

David and Shandy

By Nathaniel Bates

The island was surrounded by smooth waves that overlapped in patterns of ordered chaos. The pattern would not last, but it was beautiful while it did. David knew that it would be a perfect day to take a swim with Shandy. Shandy was like a wife to him. They were that close. Sadly, Shandy was not a woman. She was a dolphin. But, for female company she would have to do. David was not actually an expert in marine biology. He was a former Physics teacher who was out on the road finding himself. How he got on to a Navy controlled island with a super-intelligent dolphin and a crazed conspiracy theorist he would never know. Already his memories of life were strangely hazy but he was sure that it was simply a combination of the beauty of the ocean and the gentle monotony of his life out there.

John was the only other human on the island, and their relationship was tense to say the least. John was on an endless lecture series on how the governments of the world were secretly arming against an alien invasion. The alien invasion was led by none other than YHVH, who was presumably an alien masquerading as God who deceived the Biblical Hebrews. Working for YHVH were a shadowy group of Hollywood producers and Israelis who would stop at nothing to undermine the patriotic resistance to the infiltration of our planet. John claimed he was not an Anti-Semite and that he had nothing against Israel *per se*. The fact that David was Jewish was emphasized to mean that John was not talking about all Jews (which was intended to reassure David but it made his message even more ominous). He also claimed he passed his psychological exam with flying colors but the Navy civilian records said otherwise. David could only wonder at whether the professions to “love everyone” were sincere. What particularly disturbed David was John’s railing against animal rights activists. David came to the island to

commune with dolphins and to do work in oceanography. Belief that humans had unrestricted rights over Nature seemed incompatible with any humane treatment of Shandy, a humane treatment the Navy claimed that they afforded their perfectly trained retired dolphin.

David never witnessed any cruelty toward Shandy, but he kept the matter in mind as a strange anxiety set over him once the sun began setting. The scene was beautiful, but the beauty seemed to bring out an anxiety in David's ordered life. Just how it was he got where he was seemed a problem to him. How does one begin as a Physics teacher in a community of military-connected scientists at a national Laboratory and then suddenly end up on a beautiful island in the middle of the Pacific? His memories were hazy, but he remembered running afoul of many parents in the accelerated Middle School in which eighth graders were learning advanced Physics. Somehow the parents were never satisfied. The feeling of being a servant overwhelmed him. After one year, David left the community and headed out to find himself. What concerned him was the feeling that there was more to it all than he could remember, that there were deeper forces at work. He figured that maybe he would write a story about it and become the new PKD.

Instead of being the new PKD, David realized that he was destined to obscurity and that happiness would be reconciliation with the inevitability of living as a slight shadow in the body politic. PKD's paranoid fans might believe fiction was reality, but being in his own skin did not give him the luxury. Reality would mean the flush of ocean breeze and the lingering of human physicality in a world becoming more abstract and more chaotic with every news story and every economic turn. Shandy came to the shore and David realized that he needed to swim with her if only to save himself from the maze of memories fading into fiction. He dove in and swam with Shandy in an ocean that was not too cold but not warm enough for him. There was no telepathy

between them as many New Age believers would have hoped, only empathy. What passed between them was the quiet realization that each had their own personal demons that they both respected in one another even across the species barrier. Shandy would swim without judgement. If she knew how to communicate with humans with any kind of strange telepathy she had the good sense to leave David's mind alone like a proper lady should. David could not help but to wonder what Shandy would look like if she were a human female. It was somewhat perverted but once the thought came to mind he could not suppress it. The ocean was vast, blue and absorbed his thoughts in a kind of timeless bliss that almost got him to forget that he was living in uncertain times and on a fragile planet.

The sun was setting and David knew he would have to swim back to John and possibly be insanely butchered if John ever thought that he was working for the evil aliens. The government's psych exam process was not what it used to be. Some heads had to roll. Hopefully it would not be his. Leaving the ocean was not easy because he knew that a cold blast of air would meet him. David dried with a towel and jumped around as he put his underwear and pants on. Swimming nude with a dolphin was not a sexual act as far as he was concerned, but he could not help but to be vaguely aroused once he put his clothes on. Thoughts of an old girlfriend intruded at an inappropriate time because he would soon have to be on edge with John's paranoia. Rushing into the lab, apologizing for being late, and taking his place at the computer all seemed to happen in one closing act that set the stage for Scene II. Fortunately, John came even later and he was not at all in a bad mood. "You really were there!" he blurted out. David decided not to ask what he meant.

They soon got to work and forgot about the whole issue. Their focus was on monitoring ocean currents and the dynamics of Earth's climate. Science fiction would have to wait. The

sheer joy of crunching data was what excited David. He was better at it than he ever had been. It was strange how the skill just seemed to come to him. He had never been an ace with statistics but the movement of waves hit him on an intuitive level. After a good night shift---his shifts were split which made for a more restful day---David left before John could crunch the day's news with a conspiratorial bent. He grabbed a bite to eat and fled to his room. Personal email awaited him.

Sitting down at the computer, David was astonished to see an email that was from an old friend Max whose son worked for Los Alamos Lab. His son had just graduated college and was looking forward to a bright future. He opened the email and began to read the words. Just then a strange feeling came over him of a memory that was disconcerting. He was sitting in a lit room and...the memory was gone. David shrugged it off and continued reading the note of congratulations at getting his new job and the general jibber jabber that comes with friendly emails. He responded with a similar note of congratulations at the son's good fortune and called it an evening. David then lay down in bed and dreamt. The dream of the lit room came back to him. It was an ominous feeling and he was reassured when he opened his eyes and saw the stars in a beautiful Pacific sky outside of his window. The rest of the night went peacefully.

The morning shift began well enough but John soon launched into another paranoid diatribe. David always agreed with him that the bankers had stolen a lot of wealth through political influence. This was never the difference between them. It was when everything that ever happened became a conspiracy that David became anxious. John was out to try to prove that global warming was a hoax and that is where David drew a line in the sand. The denial of what David considered a scientifically proven fact on the government dime was where he drew the line. He was not going to be a party to the use of government computers to promote the very

economic bottom line of the huge mega-corporations John supposedly opposed, allowing them to continue to pollute with impunity. By remaining in the lab, he would be a party to the misuse of government funds and knew he had to leave. David stormed out of the laboratory and did not care what happened next but he felt that he needed a cooling off before making any rash decisions about contacting the Mainland. The need to cool off was precisely the excuse he needed for another swim.

Shandy was perfectly trained by the Navy to respond to human signals and she knew that David wanted another swim once David called to her. Maybe he would find a mermaid out there in the ocean and the two would get married. Would she be jealous of Shandy? David felt the doubt that he might be using this whole debacle with global warming as his own excuse to slough off on the government dime, but suppressed the thought. As he swam again his thoughts drifted away from the debacle at the lab to an abstract mental escape that focused on Newton. He realized that in order to construct a mechanistic “Newtonian” Universe, scientists and philosophers had to construct a Newton who was a pure rationalist. The real Newton was a mystic and alchemist who never believed rational physics was complete. Newton always imagined that a deeper reality underlay the mechanistic world he pioneered. This meant that if he ever came in contact with quantum physics he would probably have been delighted at its implications. He would never have been as reticent about it as Einstein was. Newton was not a “Newtonian” just as Marx once said that he was not a “Marxist.” Old Isaac was “New Paradigm Physics” long before the Seventies and the New Age revolution. But, a nagging thought crept in that David could not suppress. If nineteenth century scientism could get Newton so wrong because the industrial system demanded that they see the world a certain way, then is it possible that anyone could be misinterpreted by the zeitgeist of a later age with the real man fading into

iconic invisibility? It happened to Newton, Jefferson, Marx, Jesus and every great historical figure that the actual man was forgotten and the symbol became the tool of many.

David returned only to find that Federal auditors had already arrived. John was in big trouble yet he never blamed David. Perhaps holding off on calling in the Big Boys was the best policy since it saved David from the Wrath of the Wronged Man once he began accusing his enemies. John would not be removed right away, but the auditors would stay a while in order to determine whether an unauthorized use of government computers had occurred. It was not only John who was paranoid about the speed with which the auditors came. David also wondered how much they were monitored and felt an ominous feeling about the auditors. One man in particular stood out as vaguely sinister. The man's name was Charles but David could not help but wonder whether this was an assumed name. He shook his head as though he was trying to wash John's paranoia out of his system but he could not. Memories of a strange kind flooded in seemingly from his solar plexus where he often felt his repressed memories were hidden. Something was not right and he sensed that these auditors knew more about him than he wished.

The auditors would speak to each of them alone. It was no surprise that they wanted to speak to John first but he had the good sense to summon a lawyer. They then came to David and he decided to be reckless and dispense with the lawyer. He had nothing to fear, or so he felt. Indeed, the delay in contacting the Feds was understandable given that David himself was not sure a crime had been committed. As much as he disagreed with John, he was still uncomfortable with the seeming criminalization of what may have seemed a legitimate scientific question to John. What if David had decided to do his own investigation of a topic, say the JFK Assassination, which rubbed someone the wrong way? It was difficult to determine what was, and what was not, a "legitimate" scientific question. As they entered the room another

suppressed memory came up for David from his time as a Physics teacher. This one was real, an actual memory of when he was teaching and local Lab security personnel had entered his apartment when he was not present to search his computers even though he never signed a security oath. Indeed, even though he did not work for the lab it is possible they saw him as a kind of support staff in a strange way that he could not understand. This had happened on multiple occasions and it might have related to statements he made to his students defending Edward Snowden. These same security personnel also entered his automobile and searched his GPS system. He knew all of this because these agents made sure to make their presence known by leaving the computer switch on and by plugging his car's GPS in when it was previously unplugged. It was a high security town and, Constitutional or not, certain actions made sense to Security and David could only forgive but he wished he could understand. It was during that same time that some parents acted strangely toward him and demanded that their children be removed from his classroom giving little or no reason. It was a paranoid story worthy of John and yet it was true. How the multiple events interconnected was something that David continued to ponder.

Questions floated in and out of the paranoid liminality between reality and dark fantasy. Did his problems with certain parents connect to the entry? Did it connect to his remarks on Edward Snowden and the eventual need to abolish nuclear weapons? Or, might it have had to do with his own investigation into Internet rumors about underground bases and alien bodies? If it was the third then they should have known that he never believed any of those stories. His exploration was of an anthropological nature, the investigation of a paranoid subculture and not of anything his scientific mind would ever have considered. If it was the first two, then he was guilty as charged and proud of it.

David came back to the present. He held to a firm demeanor as the Interview started. The questions began as monotonous questions, but friendly enough. “Why did you not notify us immediately?” a woman asked. Her name was Kelli and David had to admit she had a nice smile. “I needed time to think. You know, I am not sure that this is really a crime. I am a firm believer that humans are behind global warming, and that if anything the government is too tame and conservative in dealing with the problem, too subservient to moneyed interests. I am shocked at John. However, I do not see a crime here.” I was firm and adamant, a true civil libertarian. “Nor do we,” Charles began. The shock of his statement felt like it was a wind that would blow the lid back from David’s head. It exposed his brain as bare. “So, why are we here?” Charles continued rhetorically, “You may already know the answer to that. We will of course interview John and find him innocent of any charge. We needed the pretext to come here to see you.” David leaned back in his chair, as though his posture would give him a power and an edge in this moment. He paused and asked the only question that came out of his mouth, “Why did you enter my car and my apartment back in those days?” John may have been paranoid, but David knew it was a Pot-kettle-Black situation and for all he knew the psychological exam might have paired the two in the same Lab based on common mindsets. He was either very paranoid or this was very real. Perhaps it was both. “We had to let you know that we were here, that we were watching” was all Charles would say.

David then inquired about the people that came against him. Charles looked puzzled and a bit shaken. “Actually, David, this mob you speak of was a loose confederation of spoiled middle class entitled ones, the kind of people who think that life is all about them. Believe me, we were not behind that one!” David softened and then asked them what they really wanted. “We could care less about your pseudo-radical statements or your explorations on the Internet.

What we care about is the fact that your mind is prepared for something important. It is so well tuned that one wonders whether or not the Cosmos sent you to us by some happenstance. You are necessary for our explorations into the deepest levels of reality.” A million thoughts flooded in David’s mind, a million conspiracy theories, a million ways to get out of the room, to flee. But he knew he had to face this reality. “They could find me on a distant island and so I have to stand my ground if I am ever going to overcome the matrix I found myself in,” David said almost audibly.

“David, here it is. Your consciousness is attuned to go beyond space-time and to peer into the fabric of the deepest levels of reality. For all we know, you initially came to our sphere of influence because YOU knew that this was the case. But, no matter, you are the one we want and we need to be able to peer through space-time to the ultimate advantage of the national security interests of the United States.” Of course, he meant to manipulate space-time in the interests of the US military establishment, David surmised.

“This myth of democracy has served us well,” he could hear the US ruling class whispering to one another whenever patriotic rhetoric motivated genuine patriots to actions that were often less patriotic than rhetoric would suggest. It meant that large segments of the American population would believe anything provided that certain myths were upheld as sacrosanct.

“Sir,” David began, “you say that you had nothing to do with the campaign against me but I am not sure. My investigations into alien mythology may have gotten too close to a cover story. Feynman suggested that anti-matter is really matter in a backwards time symmetry. If there is a quantum theory of gravity, then a graviton might have an anti-graviton, and we might well have anti-gravity. It is by no means certain that matter and anti-matter would attract. They

might well repel. If such technology exists based on anti-matter then it might well be so classified that the world would need all this alien hogwash as a cover story for hovering disks and craft that can turn at ninety degrees and accelerate on a dime.”

Charles laughed, “Even if what you are saying is true, our reasons here are not what you say. We explored the minds of many of our own scientists and community members. We found that while they were brilliant minds they did not have the untrained receptivity that you have. This is our reason for being here, not matter or anti-matter.” The import of the words sank in. The lab explored the mind of its own scientists! Charles never specified whether or not said probing was voluntary or even known to them. He also never specified just who the other community members were and what impact these psychological experiments might have had on the community. David also wondered how he himself had been mentally probed without even his own awareness, or whether events were staged in his life as part of the experiment. Finally, David noted that Charles never actually denied the idea that anti-gravity could be a possible result of Feynman’s speculations on symmetries in the arrow of time or that secret craft might exist.

“We need brave pioneers to explore the realm beyond this one,” Charles expounded in the most monotone projection any sane American could stomach.

“And what if you said no?” David said to himself. “You won’t. Deep down you are afraid of the government and its power, perhaps even more than John. But, deeper even than that you are a man of scientific curiosity. That over-rides your fear. You were born for this. “Think about it and get back to us. We are done for now.” The agents said as they left, but not before Kelli winked at him. Charles smiled, as though to imply that there might be other rewards for service. David got the message and knew that while he was dealing with the darker elements

of government, they were also the more interesting. In a way he was almost glad that the American government was not filled with Boy Scouts. He hated to admit it but he was attracted by the offer. As for the flattery, he knew it was nonsense meant to get him to the program. He had no “deep connection with the cosmos” or any such nonsense. What he could not figure out was why on Earth they chose him. David knew that he had to play along if he was going to get to his real ambition, to learn their real game. He left the interview room, which was actually a makeshift interview room that was really a computer room. The agents had already departed and David decided to do something he never thought possible. He decided to confess all of these events to John. If he was going to be as crazy as John then he might as well admit it.

They sat together in the Lab and John listened intently to the whole story. “David, you have to realize that these are really mind control experiments they want to put you under. For all you know, that whole community you were in was under some kind of mind control and that is why everyone acted so crazy.” For John, everything was either mind control or aliens. It was fortunate that John never delved into Holocaust denial or some of the darker elements of conspiracy. John knew that millions of people died and that millions would not lie about their experiences of personal turmoil. John even made the point on his various forums that if the Holocaust were a lie, then one could argue that other historical events were completely made up, such as Cromwell’s Irish crusade or the American Revolution and that would lead to absurdity. People do not lie in their oral history, John realized. Of course, while his argument on the Holocaust was just and sound, his adamant and consistent trust of oral history led him to also demand a belief in the validity of Roswell. He argued that a whole town would not lie about that just as millions of Jews would not lie about camps and gas chambers. His consistency was genuine but maddeningly loopy. Finally, John even supported the State of Israel and was

generally supportive of Jews as people and that almost mitigated David's sense of unease.

Almost...

Mind control experiments, indeed! But, David could not rule out the possibility that there was something deeper afoot. The CIA was interested in mind control in the Sixties and Seventies. Supposedly that interest ended with the disclosure of the MKULTRA program but David was skeptical that anything like that would end. During that same time, the CIA also had a relationship with New Age physicists such as those in the *Fundamental Physics Group* who dedicated themselves to reconciling Physics with Mysticism. Supposedly that interest involved investigation into quantum physics and the paranormal. But, the possibility also existed that it involved an exploration into the psychology of the scientists themselves without their suspecting it. The same attempt to conduct psychological experiments on scientists might have happened in his old community for all he knew. It might be happening in his own life. David realized that he was probably already a test subject and that he should face the reality that, as Dante pointed out, his only way out was through the lowest circle of hell. If there was a lowest circle, he had to face it.

The agents decided to conduct the experiments on the island itself. There would be no trips to Area 51, or to Langley Virginia. The experiments would be conducted on the island. The point of the experiments was a simple point. The mind was seen as potentially transcending time and space. Ordinary matter could not travel backwards in time for many reasons, among them the conservation of energy. But, the human mind was seen as a possible conduit for non-locality according to those models pioneered by non-conventional physicists and mathematicians. Neo-Darwinists, biologists, and skeptical materialists would have nothing of it. No University would pursue such an avenue and maintain credibility with academics inclined to

the bio-chemical model of the brain. That is why the classified world took it up with the craziest looking contraption that David ever saw. It was a helmet that would be put on his head and regulate brainwaves. This did not look like a promising start but David signed on and he was always one to explore other states of consciousness even if the experience made him look like an alien with a metallic watermelon on his head. It was too late to invoke the ghost of Sagan and avoid the demon haunted world.

His first job was to project himself into North Korea five years before. In order to do this, David had to focus on a picture of the North Korean flag and on to a calendar date from five years before. Nothing was happening. David's deep connection with space-time seemed to be a deep connection to boredom. The agents simply told him to concentrate harder. The machine was either not working or was working against his inclination to expand into the cosmos and reach higher enlightenment on the Federal dime. David continued to concentrate on the picture and the calendar and still nothing happened. The agents decided to end the first session and David decided to get up out of his chair in disappointment. Yet, his body did not move. What got up was his consciousness itself. He literally stood outside of his body, astonished at himself, and moved toward the picture and the calendar. As he moved toward them, he went through them into a dismal missile silo with a huge picture of a dictator and a lot of dour individuals pretending to be happy and content with their lot. David was there. He truly was there!

This had to be his imagination, but David could not see how that was the case. If the biochemical model was correct, then this would not actually be happening but it was. A missile was being moved and yet proper maintenance procedures were not being followed. Radiation was leaking that would cause the scientists and technicians to be in danger of cancer. He could see this, but they could not. It would be useless to warn the North Koreans of any of this five

years after the fact. Frankly, they would reject any such warnings anyway. But, the more pertinent fact for American national security was that this missile was going to be boarded on a submarine off the coast of California. Whatever radiation leaked would leak in the ocean nearest to the Surfers, Scientologists and Fundamentalist Christians of Los Angeles. When he snapped back into his body, he reported this fact with a degree of urgency to his handlers. The experiment had worked, and he was going to save the world from nuclear Armageddon.

David's account was immediately reported back to Washington and it was decided that he rest for next time. As he left the room for his own room, Kelli followed him. David stopped in a moment of fear and hesitation. He looked at her and realized that he was not James Bond and that his role in life was not as a secret agent who seduced beautiful women. He might have just saved the world, or he might have imagined everything based on brainwave manipulations, but a Casanova he was not. He began to open his mouth and Kelli just smiled. She was the one getting her way, not him his. David was a nerd who never thought of himself as being anything other than who he was. But, he knew that this night was one destined for sex. It might have been his recent transcendence of space-time that led him to accept the inevitable. He allowed her to follow him to his room and she did. As they sat down together, David had only one question for her. "Was this a real experience, or was I simply a test subject in a psychological warfare experiment?" David's mind was one of a skeptic, a philosophical materialist. Even an out of body experience, swimming with dolphins, and sex with a beautiful woman was not going to transform him into a right-brained New Ager who accepted mystical experiences on faith. She answered him frankly. "I make love to heroes, not test subjects." It was a logic with which David could not argue.

The next day the news reported that a North Korean Sub had been detected right off of the territorial waters of the United States. North Korea denied the reports but the Pentagon was adamant. The television continued to sound itself out into a muted room while David spoke to his handlers about the day's activities. The handlers spoke in full earshot of John since John was deemed to be no danger to secrecy, or any danger to anything for that matter. John was listening intently, every word, but David was not. What was more pressing for David than John's presence was the fact that the entire experience ran against the philosophy he held to for most of his life. David was an Epicurean materialist. The whole idea of a "soul" that could leave the body ran against his entire being. He was not so much a materialist as he was a physicalist who wanted the sights, sounds, tastes and smells of one world to be enough. The apparent fact that he "saw" a North Korean nuke leaking radiation, radiation not in the visible spectrum but literally seen by him none the less, negated a worldview from the fashionable dinner parties of ancient Hellenistic Greece, one that gave his life meaning in the hope that his existence would be complete on death. The last thing David ever wanted to be was someone who was omniscient, whether as a scientist or a psychic. The burden of such a position interfered with the very boyhood freedom he had come to the island to find again.

The mind was the brain. This was not because all truth was material, or because some scientific model demanded it. The mind was the brain because the brain could be *felt*, touched, and seen as a thing of beauty. Beauty was truth, and truth was beauty. Deep down it was not the lack of scientific evidence or mathematical equations that turned David off to New Age thinking. It was the fact that believers in the soul would always believe in the soul, regardless of life's misfortunes. The green of the hills would never have the tragic quality that truly gives them poetic beauty. They would always be pleasant and pretty, a forced pleasantness that denies the

sadness inherent in all beauty. Evolution requires the death of species and for David there was no way of getting around the fact that life on Earth is not about “spiritual evolution.” Life on Earth was not about teleology in evolution toward greater rationality either. Life on Earth was about a series of experiences that each intelligent being would have to give meaning. A meaning given by Bibles or Ascended Masters would be inherently less creative than one given by poets and drunk philosophers.

It was possible for David to maybe, possibly, believe in God and evolution at the same time, for those so inclined at least. In fact, a rational Universe would be good for religion in that it would allow God to downsize and to be less encumbered. Evolution allowed for God to do truly spiritual things and not force Nature to be what she is not, a perfect design. But, in the end any God who existed for David would be one willing to accept the laments of creatures at a Universe that is not finely designed. A perfect designer would be an engineer and not an artist. Artists accept rebellion and always, always want their creations to know they are naked. Religious believers, by contrast, want an engineer to create a closed system of heaven for all eternity and that was too much. They want a soul which for David meant the burden of existence for all time. Yet, here in his most recent experience was the soul that he experienced directly. David experienced it, in spite of it all, in spite of the fact that he was a rational scientific mind and the last person to believe in miracles, ESP, or soul travel. Or, so it seemed. The possibility that this was all hypnosis still remained. It might well be that they knew about the Sub already and were playing him. For all he knew, there was no Sub in spite of what was reported on the news. They were playing a game and he knew it. He would get to the bottom of it. Or, more likely, they would get to the bottom of him.

The next session would involve a remote viewing (David hated the term with a passion) to the nuclear arsenals of the United States. This seemed odd to him because he assumed his target would be in Russia or somewhere but the purpose of the projection was to see if the United States was infiltrated by foreign agents. David was asked to focus on Los Alamos, a small town in the Jemez Mountains of New Mexico that was central to the Manhattan Project. It was the heartland of America's defense scientific establishment. He would be there to see if he could ferret out any agents from Russia, a particular concern, or other powers both friendly and hostile. David focused on a picture of Oppenheimer on the wall and on a calendar date that was the present. Nothing happened for a long time, and soon David moved to get up. But, as before, his body was still present. He moved toward the wall and walked right into a picture of Oppenheimer. David then stepped into the mountain air of a small town with barely anyone present on the streets. It was night time and it was closed down. He moved toward the Lab and realized that he was about to enter Federal territory without any official authorization other than the vague premise that he was part of some top secret project the nature of which he himself could not fathom. There were armed guards present at the Laboratory. It was a good thing none of them saw him because they did not look like individuals with whom anyone would want any conflict.

David entered the Lab and entered a secure room. He assured himself he was there only to conduct counter-espionage but the whole situation was murky. He was the intruder more than anyone else. Two men and a woman were talking. The woman clearly had a Russian accent. The men were American, one with a slight Southern drawl that was clearly repressed in the interest of not sounding it out in the presence of PhD's and Yankees. The Russian woman he did not mind impressing with his southern accent. She found it rather sexy. It was the other

American who minded. The discussion was not about nuclear technology, so David breathed a sigh of relief---he could breathe in this body, or so it seemed. They were talking about pleasantries and small talk. The Russian woman was very interested in what the handsome American with the Southern accent had planned over the weekend. She would love a trip to the *Valles* Caldera in the Jemez with him, she said. They would hike it together. They both agreed and the trip was settled.

David then had the immediate experience of time moving forward. What he did not know was whether he really landed in Los Alamos in the present or whether he had come slightly in the past. He lost his sense of temporal order and it disconcerted him. He moved forward to the weekend and followed both of them. It might be that he actually moved into the future, to events that had not happened yet. David grounded himself in reality and walked along with both as they explored the huge extinct and silent Volcano. In its silence one knew that Nature may rest but she never sleeps. Their conversation was what mattered. She presented the man with a plan to ferret what she called “the real secrets” of Los Alamos. This made no sense to David, but it appeared to make sense to the man. The real secrets were not in the news and never would be. They were so esoteric that David, it seemed as though David, would not understand them if they were laid before him. But, what was evident to David from his deepening sense of insight into reality was that the man was going to give her what she thought were the “real secrets.” In fact, David sensed from his developing ability to pierce the veil, she was going to get something completely different. She would bring fake secrets back to her people. The man she thought was selling out was really a counter-espionage professional experienced with disinformation as part of the Game. There was no problem here, only business.

David moved back in time to the room again, effortlessly. There was nothing more for him to see, no deep existential threats to national security. For all he knew, the woman knew she would get fake secrets but would take the chance on getting a few gems anyway. David thought of the history of the place, the awesome and tremendous history of where he was. He thought of the Manhattan Project and of the concentration of brain power that made the town what it was. That brain power was well stocked with pacifists and idealists who had never wanted a permanent defense establishment. They wanted a war to end all wars and never got their wish. David felt the sense of the tragic again, the realization that the green hills and burnt forests of the Jemez carried a different kind of tragedy than most small towns knew. He peered into the secret of a town whose own founders had wished would fade away but would not or could not. The past of repressed tragedy lived on in the present as David slipped into the past.

David was in the past! It was 1944 and he was in the middle of the Manhattan Project. He would have to control that time thing a bit better! Meanwhile, it was time to explore history. David walked the town and saw brilliant minds, lusty soldiers, young independent women, optimism about the post-war world, patriotism, internationalism, physics, chemistry, and the lightning storms of the New Mexico high desert all colliding into one moment in history. The Indians were tragically shuffled off in the periphery of social life, while the Hispanic population was imbued with enough hope of getting their sons back from war that they did not protest the land seizure that made the Project possible. Discussions centered on fission, Special Relativity, rocketry, and a few subjects that David realized might still be classified long after. One particular dwelling moved him closer to it. He could not figure out why it beckoned him closer, but it did. The dwelling was a small one and it fit someone who had the luxury of a bathtub but not much more.

David entered the dwelling and it was Spartan to say the least. The familiarity of the place bothered him. He saw books on Physics, Calculus, and Indian Art. There were rare old Philosophy books in special places. The man who lived in it knew Oppenheimer and called him “sir.” It was never “doctor.” No one called anyone “doctor” as it was bad form in Los Alamos. The dwelling was a kind of monastic cell, a place someone dwelt in who did not socially connect. David knew the man was older than many scientists there. He knew Oppenheimer and Einstein on a formal if not a first name basis. He was even in a position to know that Einstein was not invited to join the Project because of questions around supposed “Communist” affiliations, but this seemed illogical given the many socialists and even a few Communists involved in the Project. The man was out and David had the freedom of the place. He peered deeper through the veil to see the man’s life. He was a physicist who valued his privacy enough not to want the public stage. Well versed in poetry, philosophy and the liberal arts, the man was dedicated to deeper questions around quantum physics and consciousness decades before such thinking became openly fashionable in the Seventies. The man would not live much longer than a few decades more. David also realized something else. The man was David himself. David was staring into his own past and allowed the realization to sink in while he awoke in a chair on a Pacific island decades in the future. He had just experienced a past life and it astonished him more than anything ever astonished him in his life.

David was dizzy as he stood up. His handlers were waiting for him to divulge the secrets. He assured them that all was well with national security; at least as far as he could find, but Kelli knew there was something more to it all. He told them about the incident with the Russian spy who was contained, surely enough, but he certainly did not tell them about his unauthorized forays into the past. It would have to wait for that night when he would talk to

Kelli alone. She would report it, perhaps, but it was still best shared with an intimate than with strangers. The whole adventure had gone way over the line. ESP is one thing, but reincarnation just gave Epicurus and Lucretius the boot. David could no longer bear to hold the contradiction as one that could be smoothed over. Making matters worse for gentlemanly skepticism, David was tied to history in a way that suggested that time itself was a dimension of space that could be traveled. He had always hoped Ernst Mach would be shown right, that space and time could be dispensed with as relativist abstractions. Yet, it seemed as though space and time were an actual fabric that could be traversed with the human will. Even more than the shock of finding out that there really were secret government programs, that he really did have his apartment entered, that he was a Manhattan Physicist in his past life, that ESP was real, was the loss of his identity as a rational skeptic of a Humean sensibility that filled his life with a sense of moral purpose. Of all things to go, one's illusions of intellectual presumptuousness are the worst to relinquish because, ironically, they are often the most humane aspect of oneself.

He related everything to Kelli, from episode to episode, and when he was all done with his fantastic story he then instructed her not to believe it. "I may not agree with mainstream science at this point, having seen too much, but its methodology must be preserved if sanity is to be preserved. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. If we do not follow that line of thinking, the power structure that would keep people in ignorance has a weapon in its hands. I mean, if we follow that the laws of physics as if at whim, then what if they DID change to create a magic bullet that killed Kennedy with one lone gunman?" He stopped and waited with a smile for her reaction. "David, if we were the ones behind that one then why did Oswald call himself a Marxist? It was obviously the Cubans. The government is not organized enough for that." The irony of someone in a deep clandestine agenda claiming there were no conspiracies was a bit

much for him, along with her blithe dismissal of accumulated evidence of a cover-up that Castro could never engineer. But, he wanted something that night and it was not an argument. “Look, my man, you must understand something. Something you saw caught my attention. You say you saw that some Russian chick wanted the ‘real secrets’ of our defense establishment. A counter-intelligence agent was right there to give her some disinformation prop. But, there is an actual real secret that the Russians know. They know that the mathematics that went into physics is now being used to study non-linear systems. The ultimate non-linear system is humanity.” The soft nature of her voice as she revealed this truth accentuated the deep import of her statement. She was talking about the use of mathematical models for social control by elites in government, business and other institutions. “This is your *real* conspiracy, David.”

“Kelli,” he changed the subject, “What if I really am a Manhattan Project scientist in my past life? Do you get the symbolism of what it means? When the McCarthy period dawned the liberals of Los Alamos headed for the academia or lost their clearance. My man probably was one of those. What survived was an isolated community of dedicated Cold Warrior sons abandoned by the fathers.”

Kelli laughed, “What on Earth could you possibly mean by that?”

“The fathers left for Universities and left the sons to fend for themselves. History is manifest in that location by the absence of history. All that is left is imagined images of fathers who smile upon the weapons of war when the real fathers were often pacifists. The same is true of our whole society. We assume that Thomas Jefferson would smile on our current capitalist system when in fact he feared such a society as this.”

Kelli held her breath and realized that she was dealing with a possible subversive. Why the Project would choose a security risk went beyond her, even to the point of sending him to

sensitive nuclear instillations. What perplexed her even more was that she was falling for him more and more, on deeper and deeper levels. She looked at him with stern eyes, “I am afraid you will influence me with your dangerous ideas so can you please stop talking and just make love?”

A night went and a morning dawned on two bodies that managed to make a deeper emotional connection than either had expected from the tense day prior. Their relationship had always been tense to say the least. She was an agent of a government that David distrusted as much as John did, in spite of the differences in their thinking. But, the issues between David and Kelli went deeper into the misty past of human history. As much as post-modern humanity wanted to deny it, as much as it went against political correctness, as much as David himself began to question his own scientific materialism, the fact remains that male-female relationships are shaped by evolution. The evolutionary criteria by which males and females inter-relate were shaped by creatures with intelligence and sophistication far less than modern humanity. And yet, modern humanity is trapped by their choices. Animals do make choices and they do have some form of philosophy of the future in making those choices. One cannot say that blind Nature shaped everything by natural selection. Animals have intelligence. They make choices that shape the future, choices that their descendents must live with. Sexual selection is as important as natural selection, and yet it is less logical. David and Kelli had a relationship that was as illogical as sexual selection itself because both saw the other through the philosophy of their animal ancestors while each saw themselves as fully human and complex. This is the tragedy of men and women. Certainly she saw him as some kind of manly man that he never saw himself as being. David began to wonder whether she really was a “reward” or whether he was the reward.

David began to feel uneasy about the whole concept of human relationships as a “reward.” It was a chauvinistic vestige of another time and yet it persisted in human relationships in spite of the disapproval of Victorian traditionalists and modern feminists alike. He could not help but to feel ashamed of himself, but he was drawn to Kelli on deeper and deeper levels. It was not just sex anymore. She slowly began to understand him on a deeper level than he had suspected. It made him feel guilty about the “reward” concept but it also meant an opportunity to go deeper. David did have to go deeper into what Kelli was beginning to get him to see: his own inconsistency in judging her, the government and his old community. He had been avoiding a vulnerable truth about himself that he would now have to face. His experience as a Physics teacher in a district of the children of military connected scientists was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, there were those who afforded him great respect. On the other hand, there were those who viewed him a servant. He came to resent the latter group and he resented the notion that he was seen as a cog in the machine of the military-industrial complex in spite of the fact that he taught in public school.

David viewed his decision to separate as a heroic stand against the military-industrial-scientific complex, a move for peace. Yet, seeing himself as intimately connected with the Manhattan Project across the gulf of time gave David the unsettled realization that he was not so innocent. He had judged and condemned his fellow human being. Hatred of one’s neighbor was the ultimate sin in any religious system, as it was in the secular humanist Saganism that David still clung to in a desperate attempt to avoid what he had lately experienced. David hated his neighbors and judged them evil for their involvement in war and death while he hypocritically harbored the very hatred in his heart that kept war going. Now he realized that his own existence

was not so innocent, that the weapons of war lodged deep in his heart were also deep in his past. Forgiveness would be for his own sake and it must be done or he would be as guilty as they.

David walked out of his bedroom and down the hallway with the realization that Kelli might soon be leaving him. The Project would not last forever. He was unique perhaps but not that unique. John was gone. He left a note stating that he could not abide by the “communist-fascism” that had overtaken the Lab, or some such verbiage. David wished him well. He only wished that John had understood the degree to which so many of his ideas rubbed him the wrong way, in particular his casual use of Anti-Semitic literature to prove his point. Perhaps he did not realize it himself. The room was empty and David did feel sad. Soon the Project would end and he would be getting back to his regular life of...what exactly? It all felt like the end of the road at this point. He wondered just what happened with the Southern accented man and the Russian woman anyway. Clearly she would be disappointed because no sex would occur. The man was a devoted family man as well as counter-intelligence agent and he would do his mission and nothing more.

What nagged David was the question of the “real secrets” of America’s defense establishment. It was a nagging question that burned deeply within him because of the feeling that there was some secret that the national security establishment would do anything to protect. John would say that Capitalists and Communists were on the same side in the Cold War, manipulating fear to control the people. David hated to admit it, but there was some truth to that. Both sides wanted to control the workers with hierarchy and might have mutually agreed behind the scenes to use the Cold War to do so. Russia was Fascist since Stalin, not Communist anyway, so of course western Bankers might feel at ease with its essentially hierarchical system and loan to both sides of the conflict. But, this was not the ultimate truth because human nature

will always mean that each power structure wants a leg up on the other one. The ideological differences might not have been as much as Ronald Reagan wanted people to believe but the competition over control the planet was still real. Still, there was a deeper secret than surface reality and David knew he had to find it.

David sat in his chair in the empty room and stared at a mental image of his old job. It could work but it would be chancy. There was no machine so he would have to do this on his own. The focus was on the image of his old classroom, and he mentally created a Calendar with the past school year. His kids came into view and the secluded community began to surround him. David leaned back in the chair and fell back right in the middle of the town square in his past year of teaching. Surrounding him were very few people, as it was a cold winter night with little cheer as he walked the streets. The snow was piercingly cold and the pond was deserted as were the restaurants and diners that closed early. Ahead was the High School, coming to residential areas that were secluded in a kind of social isolation that spoke of secrets, or perhaps a secret. John might say it was aliens, or some kind of Roswell cover-up. Roswell might have happened, or it might not have ever happened for all David knew. He had gone to Roswell once and sat in the Roswell UFO Museum library, only to come up with more spooky questions than any real answers. It was a fun trip but the road dead-ended as far as any actual truth he could find. The real answer was where he was, inside the houses of the people in the dark night of winter. He did what no true gentleman would ever do and entered a house uninvited. Somehow David knew the mystery would be in there.

The house was well decorated but in a tasteful way. Gaudy furniture would never do for people whose reality was one of voluntary seclusion. David understood the feeling himself, being a man who desired voluntary seclusion. There were guests over, a man with another man

in the garage talking Shop and a woman with another woman in the kitchen talking Life. David felt a tinge of guilt again because he had previously hated the community for designating him an Outsider and yet here they were, decent people. He was an Insider now, albeit an uninvited one. He overheard their conversations and found them pleasant. In fact, it was too pleasant. The pleasantries were boring, but that might have been just what David needed to find, to find them human like himself after all. He came to one of the men, an engineer, and decided that he had to peer into his mind even though it violated his own code of ethics. He stared into the man's mind as though into an abyss, with the deep lingering fear that this abyss might stare back at him. It never did. The secret would be hard to find and yet it was there.

David knew that there was only one place to find where true secrets lay. He had to do the unmentionable. He had to peer into a man's Insecurity. It was not an endeavor taken lightly because no man should have his insecurities violated, much less his Insecurity itself. David could turn back now. And yet, he would not and he knew it. He delved into the man's college years, his marriage, and the death of his parents. He saw the birth of children, the respect of sons. His son idolized him. He wanted what was best for his son and no one would get in the way of that. Suddenly David saw himself as others saw him, someone who held the future of his children in the balance. The secret was becoming apparent, but he was not there yet. Deeper still was the insecurity of never measuring up to expectations, the sense that one was in a permanent backwater. The fear was that IF ONLY THEY KNEW...what? The wall seemed impenetrable. It was not necessarily classified information he wanted. David never sought that. What David sought was the secret to his own exclusion. He focused on a deeper level, on the man's children again, their sudden turn to teenage angst, the loss of the idolization of Dad hurting Dad at the level of the deepest Insecurity. It was a painful loss but one made more

painful by the fact that it reminded him of the Secret. It was the Secret of the community that no one could ever communicate. David asked himself the question of what this man would see in him if it was the man's own reflection staring back. That reflection was the Secret and the pain of wounded masculinity. David stared at the Secret and the abyss stared back at him. David knew.

David convened Agents Kelli and Charles for a confrontation of sorts. There was a secret in his last job indeed. It was feared he would uncover it with this deep intuition he had (he still could not call it "psychic"). He was driven away because they feared he might come upon it. The secret, he told them, was that in addition to genuine scientists and engineers there were decoy scientists and engineers that were actors. They were there to play a part, decoys to fool the Soviets during the Cold War and the Russians afterward. These were patriotic Americans whose job it was to mislead foreign agents about "real secrets" when any real secrets were being carefully guarded by decoys. They were not actual scientists but decoys so the real scientists could pursue hidden work while they threw foreign nations off the trail. The life of such a decoy was a life of frustrated inadequacy, just as David's own life was one of frustrated inadequacy. They knew that they were not really what they claimed to be and that their degrees and jobs were given to them as covers for espionage. Prestigious degrees were given to them that they secretly knew they did not earn. It was not dishonest deception for its own sake. It was patriotic and noble. David could find no fault in it. The program was established during the Cold War by Edward Teller himself and the more David thought about it, the more it made sense. Decoys were part of the operation, just as the real scientists were. The two intermingled socially with each doing their job. David would have uncovered it if he had stayed because he would have tried to engage them in scientific conversations and friendship. Charles did not tell the full truth

when David asked him about his experiences in that community and David would not let the issue rest.

David's anger with the agents exploded but it was more hurt than anger. He could have kept a secret. He did not need to be driven out of there. He would have kept counsel and played along. At bottom David was a patriot and it hurt him that his country did not invest its counsel in him. Give or take a few affiliations with radical groups in college he was basically an average American. His calls to overthrow capitalism and the state were as much made to impress girls as any genuine conviction (it only worked on occasion). As David was speaking his mind, Charles became more and more agitated. He even became furious to the extent that Kelli was becoming nervous. David wondered if it was his unauthorized use of the remote viewing. He was adamant that it was his power and he could use it as he wished.

Charles screamed, "Tell me the secrets. Not nonsense. What is the real secret?!"

David and Kelli were stunned and began to become afraid when Charles pulled his gun and pointed it directly at David.

"Those are the secrets. I promise I won't tell..."

Charles cut him off. "David, I am telling you, I need to know the real secrets. I am not buying any of this! The United States is holding secrets that must be shared with us otherwise you will dominate the world and plunder the globe. You know the secrets of this imperialist country and you won't tell!"

Kelli drew her gun and attempted to point it at Charles but Charles quickly knocked it out of her hand in a motion so fast that it seemed like a helicopter motion. Charles pulled out a cell phone and dialed. Charles spoke to a voice on the other end in a flawless Russian to match his shrill political rhetoric, his eyes glaring the whole time. Charles had his gun on Kelli and she

wincing as the slow realization dawned on her that her fellow agent was a traitor to his country, and a dedicated ideologue without the complexity to make his treason showy or interesting. He was fervently waiting in the wings to give her secrets to a foreign government because he believed in simple truths in a complex world regardless of the cost of those truths. David stood across the room and realized he could do nothing from such a distance. Charles (Mikhail) knew that killing both of them would never work and would be unacceptable to the Kremlin. It would set off an international incident that would make the Crimea pale by consideration. David was a conspiracy crank, someone who would be laughed at as having odd theories about government agents and psychic experiments just like John. Kelli, on the other hand, was dangerous. It was sad, but she would have to be dealt with before his return to Russia. Mikhail would never be Charles again, but she was still his friend and colleague. The duty made him feel ill at ease. He would have to shoot her and push her into the ocean off of a waiting boat, perhaps even to blame the whole killing on David and his delusional state if there was some kind of reckoning, which there probably would not be given that she was made *invisible* as part of her cover. The Kremlin would still be angry, and most Russians would never understand such a grim duty, but the mission required it even if the liberals in the *Duma* would not.

Charles pulled her away fast and headed to the boat. He regretted not tying David up but he had to get out of there fast. Check-in would come soon and David would have to be accounted for. David would be unable to report anything because officially neither he nor Kelli existed, but David did have to be present for check-in. He knew he had to plan something. It never really did make sense to David that Charles would want him to remote-view Los Alamos instead of Iran but it was suddenly clear. He wanted American secrets, not Iran's. The North Korea excursion was espionage on an ally, making sure there was no double-cross. The rest was

spying on America. The boat sped off leaving David running after them, frustrated, cursing himself for not learning Russian in college so he could at least communicate his displeasure to the Kremlin if not to DC. There was nothing to be said to DC that would not make him look like a crank to the vast majority of intelligence and military officials who knew nothing of Black Budget activities. Kelli did not even exist. For all he knew, that was not her name. The boat was getting away and David knew only one way to thwart Charles' evil plans in a way that Charles would never suspect. He summoned Shandy and decided to go for a swim.

The ease with which Shandy answered his call always astonished David but he realized that she was trained by the Navy. It all seemed so natural that she would be willing to swim with him at the drop of the hat. Man was the top of the animal kingdom and that was the natural state. But, alas, for dolphins, they are the top of the animal kingdom and it is natural that a human would want to swim with them. For the shark that might conceivably attack either David or Shandy, the shark species was the entire purpose of Nature. The octopus felt that same, that God created Squid in His own Image. Really, when one got down to it, Shandy owed him no loyalty because he was not of her species. The loyalty that she showed humanity was unearned as mankind never gave her as much thought as a thinking person. Dolphins are very intelligent, perhaps as intelligent as humans, perhaps a little less or a little more. Yet, Shandy could have simply thought of herself, but chose to think of David and to expand her sphere of compassion to him. Surely that mattered. They swam together with David having far more respect for her than he ever had before. What she thought of him was inscrutable. Perhaps she sensed the love David had for Kelli. David could not suppress the thought that maybe Shandy was jealous of her.

The interspecies team swam like a bullet underwater and saw a boat up ahead. The boat was light and could easily be rammed by Shandy, but David did not want to risk the possibility that Kelli was tied up. Drowning her was not the mission. Saving her was. He decided to swim up to the rear of the boat because this was what they always did in the movies. It really was that ridiculously simple. It was a chance and he knew it was risky but he also knew he had to act fast. David dived under and swam up with a jump that reached to the floor of the boat. Pulling himself up was hard for some reason. It might have been his age, the fact that he was not as young as he used to be. David pulled himself up and managed lay on his stomach on the floor of the boat. Knowing he had limited time, he got up and moved to the rail at the side of the boat. His only guide was the movies and he knew he was no action hero, but the thought occurred to him that maybe someone in Hollywood wanted to plant clues for how ordinary men can act heroically when they are in danger. David snuck around the edge and stared down the hallway, turned around and faced the other way, crouched down, and went forward. Kelli probably did not legally exist anymore, and for all David knew he was erased also. The American government would see him as inconvenient at this point, a casualty of a black operation gone bad.

David sat down and a thought occurred to him that never occurred to him before. Either his adventures were real, or they were delusions. Either he transcended space-time through some kind of quantum non-locality, or there was some other explanation. It could be that the government itself hypnotized him and that his entire experience was a screen. Now was his only real chance to know. David focused on an image of Kelli and Charles, and focused on the present moment, and decided to give the whole idea one more chance. He moved out of his body, or thought he did, and saw the two of them on the front of the boat. She was tied up and

he had a gun pulled on her. David quickly returned to his body and decided that he had one chance to see if this really was reality or if it reality was material. If she really was tied up in the front, then his foolhardy plan was not so foolish. If not, he might end up dead. The whole question of whether the Universe was mechanistic in the nineteenth century sense or whether quantum physics really could imply something more was going on would be settled on a boat in the middle of the Pacific in the dead of night.

David moved physically around the corner to the front of the boat and saw Charles pointing his gun. His back was turned and yes, it was as he envisioned. He had no time to wonder about the truth of psychic powers or how he knew. He had to act and he sprung forward knocking Charles on the ground. David had the element of surprise, but Charles had the element of training in the Russian military. Charles quickly recovered although his gun was knocked overboard. David had the forethought of grabbing a machete off the wall of the boat, a machete that may have been intended more for decoration than a weapon but it worked none the less. He cut the rope with it and freed Kelli. Charles stepped back and reached for a reserve gun that he planted for an emergency underneath the rail and David knocked him with the machete. David kicked himself for not using the blade but he knew that his reserve was always on the side of life and its preservation. It was an instinct with him that made him human but that might cost him. Charles fell on the floor but recuperated his gun and David knew he had one strike. The machete knocked the gun out of the hands of Charles and into the hands of Kelli. David then stuck the machete right into the area with the heart of Charles and punctured his skin. Charles knew that one false move and he would be punctured.

David realized that he would have to tie Charles up. That moment of deliberation was a moment to the advantage of Charles. He kicked David and got on his feet. The two men were

fighting hard and it was to the advantage of Charles for sure. Kelli came to the defense of David and delivered a good kick to Charles but it was not enough. There was another hidden weapon that Charles was able to reach for, a gun with considerable firing power. David was not a fighter and he knew it. Kelli managed to knock the gun out of the hands of Charles and David recognized that as “heroes” went he was not a White Knight. He had to know his strengths and his one strength was his connectedness to Nature and to Existence. It was a strength he fought within himself, seeking to hold to a world-view that no longer held to the reality he perceived. David called to Shandy and knocked Charles toward the rail of the boat. It was a chance, but David knew that it was their only hope. Shandy rose to the occasion by jumping out of the water. She knocked Charles into the water in a motion that looked almost bullet like. David grabbed the gun in a futile attempt to feel masculine but he realized within himself that it was Shandy, the Dolphin and Cosmic Connectedness, that saved the day. He mourned the passage of his rigid masculinity with a moment of silence.

That silence was broken with the sound of a helicopter. The chopper hovered above the boat, and quickly men clad in black landed on the boat. David could only wonder what other color they would wear. It had to be black, just like the movies they themselves probably watched too much of. Other G-men jumped into the water and quickly grabbed Charles and spirited him aboard the chopper. One man stayed behind and walked toward David motioning him to put his gun down. David did not realize that he was holding it defensively, not trusting the G-men that much more than he trusted Charles. The man spoke to David calmly, “None of this occurred. You have no psychic powers. Do not discuss this with anyone. What you thought happened to you was really a form of hypnosis engineered by us to capture a dedicated albeit rogue Russian agent we could never prove was one. He will be dealt with according to the

wishes of both our country and the Kremlin which has decried his insubordination in this matter. I repeat; you were hypnotized to believe that you engaged in psychic experiments but it was a deception. Move on with your life.”

The words resonated with a deep pain in David that he could barely fathom. The faith in a Universe of spirit required much from him. The truth was that deep down he still felt that human life was determined by evolutionary ancestors whose choices were constrained by nature but with consequences felt in our more sophisticated age. Faith in anything higher in such a cosmos came with a price and that price meant repudiating his animal ancestors. It meant repudiating their animal wisdom, limited though it was, for the sake of an abstraction that left him with a profound sense of unease. Whatever God one believes in must be perfectly all-powerful in a Universe of suffering. To David this was a contradiction, one that made it easier to believe in blind forces. It was easier to believe this man, and David let himself consider the possibility that he had been duped. He desperately still wanted to believe in all of the comforts of living in a physical Universe with nothing else but knew well that his experiences at least felt real and helped save the day on the boat to say the least. Western man may be divided between belief in God and belief in Evolution. But the real test of love for either comes when either God or Evolution deals you a bad hand and you still choose to maintain your faith in whichever of them you chose in more naïve days. Religious and secular Americans both generally fail on that score, and David was no exception. David was dealt a bad hand by evolution, a genetic disposition toward neurological disorders that stood in the way between his life and real success. His love for blind unguided materialism could not survive the bad hand. He needed faith in something more and he was not able to go back to his life before...

Before what? He did not know what happened and could not say it was any kind of spiritual enlightenment. There was a truth that he had to know, a mystery that he had to get to the bottom of. “OK, I imagined it. Did I imagine having my apartment entered? Did I imagine seeing Charles on the boat head before I made it? What is it that I am not supposed to get close to? What is the mystery that I was not suited to know so that now you cover it up? How were people turned against me? Was it by group mind control?” David truly wanted answers to these questions and he knew that he had graduated to John-hood with a fully paid for stay in the Mental Institution for the High IQ Politically Paranoid Post-Modern Downsized Intellectual.

Kelli got up and walked over to David. She put her arms around him as if to tell him that it was better to let go. “You will never have the truth but you will have me. I know that for you, unlike the vast majority of men, a woman is second best to the truth. You lust for knowledge more than for sex. But, I can be touched, felt, and held, not just mated with. I am also yours. Accept me and accept my love.”

It was better to walk away. The answers would never come but David still had faith in a rational Universe that persisted in spite of all seeming evidence against it. Answers were there, and he would have them. His deepest and darkest fear was that there was nothing there, nothing behind the curtain but an endless chain of mirrors. If love truly conquered all then perhaps David would have to accept the endless chain of mirrors. But, maybe David could have love and truth at the same time. He would have to try.

The G-Man looked down and spoke with full authority but without condescension. “You are looking for the secret of your existence. You are looking in the wrong place. You were never that important to us. The idea that you have some kind of connection to cosmic existence was part of our attempt to snare a dangerous foreign agent. Sorry, but your life does not matter

that much to us and you are probably glad of it. What I can say is that you were part of a general program of counter-intelligence involving agents masquerading as scientists that you might have uncovered and yes, your explorations into mysteries behind the scenes attracted our attention. Hypnotizing you was part of this elaborate program of counter-intelligence and disinformation. We have our people in all branches of science because all branches of science are potentially weaponized at this point and the truth can be dangerous. We need decoys and they are doing a necessary job in a complex world.”

David responded in a hesitant voice, “Were people turned against me by mass mind control?”

“No. People turned against you because they thought you were a jerk. Sorry, but that was reality. You do not work well with others and you might consider that you had your part in it as well as they did. You are a bit of an individualist in both the good and bad of the American character. That is what we saw in you that was positive, but which a lot of self-important people see as negative. Sadly, the positive part of that attribute meant that you would come to more truth than you should. You would have talked to our actors masquerading as scientists and realized they were not what they seemed simply based on your gregarious attempt to engage them in scientific discussions. That is why we had to throw your opponents some support. Sad, because I like you and do not like them. You had spunk and I respected that, which is why I saw the potential in you and suggested to Charles that he recruit you. He never suspected that I knew what he really was and that it was a ruse to get him.”

“We have to have a number of actors working as scientists because actual science must be kept hidden for global security. This we had to program into you with hypnosis, along with your other ‘discoveries’ that you thought were out of body. You can know all of this because

your mind is suited for it but the hidden must ever remain classified. Real science must be kept guarded with decoys because in the real world truth can be dangerous. If the public knew that a number of Einstein's later papers on General Relativity were classified and used as part of secret experiments on space, time and gravity, there would be an up-roar and foreign governments would want them too, destabilizing the global situation. We can actually nullify the effects of gravity using Einstein's later thinking on the Grand Unified Theory, ideas never published or seen by the world. Forget psychic powers. This is the real conspiracy, if you want to call it that. We have to cover the real science up and manipulate science in order for humanity to remain dependent on fossil fuels. It is not cruel. Without this dependence, the Middle East would lose revenue and go crazy. Humanity cannot handle too much freedom. It goes crazy. I know that as a kid you romanticized Star Trek and the ability to bend space-time to go to the stars but the reality is that this power cannot get out of the box without humanity going nuts. Forget aliens. The technology for flying saucers came right from Einstein and Tesla cooperating behind the scenes while appearing as scientific opponents for the camera. The disinformation around this requires counter-espionage and a whole lot of double timing. As for you, you were simply at the right place and at the right time that we saw potential in you as well as potential threat. Your mind could be utilized to catch a mole and you should be proud as an American. That is better than some psychic mumbo-jumbo that you yourself never really believed. You figured a lot out about the nature of what is behind the scenes already, but you are just one man with a conspiracy theory and no threat to us. Heck, you can even write a science fiction story about it if you want."

David thought about it. He could scarcely imagine the wonders that were suppressed that could have been used for human liberation but that were co-opted for war. They were all protected by layers of secrecy. The G-Man was telling the truth. Well, almost. David did not

believe him that it was all hypnosis. There was the fact that his projections did work on the boat, that they could not have faked that. He neither believed nor disbelieved. For all he knew, the man was protecting the fact that the Project did work, that he could leave his body and that it was all real. David had finally gone beyond belief, beyond skepticism, beyond the need to escape from the immediate Now. Uncertainty would be his constant companion, the knowledge that the mysterious world of his travels may have been a journey within after all but he was at last at peace with his unknowing. Truth was never going to be simple and for once David allowed for mystery over certainty.

The G-Man was lifted on to the helicopter and was on his way as the light of the chopper became dim and its sound faded. He would deal with Charles in a way that was against the norms of the Constitution and which David, ever the moralist, would not countenance. Due process was presumably for everyone. But, there was nothing he could do for Charles now. David also knew that he was not going to return to a United States increasingly controlled by men such as this mysterious person who knew no bounds of law or Constitution. These men openly despised intellectual freedom in the name of secrecy and David could not leap that far from the familiar home of western faith in human reason. Decoy scientists may have had their place in some contexts, but the suppression of truth was something else entirely. David was going to move elsewhere in the Pacific, perhaps to some beautiful desert island in order to keep the dream of the Enlightenment and open science alive. Kelli would come with him because she now knew too much at this point. She saw the other side of her own work and knew that following orders blindly would no longer suffice. She finally awoke to the world of the unseen and she knew that David would have to be her guide in it since he knew it better. The barrier between them was strong but they would work to lift it. She was no longer a “reward” and

David was glad of it. She was a woman in full dimensions. He grabbed her and kissed her.

Beyond the mystery of his existence, beyond soul travel, beyond scientific doubt, spiritualism and materialism was the immediate moment. Beyond all of these was his humanity and he was doing his best to reclaim it.