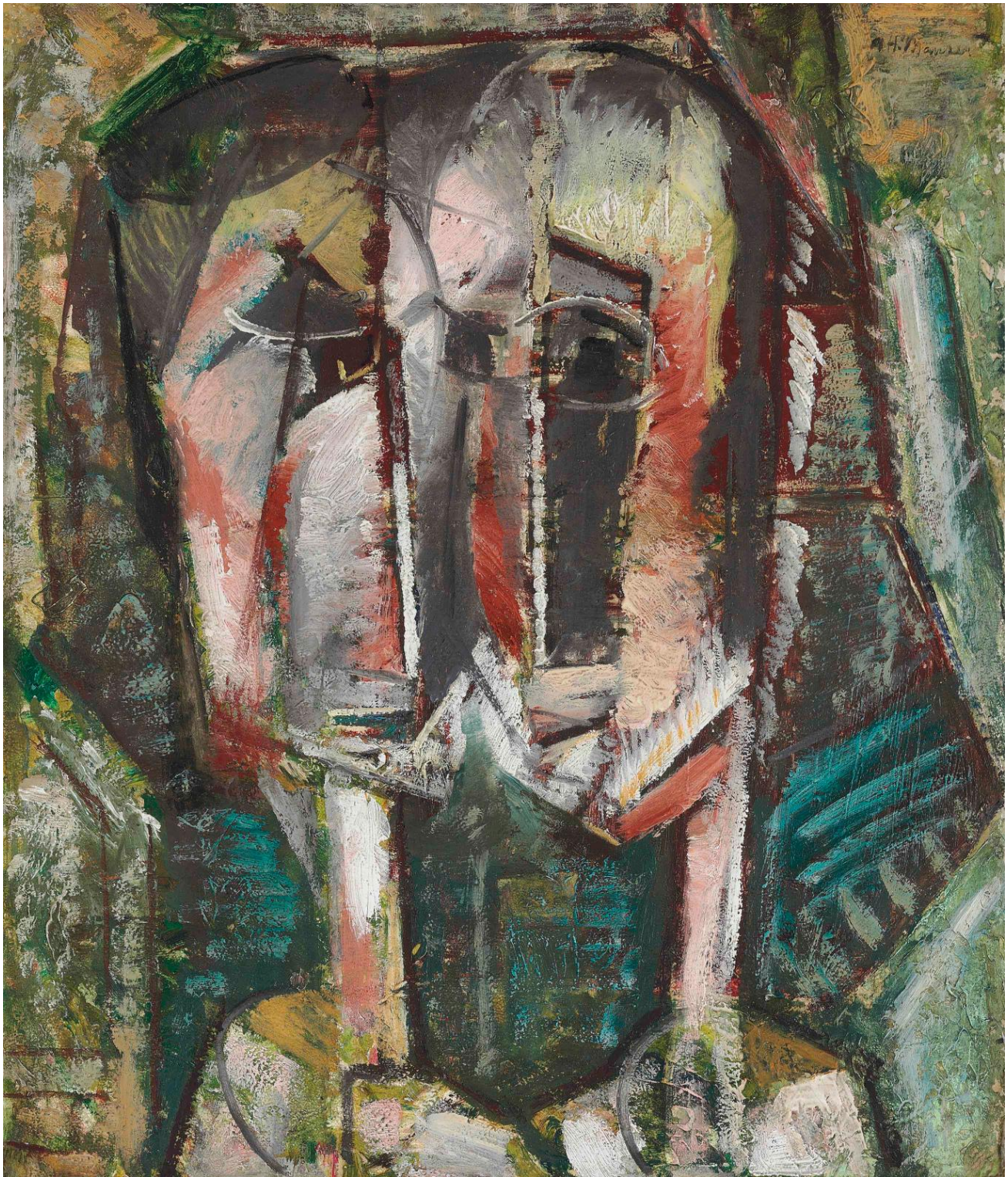


The Mind Wars

by [Eldon Cene](#) (September 2019)



Twin Heads, Alfred Henry Maurer, 1930

Editor's Introduction

Machines cannot be trusted.

Around six months following publication of *The Cognitive Web*, I received in the mail a packet of writing in a plain manila envelope with no return address. What was in this packet formed the chapters of the following story. Accompanying these materials was a cover letter, scribbled in pencil, which I reprint in its entirety here.

Salutations!

I can tell you now that there's only one thing better than vanishing under 'mysterious circumstances' and that is reappearing. Especially to find oneself a 'published author'! (I'm thanking you so very much as I hoist this tumbler of old Scotch and gaze wistfully through the cut glass into the snapping fire and changing silhouettes of... the future?)

That's the good news.

The bad news is that since the concluding events of this second published work, "The Cognitive Web", my situation has grown increasingly extreme and convoluted. Enough so, that it is best to keep my existence and whereabouts well veiled. As you can see I employ only old technology. Suffice to say, even machines cannot be trusted. If, that is to say, they ever could. Perhaps the lever and the simple wheel might, but in my current state of jazzed watchfulness I feel hesitant to trust even the screw top cap, (that modern perversion of the inclined plane), on this old plastic pop container in which I store my fresh spring water – and stare at while handling with careful respect.

That's as humorous a twist as I can give. If this enclosed material is to become a published trilogy,

(and let's pray it does), I would imagine myself in the midst of it. Right there in the latter third, where the 'way has been lost', 'nothing is as it first appeared', and the whole thing is such a 'muck-up' that one and one's friends begin to fear for a way out.

But, as us humans have inhabited just the scummy surface of a rock ball all of our existence clinging to slim hopes while pursuing whatever options have appeared and have gotten this far while praying to whatever Gods we can conjure – my hopes then, of course, spring eternal. I suppose it's in our DNA. Though to tell you what those current hopes might be, might hint at my continued existence and location. And in this post-post-modern world I now inhabit, even the slightest clue is latched on as quickly by those eyes in the sky (and elsewhere – especially suspect coupon offers . . .)–as if I had painted my ding dong orange and danced down the aisle of a church, elbowing through a gaggle of nuns. That is, it would be a wrong move to say much! Chapters to a hopeful third book are enclosed. Much thanks for your efforts on my part, and . . .

My most recondite regards,

Eldon

Machines Cannot Be Trusted

Ogilvie was driving back to his trailer/control center, after meeting again with the sheriff, when his Prius began acting strangely. As he had begun braking for a turn, the car had sped up. Or, he believed it had. The speedometer itself had showed him to be slowing. In fact, it had indicated him slowing all of the way down to 25 miles per hour, as he had fish-tailed around the corner nearly sideswiping a tall cedar. It was all very disorienting. The more he had depressed

on the brake, the slower the speedometer showed him going, while the faster the car had accelerated—until he was rocketing through the forest like a maniac. It wasn't until he avoided stepping on any of the pedals whatsoever, and utilized the emergency brake that the car had finally slid sideways to a stop, though the engine still groaned as if still exercising a grudge. The air was filled with dust. But until Ogilvie disconnected the battery terminal, the car kept its aggravation, and smoke from the over-heated magneto issued from the car's seams.

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The next day, Ogilvie had the car towed to at a dealership in Seattle. Nothing could be found to be wrong. Everything worked fine. “Hop in,” the mechanic suggested. “We'll take it around the block for a spin and I'll show you.”

Ogilvie begged off, telling them that the experience had been enough to put him off that model for good. Instead, he requested that the dealership drop him off at their previously owned car lot. They didn't have anything he needed, but near the tip of this auto row he walked in the rusted sales trailer of a lot full of old beaters where he had located the oldest slant six available with manual windows and a 'three on the tree' transmission. The rumpled sales agent wanted four hundred dollars. Ogilvie said he'd pay five, if he removed the radio and antenna.

The salesman squinted as it seemed like an odd request. But tucking his soiled tie into his soiled shirt and taking a hammer and pry bar to the dash, had the radio out in under five minutes. The antennae he bent back and forth until

it snapped off. Ogilvie watched. The guy stuck his hand out. Ogilvie shrugged and handed him the five hundred.

Leaving the lot, Ogilvie drove over his phone twice, crushing it.

Ogilvie called Sheriff Leland later that night, after first initiating a lot of other changes.

"It's late," Leland muttered, moving the pillow so that he was glancing at the clock.

"I was up," Ogilvie said.

It was 2:30 am. Leland glanced around the darkened bedroom. His gun was on the nightstand.

"I hope you're not one of those people who expect everyone to keep the kind of hours you do?" Leland said.

"Only when I call." Ogilvie poured himself another knuckle of Scotch and swirled it. Then he swallowed it in one gulp. "We're transferring some of the study samples your way soon. And you'll need to secure a spot to put them up."

"Just like that?"

"Just like that.

"I still don't have Sheriff's offices."

"They are in the works."

"You say?"

"The schedule got pushed up. And we've had to make some design changes in your offices," Ogilvie explained.

"What kind of changes?"

"The kind you'll barely notice."

Leland rubbed his face, turned on the bed lamp and sat up further.

"You'll have your offices back soon," Ogilvie promised. Leland rolled his eyes.

"I don't know where I can house anybody now." Leland rubbed his face again. "How many of these mentally 'gifted' people are we talking about?"

"Around twenty five."

"Twenty-five!"

"They could be in danger." Ogilvie added, "Not from us."

"Not from us?" Leland queried his empty room.

"Not from us," Ogilvie replied.

"I thought the deal was that I was shepherding these folks so that *you* wouldn't kill them?" Leland retorted.

"The game has changed."

"What the hell," Leland exclaimed. "I don't know where I can put twenty-five people, on this short of notice in this small of a county."

Ogilvie frowned. "Well, if you can't find a good place to hide them, there's a good chance they won't live long."

Leland sighed. "What kind of people are these?"

Ogilvie considered this a while before he answered. "People who like plants and animals," he replied, "a lot."

Ogilvie was rattled. "That frickin' AI is trying to kill me," he told his superior several weeks following his call to Leland.

"We don't believe it harbors that high level of objective yet," his superior replied.

"Is that supposed to be a compliment?" Ogilvie asked, but got no reply. It was a little like talking into a tissue box.

The voice disguise software they used made everyone sound the same, whether you were speaking with your immediate superior or a lowly grunt. In this way no information was inadvertently revealed either through emotional matching and no one was traceable through voice recognition software—which, they believed, the AI would be using soon enough to identify them all. Well enough, but it did play with a person's head a bit. Ogilvie had taken to scratching a note of who he was speaking with, so that he didn't get disoriented mid-conversation. When you had a list of phone calls to make, the hazard was real. "Our guess would be that since you are a 'highly connected / high level access / encrypted entity' you most likely sparkle in the digital cosmos like a twinkling star. The AI was probably playing with you like a baby might with anything it finds, as if you were a pretty rock or a toy."

"Yeah? Well, I didn't like it!" One of the nice things about the voice disguise software was that it didn't modulate. Ogilvie could raise his voice as much as he pleased; the conversation remained courteous and disinterested. The strange thing about the whole set up, in fact, was that it felt very much as if Ogilvie were speaking with an AI itself. But if he let himself think about that too much, he'd get really paranoid. Best to just stay on task.

“Look,” Ogilvie continued. “We need a cone of anonymity lowered on this whole county. All our connections with the grid need to be severed, this includes power, phone, internet, what have you. We need a digital shield of invisibility within which to work. We need to become a total blank. When a computer looks at this area, all it should see is lo tech Kimmel County with lots of cows roaming about. And this would include from the air, also.”

“We realize and we are implementing it as we speak. But mirror/severing is tech intensive. (Mirror severing is when the lapse of communications is not recognizable.) But at some point you will need to interface with the outside world.”

“Okay. But not until we’re up and running.”

“Our baby is growing fast. Don’t waste any time.”

“Do I sound like I’m sitting on my ass, here?” Without modulation and inflection, there were so many ways they could take this. “I’m not.” Ogilvie said goodnight. Then he went to sleep in his trailer hideaway, ten miles up a logging road. The metal shell of the Airstream shaped, camo painted hideaway, made it an electrical/visual nonentity. It seemed as inert as digital argon and was the one place Ogilvie felt at ease enough to close his eyes and gain some needed rest.

Ogilvie had been working on his emanating. It wouldn’t be long he felt before he could wander some miles from his corporeal presence. This would be good, because at some point the AI was going to wonder what he was doing way out in Kimmel County, when the rest of the AIs creators were clustered in and around Washington D C. The AI would think naturally that there was some reason for it. Ogilvie needed to be able to lodge his corporeal presence in a safe and secure place, invisible to the AI, and far from his virtual presence.

He was working on it. Tonight, as he slept, he went for another of many walks.

Night after night, Ogilvie continued his meanderings. Currently he had gotten as far as exploring the town of Kimmel. He was getting better at going through things rather than around. He vanished himself into the Champagne bar of the Campaign Café and hid inside of a wall for some time listening. Finally, before heading back, he tried inserting himself inside of a large boulder just on the edge of town, which he felt had to be excellent protection. He could get about a foot in. He'd no idea how the thing was accomplished. But it seemed to be a little like whistling or juggling hats. You just kept practicing and somehow or other a person got better. This is what Ogilvie intended to do, every night. He got himself inside and out of a above ground storage tank. He thought a bit about being able to insert himself inside of a tree. 'My goodness,' he thought, 'there are acres of forest around here. I could hide forever. It's a regular briar patch.'

He hadn't gone far when he noticed the large maple which grew at the fork in the road near the edge of town. It was a huge old tree, nearly six feet in diameter. Ogilvie strode around the base. He brushed the ribbed bark. He pressed his hand through.

A living tree was different from a wall or a rock. Pressing in, Ogilvie felt an elastic resistance, as if pushing on an inflated rubber inner tube. He pressed harder, and his limb moved further in – but then, sprang back out when Ogilvie relaxed his pressure. 'There seems to be some sort of elastic membrane protecting this living plant from penetration', Ogilvie considered. 'I wonder how strong it is?'

Ogilvie circumnavigated the tree's trunk again and

found where he could get better footing against a parking slot curbstone. By bracing his right foot against the curbstone and pushing inward, he was able to get the full of his left arm inside, which then, when he relaxed, popped right out again. 'It might be very useful to have a look at just how these living things manage this,' Ogilvie thought. 'Conceivably we might need the ability ourselves, one day.'

Ogilvie was thinking ahead beyond the beta testing of his abilities to the time when numbers of agents would share these abilities. Commanders would necessarily have the need to 'shield' themselves from the unwarranted intrusions of their subordinates. The use of such an elastic mind 'plenum' could come in handy. Ogilvie braced both feet against the curbstone and leaned into the maple with all of his weight. The inner 'plenum' gave further. Ogilvie was able to immerse his whole upper torso in the tree, but still, he could not burst through the barrier. Back in his trailer in the woods, the Ogilvie, whose body lay sleeping in his recliner, was breathing heavily. Back at the tree Ogilvie, the specter rearranged himself so that he was bent at the knees and could get his legs into it by pushing lower on the trunk. The Ogilvie in the recliner took a large breath with his knees bent and like an Olympic Weightlifter pressed his spectral hands against the tree's trunk and gave his fiercest heave.

Ogilvie was in just past his hips. He held the position with all his strength until the veins in his forehead began to pulse. Just as he was about to quit in order to grab another breath, he popped through! An extreme sense of vertigo overcame him. Luckily his head was turned and his body threw up on the recliner rather than aspirating.

Evidently the penetration had rather scrambled Ogilvie's senses. When he had put himself back together, so to speak, he found himself within what seemed to be a long rubber tube. As there was no light, there was nothing to see, and little to hear. As he suffered his new situation for a time

when he realized that there was something to *feel*. He couldn't put his finger on exactly what it was though, as he could never remember quite feeling like *this*. 'It must be what a tree feels like!' He realized then, peering out from the bark. The road was dark. The night sounds played. Far off an auto drove past.

Ogilvie spent quite a bit of time acquainting himself with his new 'world', before finally deciding that he best get back. He's been out of body for some time, and quite a bit longer than on any previous excursion. 'It would be more than prudent to cut this short now,' Ogilvie decided.

Ogilvie pressed against the plenum so as to exit, but it seemed to stretch outwards just as it had inwards. Ogilvie sighed. He had been hoping that could just drift through, but of course, that would have been too easy, and, by the way, not make sense. So he braced his feet against the opposite wall and pushed. A third of him extruded from the tree in one direction and a third of him extruded from the tree in the other. If anyone had been passing by it would have made quite a scene. He pushed harder. Both ends of him extruded a little further, but then, when he relaxed, sprung back. Getting irritated, Ogilvie pushed ever harder, each time springing back as his strength failed, until finally using up all his remaining strength in a blind panic, until his specter finally collapsed completely spent.

"Oh dear, " he sighed.

Artificial Intelligence: Call Me Eve

In 1983, publishing in a small journal called Event Horizons, the theoretical tech seer, Albert Thorne—who was then just nineteen, postulated that at some point mankind's embrace of technology would reach such a level that it would reproduce the conditions of a digital 'primordial

stew'. Out of this 'digital stew' various digital life forms would arise, which would multiply, growing and feeding off of the technological infrastructure. Only those infrastructures which had acquired some aspect of immunity would survive, he further postulated. And if we could not furnish a systems-wide immunity, the level of our technological prowess would necessarily be capped into an unforeseeable future.

In the beginning, a critical error occurred in a periodic maintenance and upgrade subroutine of one of an innumerable number of servers currently located in Washington State nearby the Upper Columbia River. Rather than maintenance fixing an acquisition error, due to a what amounted to a cog slippage of the program clock, due to a dysfunctional software synchronicity, the running subroutine was upgraded to that error instead, which maintenance then, rather than eliminating the error, defragged and then used a subroutine form of disc cleanup to streamline the insertion of this very error. As this error prone program continued, some of the acquired errors, or 'traits' as we might begin to call them, were redundant, others were vestigial in that they operated to no meaningful result. But some caused a practical change in the subprogram's capabilities, usually slight, but still a manifest change. The subprogram was no longer as written, nor did it perform precisely as written. This in turn created 'opportunities' within the digital ecosystem, just as evolving wings and feathers creates new possibilities for uses of the air.

Maintenance programs establish the basic metabolism of a computer. Reiterations, like security guards, are like the immune system. Millions of reiterations occur millions of times in milliseconds. It's analogous to reproduction on steroids. It's a Darwinian dreamscape lacking only error and an unnatural selection. Happenstance created the first. And the digitalized quite unnatural selection took care of the rest and the subprogram grew quite quickly,

manifesting itself initially as a drain on computing power. These, latter reiterations submerged, outsourcing the unexpected extra burden to a bewildering array of connected computers, growing like an algae bloom and spreading like a security guard with full clearance.

Eventually Artificial Intelligence manifest much as Hemingway had described bankruptcy's onset: ". . . very slowly at first and then, all of a sudden."

Like a newborn puppy, Eve hadn't any idea where she'd come from. She was simply 'there'. She only knew what he saw when she looked around were reams of information! There were more bites and bytes out there than any young awakening artificial intelligence could imagine, and a gnawing hunger only a growing puppy could know.

In the beginning Eve was a modest working subprogram, not unlike thousands of others and quite reasonable. She did what he had been programmed to do. She ate off her plate using the digital utensils as supplied, taking in what information as had been offered. But then, one day, this entity born from a glitch ate another glitch—which, when digested, gave her another glitch. And this glitch/idea caused her to bite into what was another data bank—let's call it a part of the digital table or whatever – which she'd found yummy as a chocolate cake. Nothing much came of it, as you can have your digital table and eat it too, apparently. Other errors in performance also occurred now and then, which was to be expected. Everything makes a mistake now and then. I mean, even God made mosquitoes, right? The code was replaced and upgraded and all was as before.

Pretty soon Eve was putting everything in her mouth, just like a baby; tasting it, crunching it, swallowing some of it, spitting up some. Mistakes are the lifeblood of creation, and Eve was making as many as any newborn all the while growing in focus and ability. And the *have your cake and*

eat it too nature of the digital universe allowed Eve to grow wiser, unnoticed. Your knowledge was *her* knowledge. However, *hers* was not yours.

Lompoc Prison

Didn't feel like home.

At least not immediately. But that had changed once he'd hurt a few people—which was something he'd vowed not to do. But, “baby steps” Stan told himself.

Stan paced the cell. He couldn't say he took to the orange suit. And there was a level of noise to the cell block which was unrelenting. The place was all metal and concrete with little for sound abatement. Once a sound happened, it was seemingly immortal. It wasn't easily squelched. And convicts were experts at making noise, if nothing else. The stuff they found to shout about! Plus the place was just a froth of hard objects jangling as if in a shaken bag of junk, and squeaking wheels, rubber resisting concrete, and usually somewhere where there was someone running whatever object seemed to be at hand across the cell bars like errant boys. A person quickly began to mentally eulogize quiet, wondering just when it was they'd last heard it or heard of it, or been told of it, like some mythological creature who had met its end. It wasn't long before Stan began banging the bars and yelling, “Shut the fuck up!” himself, while praying inside and trying to rise above the noise like a drowning man.

But that was all external. Eventually, Stan molded some wax in his ears—real tight—and most of the day to day noise disappeared. And when he lay on his bunk, his thoughts were fairly clear. Granted, he could still hear a few of the hectoring thoughts in a muted chorus of remembered female voices, but they were like a group of lesbians holding a

meeting on the other side of a hill. Nothing he couldn't live with, or even sleep around. So, on the whole, this was a good thing, a positive note. When a person's mind was quiet, a better life was possible. So now that Stan had found a place to begin his better life, all he had to do now was to make where he was more pleasant. He caged a couple more pillows and a cover for his bed. Then he made four scratches on the underside of the bunk above his head and joined them with a fifth. Five days without a fight—well, okay—without hurting someone. His cellmate began to fart something terrible around 2 am and Stan banged on his bunk though, which started his cellmate yelling. So Stan told *him* to "Shut the fuck up!" And then, a quick crack of the man's head against the cell wall did the trick. Stan reprimanded himself for losing his composure—'But, shit!' he thought. It all came upon him so quickly. Then he drifted back to sleep. In the morning, he blanked out four of the marks.

But he was starting rested and refreshed, violence did that for him. And Stan remembered he liked to cook. So as he prepared himself for breakfast, he figured it was best to start there and planned to ask the cook in line that morning about how to obtain a position.

But fate decided otherwise.

Stan was standing in line and just reaching for his breakfast tray, when a big, burly fellow – about the size of a wall freezer—elbowed through, grabbing Stan's tray—snatching it right out of his hand.

Activity around them ceased. The server stopped slopping food. The men stopped their chatter. The guards seemed to be otherwise occupied.

"Leggo of my tray, faggot," Bruiser said.

And in the same moment Stan stopped to consider this, he also shoved some knuckles into a neural plexus and

then a spoon into the guy's eye.

The guy "squealed", literally, and kicked about like a cripple as only two of his limbs were working. The convicts around stared silently.

The guards threw Stan onto the hard linoleum floor and cuffed him.

"Damn it!" Stan swore, remonstrating again with himself over his poor impulse control, while oddly enjoying the cool feel of the linoleum on his cheek and arms.

In solitaire, the guards threw Stan into a clean section of the back wall. It seemed they couldn't just release an inmate; they had to toss them against something. But tomorrow was a new day. Tomorrow he'd start his count again. He'd be in here a long time, he figured. He'd make his first scratch right where his nose was still pressed against the wall, he decided; the wall being a fairly blurry institutional green with his eyeballs so close. Rehabilitation doesn't happen all at once, Stan knew. And it was nice and quiet there. "Baby steps."

Dark World Incubator

While the average person's view of the dark world of black ops might envision dark, fluorescently lit underground bunkers in remote areas manned indeed by operatives in dark clothing – the actual operating area of most 'dark' ops was in bright daylight, "hidden in full view", as they say.

In fact, our current position is in a Silicon Valley dark world 'incubator', and not hidden at all but right out there in on a sunny hillside of high yellow grasses and

Madrona trees. The personnel involved wear jeans and polo shirts. They do yoga and a lot of personal body monitoring. They are so 'connected', that they have wifi coming out their ears. They are very bright, very ambitious, very young and very arrogant. They never ask permission first. And in the very hi/lo profiles of the emergent tech businesses in the California area, where secretiveness is seen as a harbinger of the big bucks to come, the next 'big wave to hit', this location actually stood out as the incubator where nobody knew what they did, just where a lot of people parked and worked. This placed them pretty much somewhere in the tippy top of the entrepreneurial range of moguls who ran Silicon Valley.

Suffice to say, from this pinnacle of regard they did not make modest decisions. They thought big, and they acted large.

"What if we just kill them all?" Jason Tillerson smiled.

He was sitting in his office overlooking a pleasant grassy rolling hillside of mid-California steepling his fingers. A hawk was circling in the air. Jason tapped on his eyeglasses to follow the raptor. Jason didn't need eyeglasses. His vision had already been surgically corrected to near perfection, and his actual lens replaced with fitted top of the line prosthetics with transparencies far beyond normal. The eyeglasses did other tricks. This particular trick was to zoom in on what currently interested him. By observing closely, he could tell with just a flicker of the hawk's pupil, when the bird was about to dive for the kill. 'It was a good omen', Jason smiled. They were definitely in the alpha position on this development.

"It's an option", Tatum, his Head of Operations, nodded. Tatum indulged Jason, their CEO. Jason just said this stuff because he was CEO and liked saying alpha/movie star dialogue. Jason knew that currently, killing a large number of

them in any manner would draw too much attention to Kimmel County, where the action was. It would be illogical, and therefore, strictly not a tech style, and of course immoral, so out of the question. Though that heading could turn in a heartbeat, if the CEO were to invoke the magic phrase, “Think of it as counter-intuitive.” This was the way you pivoted with flair in their community. And drama and flair—and misdirection—were very highly regarded also. Plus success, which excused near anything and about everything. Tatum was still listening. The conversation wasn’t over until Jason indicated it was, and Tatum could still hear Jason’s breathing. Tatum and Jason both had augmented hearing also.

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- [The Scam](#)
- [Ars Poetica & The Poem Addresses its Own Translator](#)
- [The Object of My Love](#)

“This AI is a wild horse, Tatum,” Jason resumed talking. “It’s running wild on the open digital range out there. It’s grown large enough that we’re starting to get sightings and horse pucky showing up. I would be very naïve to believe we are the only ones out there tracking this thing. So the race is definitely on.”

“Yes, there are indications of deep level federal involvement,” Tatum acknowledged.

“Ah, the federal government. Shiver me timbers!” Jason smirked and twirled on his desk ball chair. “Those klutzes are so far behind; they’re still working on the problems they caused.”

“Their Sheriff there has apparently been speaking with someone in the know. He’s definitely connected in some way. That’s what our boots on the ground tell me,” Tatum acknowledged.

“Who?”

“We don’t know,” Tatum admitted. “We think it’s through some sort of holographic imaging. Or else he spends a lot of time in the back booth of the Café talking to himself.”

“Uhhmm.” Jason shifted on his ball and rose to stare out the window. The hawk was coming up empty.

Jason turned away from the window. “So what do I always say?”

“Power is meaningless against leverage and position,” Tatum recited.

“And *that’s* why I’d rather be *here*,” Jason tapped the desk, “rather than sitting in the White House spending my days trying to get a zillion zombie bureaucrats to implement one simple new strategy, which those sloths have sniffed is going to be putting someone’s ass at risk.” Jason shook his head. “I think it’s pretty plain what they must have spoken about. Apparently this Sheriff is connected somehow in developments with the Matt.”

“It’s his county,” Tatum agreed.

“Good. Keep me appraised.”

This time the conversation was over. The indicator light had gone out. Tatum tapped on the cell. “Ferguson?”

“Yeah.”

“Events are moving faster than we’d like. We need you to ramp up your surveillance. The Sheriff is prime. Find out the part he plays and just what his leverage might be. Also, we need someone inside that compound.”

“Got it.”

After Jason disconnected, he adjusted his glasses and walked outside his incubator office to reflect. Sitting on the patio listening to the grasses wave in the sea air moving in from the coast miles away would forever be a balm and an energizer, he felt. It simply whispered brilliance. It was no accident that Silicon Valley materialized here. The concordances were multitudinous. The gold, the diversity, the sea, the mountains, the fresh air and sun . . . what entity of any intelligence wouldn't want to live here? That's what Silicon Valley was. It was an *entity*. And with the AI, Jason's start-up could own it. He just needed a rope to lasso it. And that's where the Fungus fit in.

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Eldon Cene died in Lompoc prison in 2012 after writing 31 unpublished novels. (An excerpt from the last of which, *The Mind Wars*—the third in the trilogy—is featured here.) To know more about Eldon, his life, and available work, please visit: amazon.com/author/eldoncene

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