says Mary, walking back to the stove. "Doesn't matter, they'll just raise the prices at all the stores, anyway. Please don't go.... "

"For Christ sake Mary, I have to...I'm part of the damn Committee. How would it look if I wasn't there," John said.

"I don't give a damn what it looks like. I just want you to still be here," she says, her eyes getting moist.

"Don't worry, I always take care of myself and stop paying so much attention to what Jane says."

I have to, he thought to himself, as he walked in the front line. Hell, how could I not show up. I was one of the instigators for this rally, plus they wanted him up front due to his size.

There were few men larger than his six foot six inch frame. An advantage that he had used through out his life, including getting his first job at the mill. It wasn't by accident that he was soon promoted to a foreman's position. Life had shown him, that most men, when you got down to it, weren't really interested in a fight and when their adversary was someone as large as he, it usually was the best excuse not to take it any further. The head foreman at their shop had taken John in hand so to speak, and quickly started giving him more responsibility. It soon became evident that when John gave an order, few if any ever objected.

They walked steadily on with the rooftops of Crows Hill in the distance, which was their destination. Crows Hill, an area on

a hill at the end of Main Street, that over looked the town, where the owners and the better off lived. Their boots crunched in the cold snow as the pace quickened. In the distance, he noticed some activity as one of the men next to him pointed.

"Looks like we got company."

"Sweet Jesus," John whispered.

At the end of Main Street, which was four blocks away, a line of mounted horsemen started moving into view. Quiet, gradually settles over the crowd as the black line slowly moves into the street blocking their view of the gates, that stood at the entrance to the wealthy residential area. Over a hundred strong slowed their pace down to a slow walk, and became silent.

Out of the crowd a voice yells, "Well what did you expect . . . girls?"

Nervous laughter flows through the crowd, with a variety of agreeable comments.

"This ain't good, I can't believe their doing this," says a man on his right.

"Believe it, believe it, the sons-of-bitches," John replies.

He stared ahead as they got closer, thinking we will all stop at a certain distance apart, where we will then talk to defuse the morning. Then from nowhere, a slight flash of light occurred at the edge of his vision. He looked in that direction, but saw nothing there. At the same time, something pulled at his mind as

if he had forgotten something. It was as if it was just on the tip of his tongue, but then would go away. This had been going on all morning. Possibly, something was going wrong with his eyesight. That's all I need right now, he thought as he wiped his sweaty hand on his pants.

The man out in front of John and apparently leading the mob, then turns around and while walking backwards, yells out, "Anyone wanting out, now is the time."

Two men on the left side, stop and begin to shuffle backwards. Waiting a few more moments the leader yells out, "Anyone else?"

John starts to raise his hand . . .

"OK THEN," yells the leader.

They continue to move closer until the black line is a block away, when it comes to an abrupt halt, as if on a silent command.

"Thank god," comes from the man next to John.

The line of black stood motionless, with pointed black hats and long black coats. Each carrying a long wood bat pointed down at the ground. Their horses breath being seen in the cold air, as they blocked the entire street, building to building in one solid mass.

"Those ain't riding horses either, them's work horses . . . big ones," says a voice behind John.

Slowly they come to a halt facing the black line.

A menacing quiet settled over the scene, only broken by a nervous snort from one of the troopers horses and a coughing from the rear of the mob.

John noted in the center of the line was the biggest man he had ever seen. In his right hand was a sword that he rested on his shoulder. The line of horseman were almost perfect in their stand, even the angle of the clubs that they carried was identical. All the riders to the left of the swordsman carried the club in their left hand and those to his right had them in their right hand. How odd looking, almost as if the one side was a mirror reflection of the other. None of the troopers moved an inch, seemingly frozen at their designated spot. Their faces devoid of any emotion, all of them seeming to be staring straight at him.

The apparent self promoted leader of the mob, moved out from the rest holding up a white handkerchief and began walking toward the troopers. Close behind two others followed and surprisingly, himself. He felt as if his legs were doing one thing, while his mind had other ideas, namely to get the hell out of here. Again that damn flashing out of the corner of his eye.

Before they had gone ten feet, a figure stepped out from behind the hardware store, which was about half way between them and the horseman.

"Christ its Murray," someone yells.

"MURRAY get the hell out of here," another voice is heard.

John, like most knew Murray. He had been around as long as John could remember. When he was a kid, Murray and him had been friends. It didn't matter that Murray was probably twice his age; they were still buddies. Of course, Murray was a friend with all the kids in town, for they were the only ones who would put up with him. Murray was the town idiot; a Mongoloid and everyone knew him. Likewise Murray knew everyone in town and knew them by name. In that area he was thought to be some type of genius, for his recall of names was flawless. However, in all other areas, Murray was just plain retarded.

Many nights John would sit at Al's, the local bar, while someone would get Murray to stand up on a chair and give a speech.

"C'mon Murray give us a speech," someone says.

"I dowana," says Murray.

"Ah c'mon, I'll buy ya a beer," says another voice.

"I wana two beeers. "

"You got a deal, Give that man a beer."

"Two beeers."

"Right two beers."

At the bar, two beers are placed in front of him. Murray takes one and downs it in one long gulp. Then taking out an old top hat that he keeps folded under his shirt, he places it on his head. Cheers and encouraging remarks spread through out the place, as Murray steps up on to a chair. Reaching into his back pocket he

pulls out a hand full of wrinkled papers. Fumbling with them as if trying to put them in some kind of order. A few chuckles are heard in anticipation of the fun, that is about to begin.

Murray, loudly clearing his throat, adjusting his hat and pointing into the air with one arm

"If der gotur or vemgor wit it fornication is di ongal vay ve gotton fuckadagoose."

Laughter as always rolled through the bar.

"To peerlim in der kitgin necer fo kolee di rinjess and op gotter or thid is da way. If any von hotteroinck dermouse dat nessitates da muthafuckin din."

The garbled speech and laughter continues as John's memory of that night, blends into the reality of the present street scene.

With his top hat and papers in one hand, Murray drags a wooden box in to the street with the other. Placing his old top hat on his head and pointing into the air, Murray steps up on to the box and begins the familiar garbled speech. Except this time, there is only silence.

Some men on the right side of the crowd, nearest to the buildings, begin to move out toward Murray. Caught between disbelief at what they are seeing and a fear of the moment.

"Murray get the hell away, get out of here," yells a man, breaking the quiet.

"Murray, get da fuck out of here," another voice rings out.

One of the horsemen stiffly pulls forward out of line, coming to a stop. Everyone froze as they watched the trooper raise his club into the air. Without warning, the black mount explodes into a full gallop down the street heading straight for Murray. The trooper, holding the long club over his head.

The pounding of the horse's hoofs on the snow packed street sends a chill up John's back as he watches in horror.

Murray steps off the box and turns to the mob, holding a hand out as if he doesn't know what to do. The black horse doesn't hesitate a second as it smashes into Murray from behind, knocking him over and trampling him under foot; the old top hat doing flips, as it sails through the air.

It all happened so fast, that most stood in shock. The rider yanked back on the reins to pull in his mount, but their momentum and the slippery pavement took them towards the advancing men on the right. The horse's front legs pawing the air as it was reined back on its hind quarters, while trying to stop on the slippery pavement.

Just then, the right front of the mob rushes forward. The trooper not being able to rein up his mount, plunges forward, past the few out front swinging his club in wide arcs. They meet on the sidewalk one horseman and an angry mob on foot. The horse screams as they slam into the mob. A cracking sound echoes through the air as a club connects with its front leg. The large horse stumbles

forward, throwing its rider onto the pavement. Angry men, more like hungry animals, throw themselves on top of the horse and its rider; the dull thuds of their clubs and bats echoing through the air.

John stood in the middle of the street watching as the nightmare unfolded. In a few moments, it was all over. Murray laying in a heap and appearing to be dead. The trooper and his mount lying on the sidewalk; the horse having spasmodic kicks and blood coming from under the riders still head, mixing with the fresh snow.

He stood in shock not being able to move, time seemed to have stopped as everything began moving in slow motion. Everything that is except for that black line, that began to move towards them. He stared at the large man in the middle who didn't appear to be moving with the line that was coming in their direction. Why isn't he coming towards us he thought, shouldn't he lead the charge? The line gradually picked up speed as the horses charged. The sound of their hoofs on the street was deafening. They stood tightly together to brace themselves against the impact that was coming. It then dawned on John as to what they were doing. They were charging in an inverted V. The horses on the sides would hit them first. This was not a charge to break up a crowd. This was a tactic to do as much damage to as many people as they could and to be sure, that few escaped.

As the line thundered toward them, he noted also that another line behind the first was in a full charge also. The crowd surged forward, those pushing from behind, not fully realizing what was happening. Halfway to them the inverted V split in the middle leaving the large trooper standing in the middle of the street alone, except for the second line, now clearly visible galloping towards them. They have timed it perfectly, he thought, they will hit us on the sides making sure that few will get away, then the second line will hit into us. He stood in disbelief, there was no where to run. Turning around he grabbed the bat out of a man behind him, and ran straight down the street towards the large trooper who calmly sat on his horse. As John ran forward, a large section of the mob followed him. He saw out of the corner of his eyes, troopers racing by him on both sides, heading for the edges of the crowd. Keeping his eye on the still rider he had gone about ten yards, when he heard the yells fill the air as horse after horse started slamming into men on foot. The yelling mixed with screams that filled the air as the horses trampled men and clubs swung down on the unprepared. The noise was deafening as John ran as fast as his 280 pounds would let him.

It was an instinct rather than a plan that caused John to make an abrupt turn to his right. He had no idea why he was doing it. He also had no idea that half the mob was behind him on his flight. Only that immediately in front of him now was the side of

one of the charging horses. Raising the stolen bat, he struck out at a black form that gave way under his onslaught. Swinging it blindly he felt it connect again. More yells and screams filled the air as those behind him charged into the flank of the charging troopers. Clubs cracking into the legs of the horses bringing both riders and horses to the ground. Clubs hitting against heads as the disrupted right charge met with the crowd from the side. Horses screamed in pain and panic as they tripped over the fallen in front of them. He felt some force knock him off his feet and into the street. He looked up from the pavement and watched as the second black line of horseman tore into the arena, welding their clubs. From nowhere, something exploded against his head. Laying in the snow, trying to stay awake and looking up, he sees the large trooper with a smile on his face staring down at him, and pointing at him with his sword.

"Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their Country. Come on John repeat after me," the trooper orders grinning. "What is the golden rule, John?"

"Who has the gold, makes the rules," John murmurs.

"Good, excellent. Who are you?" asks the trooper.

"John Carlson," he replies.

"Excellent. "Now open your eyes."

John slowly opens his eyes and stares at the large trooper, who is now dressed in all white.

"Do you know where you are," the trooper asks.

"Yes, I think so," John answers.

"Good, I'll leave you alone to get dressed. Take your time, there is some coffee and something to eat in the next room."

"Thank you."

A part of the wall slid open as the trooper left as if by some magical command. Of course, John knew the door was a simple hand sensitized model. He had them installed in his own home. Sitting up, he stared at the vat of pink liquid that he remembered getting into. Then the walls of the room had been covered with electronic screens. Now they were all gone leaving a bare shiny beige wall. Slipping on his one-piece suit and foot wear, he moves through the moving door into a nicely furnished room that looked more like someone's living room than a laboratory.

Pouring himself a cup of coffee, he sits down feeling totally exhausted and with a raging headache as if he had been in a fight, but then again he was, or sort of....

The wall separates and in enters the trooper again.

"How are you doing, now?"

"I'm not quite sure. I feel worn out and hurt almost as if it was the real thing."

"In a sense, John it was the real thing. At least as far as your mind is concerned, it really happened. We have had subjects, if you will excuse the term, actually show bruises and have pain

from the particular event they had chosen. So don't be concerned, the symptoms usually don't last more than 24 hours or until you get some sleep. Here take this for the pain," handing him a small yellow pill.

"It is the most fucking amazing thing I have ever experienced. I mean it was like real life, I had no idea that it was induced, while it was going on," John said.

"Any unusual happenings, that you remember?"

"No, other than the whole damn dream."

"Don't mean to be too technical, but dream isn't the right word."

"Yes I know" one thingI kept getting a slight flashing of light out of the corner of my eye and I remember a tugging in my mind, like I had forgotten something," John said.

"I see. That is typical of most, apparently Charly doesn't work a total of a complete 100%."

"Charly?"

"I'm sorry, Charly is sort of a nickname we have given to him. It is easier than saying Chromahomoentyfactor."

"Your sitting on a gold mine with this, aren't you."

"Much more serious than that. As you know, it isn't well known what we are doing here. In fact the only way we are permitted to conduct these experiments, is on the condition that they stay hidden from public view."

"My winning the Uncle Sam have anything to do with you inviting me?"

"Yes of course. If you disclose anything about Charly to anyone, you will not receive one red cent from your lottery winnings. And also you obviously have the wear-with-all to help defray our costs."

"I'll leave you your payment before I leave."

"Not necessary, it will be automatically deducted from your annual check."

"You can do that?" asked John.

"Mr. Carlson, there is very little we can not do."

"Why so much secrecy. What's the point, people will eventually find out, won't they?"

"Yes that's probably true, but we will do are best to keep it under wraps, for as long as we can."

"Why?"

"Think about it for a moment. The organic computer is as revolutionary today as fire must have been to a bunch of apes, when man first stepped out of the Garden of Eden."

"Sure, sure, but everyone knows about organic computers, our whole civilization rests on them."

"That's true, however its usage in the popular term, Virtual Reality is not what we are doing here. In fact, what we have achieved was considered impossible, due in most part to what has

been termed the Y factor. Any direct blending of two intellectuals will lead to the death of one or both. Even the attempt at linking to organic computers has been disastrous for both of them. They can be made to communicate with each other as we do, but physically blending them has always caused their demise. Also, don't forget of the limiting size of any organic computer. In either case with the advent of Charly, if I may use that term, the size of his mind can increase to literally any size we chose. In addition, the interactiveness of this computer, do to his dynamic construction, rather than the old static pyramid structures, gives him the ability to organize himself, which intern produces an efficiency beyond belief."

"Your telling me that this here Charly can actually think?"

"I'm telling you that Charly can integrate conceptual abstractions and do it freely."

"Jesus",..... that's impossible."

"Not at all, he can also blend with almost any organic computer in existence, Those he can't usually ends up with his host being destroyed."

"How do you communicate with him...or it?"

"Why verbally of course."

"He talks?"

"Yes as most computers and in a slang from the 1960's that he chose it himself. Care for some more coffee?"

"Yes thank you."

"How large can he get?"

"You mean intellectually."

"If you want to use that term."

"Ah.....we don't know". He's well beyond the OCI 100 level. You have to understand that it is difficult to measure the intelligence of someone like a Charly. Remember that his memory or recall if you like is 100% perfect due to the fact that he is a computer. In addition, the speed of that recall is instantaneous. Add to that the ability of organizing all of his knowledge and combining that with his obvious abstraction abilities.....well how do you quantify him?"

"The OCI 100 is the maximum any single OC can handle, your telling me that he's beyond that?"

"Yes and unfortunately we aren't sure how far."

"Back up a minute. What your really saying is that he has free will.....a volitional computer..impossible..can't be done."

"Yes that's the current understanding, however with Charly we seemed to have broken through that barrier. Keep in mind that; it's not like he's moving about making choices of survival. We haven't gone so far as to see him as being totally volitional..afterall he still is a vat of pink liquid a complex liquid I will admit, but..... "

John, jumping to his feet, "WAIT A MINUTE. That was Charly

...you actually put me into the FUCKING COM...."

"Please Mr. Carlson, don't get alarmed, it really is quite harmless. We would be closed down in a minute if we were to put anyone into any kind of danger. The pink liquid you were immersed into wasn't exactly Charly, but rather like holding hands. Please sit down."

"OH, so where is Charly exactly?" John asks as he sits down.

"He is in a variety of rooms throughout this floor, that is interconnected, but subdivided in order to deal with him."

"Deal with him?" asked John.

"When this project started, we had no idea how far we would or could go with it. It simply turned out that he needed more room than we thought. Hence, we simply kept spreading further throughout the building. The project started out as an attempt to find a way to blend organic computers; that is, to develop an OC that could be added onto and expanded at will."

"Whatever, tell me what other kind of dreams have others asked for."

"Dreams isn't what Charly does."

"Ok, what do you term them then?" asked John.

"We term them Induced Subconscience Adventures or ISA's. You are the 76th subject we have used and about half are historical adventures and the other half has been sexual."

"Sexual? In this day and age, with Pleasure World and all."

"Exactly."

"Would it be possible for me to meet Charly."

"Normally no, however I'll bring your request up to the board."

A panel in the wall opened and in walked a small woman dressed in a white coat, "Excuse me Mr. Carlson, but Bob is needed elsewhere and we also need to debrief you before you leave."

"May I introduce Ms. Watkins. Oh and I apologize, I'm Robert Browning."

"It's nice to meet youboth. You said debrief?"

"Yes it will only take about fifteen minutes. We just need you to fill out some forms and questionnaires, before we..ah let you leave," Ms. Watkins said.

Bob turning and walking toward the door, "I'll consider your request and will give you a call tomorrow."

"You need my number?" asked John.

"Really, Mr. Carlson," Bob replied smiling.

"Right this way please," Ms. Watkins requested.

As he made his way down the crowded sidewalk, he kept rolling over in his mind the events of the afternoon. If what he had been told was true, that they had pushed the envelope of computer technology as far as he expected. In particular it being able to induce fantasies directly onto the human mindJesus. The possibilities there would be unbelievable and possibly very

dangerous. In addition, if this Charly were truly volitional, that would present a whole set of new problems.

Stepping on to the walkmover, he headed for his new Eagle 2000. The first purchase he had made after winning the billion dollar national lottery. With a price tag of \$260,000, not everyone could afford one, which was a blessing. Most of the imbeciles on the road today couldn't keep from running into each other, let alone have them all up in the air. Talk about a circus, now that would definitely be a sight to see.

The second thing he did was quit the Institute. He had fantasies of that day, for some time, but instead of playing one out, he left without burning any bridges. Good old Gerry, our leader, played his roll to the hilt. Announcing his leaving at the Monday morning meeting, placing an arm around him and telling everyone what friends they were and letting him know that there always was a place for him at CCC. Of course, the fact that he now was a billionaire couldn't have had anything to do with it. The asshole hardly spoke to him for the past five years.

The walkmover picked up speed, entering a transparent tube as it whisked him through Church Street and past the old Trust Tower; an area where someone didn't visit for any reason after dark. Even during the daytime, the walkmover was the only safe way to pass through it. There had been talk for years of tearing the

Tower down and redeveloping the area, but so far only promises from the local talking heads.

Straight-ahead was the huge glass dome of The Colonial. It was the largest shopping mall in the world. It had taken almost 10 years to built and had taken on a life of its own, being a town within a town, so to speak. The place was so large that electric carts and walkmovers was the basic mode of getting around over its hundreds of streets. Most of the stores gave the appearance of being separate buildings. Also included were large apartments, parks, schools and just about anything any small town would have. A place where you could spend your entire life in, as many did. If you couldn't get it at the Colonial, you don't need it, was a popular saying. He had spent many of nights at a club called The Diva. A place he would like to go to now, but all he would have to do, would get a few drinks in him and let slip on his little adventure. Best for now to get himself home and do a bit of thinking on this morning.

Finally dead ahead was the Herdon Airpark as the walkmover slowed briefly for exiting. Stepping off the walk, he headed for the check out tower.

Something kept bothering him about this afternoon, that is something just wasn't right with this Charly business. At first, he dismissed the feeling due to his well-known suspicious nature and considering what he had been through, all of that had to have

an effect on one's mind. Yet, there was that feeling that he had missed something or had forgotten something.

"May I help you," a soft voiced asked.

He had entered the tower and was standing at the counter. The voice coming from a pretty bald woman behind it.

"Oh yes, I'm sorry I was day dreaming."

"Your Mr. Carlson?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Your Eagle has been refueled and will be brought around in a minute. If you would print this please."

Taking the finger printer from her he pressed his index finger into it and handed it back.

She was obviously one of the new skin people. A recent fad of the young, who had all the hair removed from their bodies. Something that he couldn't get use to seeing, including the transparent clothing they always wore. Her dress was a Seethru of pale blue that left nothing to the imagination, including the lack of hair.

"If you would like to wait over there, it should only be a minute," she said smiling.

"I think I'll wait outside, if that's ok."

"Yes, of course."

Standing in the sun his thoughts turned back to the events of the day. The charge for Charly was a flat \$100,000, which is a lot

of money to most people. Yet, that has to be a drop in the bucket compared to what their costs must be, and why me? There are plenty of rich patrons around that would pay more than that for the experience. Hell, a week at Pleasure World is almost that much, which was something else on his list he wanted to do.

In addition, the questionnaire, that he was given, was a basic PC exam. Possibly, they were checking for personality alterations, but they surely must know what I do for a living, or rather what I use to do for a living. They had to know that he could make the exam results come out to anything he wanted and maybe that's what they're looking for. They want to know, what I want them to think, or they know that I will analyze the situation and act accordingly and that will tell them shit, it's beginning to sound too much like work.

The hum of the Eagle brought him out of his thoughts, looking up, as it came into view and stopped in front of him.

"Here you go, Mr. Carlson," another new skin girl said as she stepped out of his new 2000.

"Thank you," he answered.

Getting in he turned on the computer and punched in hand control. Pulling the control arm down he took hold of the handle and slowly it picked up speed as he headed out on to the highway. At fifty miles per hour, it handled flawless, automatically making any necessary steering corrections.

Then he punched in audio.

"*Good afternoon Mr. Carlson,*" the onboard computer said.

"*Afternoon Ralph,* we are going to head home and you are to take control on lift off.

"*Very good Mr. Carlson.*"

"*And Ralph drop the Mr. Carlson, ok.*"

"*Yes sir.*"

Pushing the accelerator down with his foot, he picked up speed quickly heading for the liftoff ramp.

"*Ralph.*"

"*Yes sir.*"

"*Tie into home and have Sarah run a check on a Robert Browning.*"

"*Yes sir.*"

"*Also any connection with a Ms. Watkins.*"

"*Yes sir. . . .sir?*"

"*Yes*"

"*Is sir a proper way of addressing you?*"

"*Ah yea, that's fine. . . . you can also call me John.*"

He swung the car up on to the lift off ramp as the radio came on. "*Carlson cleared for flight.*"

"*It's all yours Ralph.*"

The Eagle sped down the ramp that ran along the highway, passing others as if they were standing still. White markers

called Frankys slipping by at an increasing speed. Then drifting to the left, they moved into the center of the lane.

The plastisteel stretching as the delta wings extended out the sides of the Eagle

"Liftoff in 15 seconds.....also John?"

"Yes Ralph."

"Sarah wants to know if you have any more information on Ms. Watkins."

"Ah. . . . nothing other than they both work for something called CHTF INC."

"We have been given a choice of 2000ft or 3000ft."

"You pick it Ralph."

The eagle quickly reached 125 miles per hour and lifted off the pavement so smoothly that he didn't realize that he was airborne until the ground began to drop away. Then increasing its angle it accelerated steeply upward.

"Take it easy Ralph."

"Sorry sir."

Within a few minutes, they had reached the 2000ft mark, as the Eagle gradually leveled off. Taking the control stick, he pulled it to the left as the ship responded smoothly.

"I'm going to fly this thing for a while Ralph, you keep an eye out for me, ok."

"Yes sir."

Pushing the foot accelerator down they leapt forward. The eagle quickly approaching the 300-mile per hour limit, which was the top legal speed of all aircars.

Needle Park appeared dead ahead. A name that couldn't have been more appropriate for the three silver towers. Designed and built by the Morris Syndicate, it gave the appearance that a good strong wind would blow it over.

It consisted of three slim condominium buildings connected by bridges near the top and half way up their 80 floors. Each floor having only four large apartments and each one facing on a compass point. His was facing north on the 70th floor. He had fallen in love with the buildings, watching them being built. He was one of the first to file for occupancy.

Placing the Eagle in a downward angle toward the Needles it quickly increased its speed over the 300 mark.

"John, we should be slowing down."

"Ah let's buzz them once."

"Sir?"

"Ok, ok."

The air ship began a slow bank to the left, while quickly slowing down.

"Ralph, I'm going to let you put it in the port, I'm really not up to that quite yet. All I need to do is run it into the building."

"Very good sir."

The Eagle circled the complex to the north side, then began a slow drop until it was level with the 70th floor and abreast of his apartment. A section of the building wall to the left of his large balcony slid open. Lining the aircar up with it, Ralph slipped it into the port with out hesitation, settling it down on the floor as the wall slid close behind him.

"Very well done Ralph."

"Thank you sir. The information that you asked for is ready."

"Good, I'll take it inside," John said.

"Well gentleman, and Ms. Watkins of course, what do you all think of our Mr. Carlson?" asked the trooper in white.

"Robert, I don't trust him," said a voice from a group of four that sat around a table.

"And your reasons Cal," asked Robert.

"This shrink is one of those NU theorist for Christ sake. Did you read his work, *The Abnormal Human*? According to him everything and everyone is ok."

"I think the word is justified," Ms.Watkins said.

"Justified, ok, what's the difference? The point is whether he can or will give us the sound rational opinions we need to resolve this potential crisis. The damn book that he wrote, leads me to think that he won't have the kind of objectivity that we

need here. It isn't as if we were dealing with some paranoid housewife."

"Your point is well taken Cal, anyone else? How about you Will?"

"He's definitely well qualified," answers Will, while punching keys on a small computer that he is never seen without. "Let's see a masters in normal and abnormal psychology, a doctorate in computer technology and co-founder of the CMMPO. A very successful private practice as a psychoanalyst, one of the most outspoken opponents of behavioral drug therapy and ten years with the CCC research institute. Last, this shrink, as you call him, has 6% of the holdings of Wincorp, a computer company that is now the tenth largest company in the world. Also let's not forget that he is now worth a billion dollars, the maximum allowed by law." Will turns toward Cal, "And your worried about some fucking book?"

"How come I knew you were going to say that," Cal said, smiling.

"Now gentleman. Ms. Watkins, I believe it is your turn," says Robert.

"First I understands Cal's reservations. However, I read The Abnormal Human also, and it's a matter of interpretation."

"Interpretation," Cal says interrupting. "According to its author there is no such thing as mental illness, and that the

labeling of those as such is society's intolerance of the variety of the human being...."

"That's not quite what it says Cal," Ms. Watkins said.

"Cal.. . .if you wouldn't mind letting Ms.Watkins finish," Robert chimes in again, playing the referee.

Cal turning to Ms.Watkins, "My apology, please continue."

"I think there are more important things to consider right now. One is, we have been handed a golden opportunity with him winning the Uncle Sam, which gave us a kind of an excuse to get him in here. He is one of the most qualified people around for the examination. And we do not have to tell him everything, if I may be so blunt."

"That's true he only needs to know what we tell him," added Cal.

"Yes," continued Ms. Watkins. "All in all, I feel there is little else to discuss. Another combination of events like these, you will not see again. I would suggest that we stop dickering around with it and move forward. Also I understand that he actually asked to meet Charly, correct Bob?"

"Yes that's true, but we shouldn't be to surprised at that."

Will looking up from his computer, "Don't you think he might suspect something . . . he's not exactly stupid. Like those questionnaires you had him fill out, which by the way . . .what were their results?"

"I didn't bother looking at them," Ms.Watkins said.

"Why not?" Robert asked.

"Because they are worthless, he would simply answer them to give what ever impression he wanted, or didn't want, or whatever."

"He's smart enough to be able to do that," asked Robert?

"The exams are PCs, for Christ sakes, he probably wrote the damn things," responded Cal.

"Then why give them," Robert asked.

"To make it look like we were making sure he was alright after the . . . ah experiment", Ms Watkins responded smiling.

"And then there is the temporary memory problem," Will said.

"Any new info on that?" Cal asked.

"No, we expect it to be the same as all the rest."

"Well, are we in agreement on continuing with Mr.Carlson . . . Cal?" asked Robert.

"With some reservations."

"Will?"

"No problem."

"Ms Watkins?"

"Ditto."

"Ok then, I'll contact him tomorrow and we will set up a meeting with him and the talking head."

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