

The Odyssey of a man who suffers a bizarre accident by design. He is chosen by the universe to shepherd the world of men through the minefield that will inevitably destroy them, and lead them to millennium's gate.

MILLENNIUM'S GATE: The Shadow of Giants

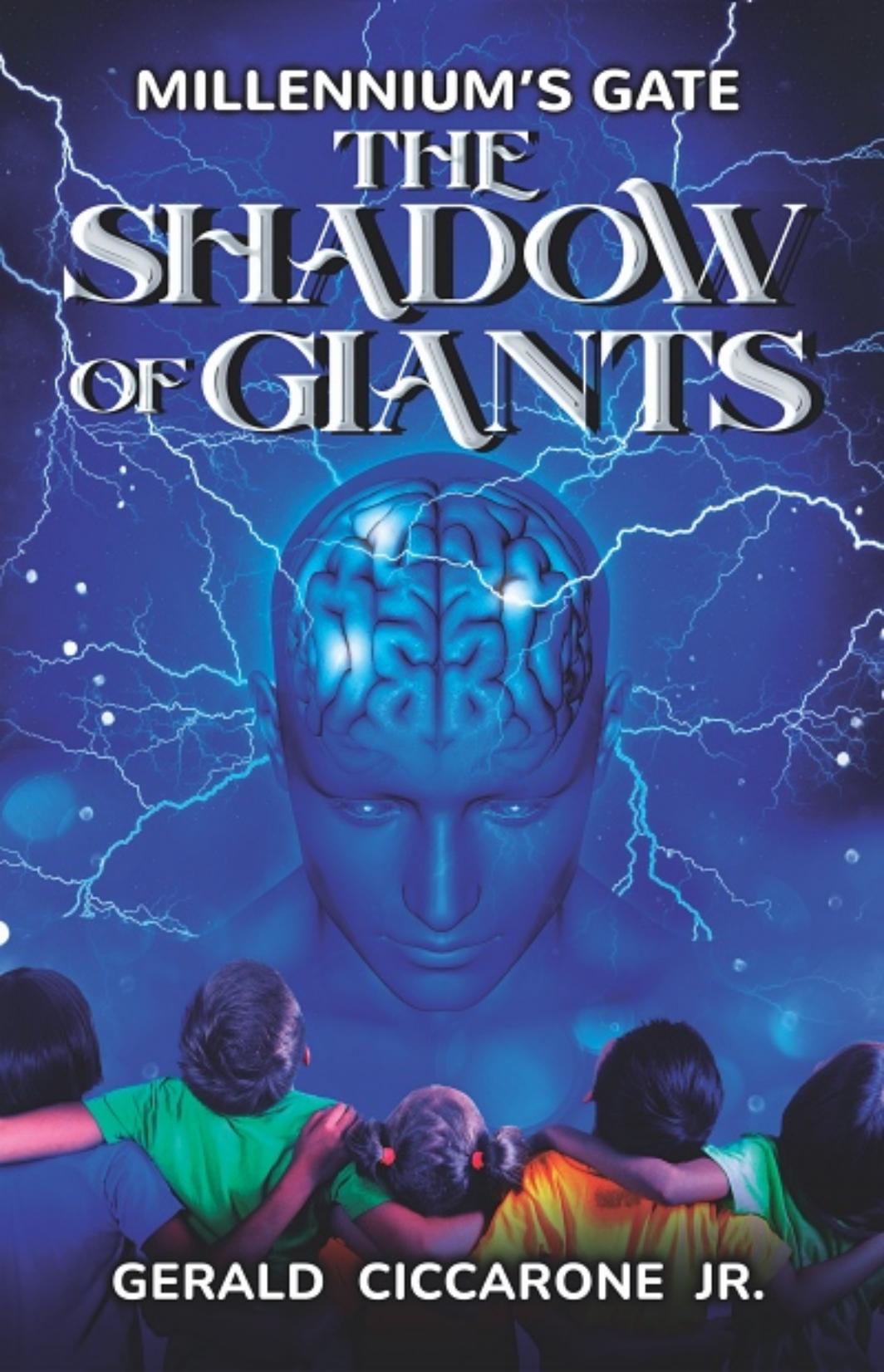
By Gerald Ciccarone

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MILLENNIUM'S GATE
THE
SHADOW
OF GIANTS



GERALD CICCARONE JR.

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First Edition

To Mollie

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Prologue

Apparently, we are entering a "Brave New World," where truth, justice, and the American way have been cast aside for subterfuge, indoctrination, and manipulation. Most of the people who live in this amazing country, still hold the traditional values which have always been the solid ground under its foundation. Local, national, and social media, as well as the doublespeak from most of our self-serving politicians, employ outright lies and innuendo to convince the majority of good people they are in the minority and their voice is irrelevant.

They have been erroneously led to believe and accept their supposed minority status, with the vast bulk of the population supposedly residing on the opposite end of the political spectrum. Such is the false propaganda being foisted on us. To quote Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's minister of propaganda:

*"Think of the press as a great keyboard on which the government can play."

*"Accuse the other side of that which you are guilty."

*"You can't change the masses. They will always be the same: dumb, gluttonous and forgetful."

*"If you repeat a lie often enough, people will begin to believe it, and you'll even come to believe it yourself."

*"Propaganda works best when those who are being manipulated are confident, they are acting on their own free will."

*"A lie told once remains a lie, but a lie told a thousand times becomes the truth."

Sound familiar? It ought to. We are living it, and it will be our undoing. Never believe for one minute this is simply, *the way it goes in all societies*. The greatest sin reasonable individuals can commit is the refusal to think and perceive reality for what it is.

Gerald Ciccarone

This is my attempt to create a character, Iggy Marcus, the epitome of integrity, bearing the standard for all honest men and women everywhere, who abhor the destruction of America, man's greatest political creation. If we refuse to take up the standard with him and abandon our obligation to posterity, we will witness America's slide into oblivion as we get what we deserve for our apathy.

Gerald Ciccarone

Every now and then, the universe appoints prime movers. Given no choice, destiny grants them the helm as existence unfolds.

Melanie Coletta-Marcus

CHAPTER I SERENDIPITY

A one-million-volt blast of brilliant white light enveloped Ignatius Marcus, followed instantly by the deafening concussion of thunder as vertical walls of the atmosphere slammed into each other in the lightning path. The lightning explosion ignited his clothing, searing the top of his head, his back, and his legs as it hammered him to the ground. He lay prostrate, crumpled, and unconscious, smoking from the intense heat. His five-year-old son, Luke, witnessed the event from the window.

"Mary!" He screamed to the housekeeper, "Mary, Daddy's hurt and he's on fire!"

Ignatius Marcus's housekeeper rushed to the window. She was sickened at the ghastly sight of the man whose children she cared for. She called 911 and ran from the house with a blanket. Luke and his younger brother, Brett, followed in her wake.

*We live, we dream, we hope, we travel the course
A life defined by achievement becomes its own measure
Shouldered burden, adversity, failure, success; are the source
In the final hour, those, not possessions, are the real treasure*

Iggy Marcus

CHAPTER II THE HOSPITAL

Iggy's eyelids fluttered open for the first time in five days. Burning needles of sunlight stung his eyes. He was on his stomach in a bed with metal railings. *What the hell am I doing here?*

Vaguely he recalled a flash of brilliant light and a deafening explosion. Then the light had slipped away, and unconsciousness engulfed him.

A woman in blue scrubs lifted something off his back. He watched her press a button wondering why she was moving in slow motion. "Doctor, could you please come in here. The patient is awake. Please lie still, Mr. Marcus, you are very seriously injured. You should stay quiet and try not to move. The doctor will be with you in a few minutes." She busied herself with a few housekeeping chores awaiting the doctor. The ICU staff had been instructed to have one person closely monitor Iggy's vital signs in the event he awoke and tried to get out of bed.

Confusion impeded his speech. It was his first conscious moment in over five days, although he had no way of knowing it. He felt physical pain, but there was something else. Something had changed dramatically but he couldn't identify it. He existed in a state of euphoria induced by pain medication.

A doctor entered the room and addressed him. "Mr. Marcus, glad to see you are back with us. I'm Dr. Peterson. How do you feel?"

Iggy groaned, groggy from the medication, as he tried to gather his thoughts. "I...I really am not sure," he stammered.

"I don't know what happened to me. There was a flash of light and an explosion; then I woke up here. Do you know what actually happened to me?"

"Yes, don't you remember?" the doctor asked. "You have been struck by lightning. You are an extremely lucky man. Somehow, you are alive. The lightning struck you on the top of the head from behind, then seared your

THE SHADOW OF GIANTS

back and legs on its way to the ground. Your head, your back and the back of your legs are severely burnt. You have second- and third-degree burns, depending on how far from the center of the lightning path the skin was. Your hair caught fire, and most of the skin on your cranium was either burned or blasted away. Frankly, we all are thoroughly amazed you are still with us. I've never heard of anyone who survived a direct lightning strike as severe as the one you have had. Your external burns are extremely severe. We have only been able to do a few tests. Your vital signs are reasonably better today than they have been. However, your injuries are still life-threatening, and you have been comatose for five days. The fact you are finally conscious, aware of your surroundings and able to communicate is more than just a little encouraging. Your internal organs somehow survived the strike, but we are not sure if they have sustained any permanent damage. Our main priority was to keep you alive and breathing, which we have been successful at...so far. You are far from being out of danger. You have been in the intensive care unit since your arrival. Unfortunately, we could not run many tests due to your weakened condition. We still must do more tests. It will be much easier for us now with you awake and able to cooperate. Your family was here several times. Your sister said you are an engineer." Dr. Peterson continued as he lifted the sheet to examine the burns.

He was weak, barely able to move. He attempted raising his head to see the doctor's face. "How long did you say I've been in here?"

"Five days in the ICU. You will have to remain lying on your stomach for quite some time. We have applied a special silicone gel and silicone bandages to your burns. The back of your body and the top of your head have third degree burns and are in rough shape. The prognosis is improving but there is just no telling how long the healing will take. Direct lightning strikes are almost always fatal. For some indeterminate reason, yours was not. I would describe that as a miracle under any circumstances. Thankfully, lightning strikes are infrequent. The survival rate depends on the magnitude of the injuries; usually defined by whether it was a direct or peripheral strike. Each person's anatomy and reaction to extreme physical and mental trauma are different. There is an additional variable in the equation. Your body was subjected to approximately a million volts of electricity. We have no time-tested baseline for the treatment and convalescence for this type of thing because they are almost always fatal. Basically, the human body is comprised of water and chemicals. The top of your central nervous system, the brain, acts as commander-in-chief for your voluntary and involuntary physical and mental operation, by sending electrical impulses through neural pathways.

Electricity energizes the entire operating system. Your survival from a million volts of electricity passing through you, may have dramatically affected that operating system. We don't know the long-term effects because the survival rate from a direct strike is almost zero. Obviously, there are short-term effects we know how to treat.

Dr. Peterson seemed to be an affable man with a relaxed congenial bedside manner. It helped Iggy feel better than he might have felt from the pain, as well as nearly getting the top of his head blown off.

His mind was beginning to clear. "Hazard a guess anyway, doctor. How long do you think I'll be in the hospital?" Then it burst in his thoughts... five days unconscious! "My God, what about my two boys, have they been told? Where are they? I hope they're okay!"

Dr. Peterson smiled. "Yes, they were here all the first day, but we sent them home with your sister once we were reasonably convinced you were going to live. They have been here several times. We told your sister we would call her as soon as there was any improvement, or you regained consciousness. I instructed a nurse to call your sister when I was told you were awake."

"Thank God I'm still alive. Their mother died and I'm all they have. They're so young, four and five years old. Will you let them in to see me?"

"Of course. Now that you're awake, we'll get you something small and bland to eat. We are giving you antibiotics and medication for pain. You will continue receiving those through your IV drip. After a lightning strike this severe, we are not exactly sure how your body is going to react to anything, even medication. You will have to remain in the ICU for some time. Tell me, Mr. Marcus, as compared to how you felt before the strike, other than the pain, how are you feeling now? Please describe any subtle differences. Lightning strike victims are rare. Any empirical data would be worth filing for future reference."

"Very strange, Doc. I am a bit groggy, but it seems to be getting better. I don't know how to describe it, but I feel very strange. Everything appears to be a little brighter than it used to, and my mind, well...it seems to be racing a mile a minute, albeit I'm slightly confused. I have a headache and feel physically very weak. Other than that, and a good deal of physical pain, I feel just ducky," Iggy said facetiously.

"Your sarcasm indicates the lightning didn't blast away your sense of humor. That's encouraging. We will schedule some tests for the morning. You now appear to be out of immediate danger, but we don't want to push you too hard. As I said, our priority is to see if any permanent damage has been done

to your internal organs. It's five PM now. We would like to start running tests after seven AM tomorrow and do an MRI for starters. It may be a lengthy process, depending on what we find, and will be somewhat strenuous considering what you've been through. You must stay in bed face down and immobile for now. We may get you up in a few days. The shock to your system has been so intense I doubt you will even be able to walk for a time. The strike traveled down your back and legs. We don't know the extent of damage that may have occurred to the spinal column, muscles, or nervous system in your legs. When we do finally get you up, it will be with support equipment and physical assistance from a therapist. I'm on call. If anything, serious arises, the staff will get in touch with me, immediately. I wanted to see you as soon as you became conscious. Right now, I must leave you and see another critical patient. You will be in good hands with the ICU nurses. See you in the morning Mr. Marcus. Try to have a reasonably good night."

The nurse repeated the doctor's instructions pointing to the call button near his left hand. "Please call the nurses' station if there is anything you need. We are right down the hall," she said, smiling.

His brief return to consciousness and the conversation with the doctor was exhausting, but he did not really feel like sleeping... just yet. He thought about what happened to him and how lucky he was to be alive. He scanned the room, turning his head from side to side, with difficulty. It was hard to see much while lying on his stomach. He gazed through the window. Everything seemed unusually bright and focused. He began to reflect on his life, a thing young people rarely do until they have a near death experience. Athletic and fit from years of figure skating and refraining from the use of alcohol or tobacco, probably had quite a bit to do with his survival. The oldest son of four children, he was very close to his two brothers and sister. All four had been semi-indentured servants to the family restaurant business. None of them liked it much while growing up, but he eventually realized after he left for college, why his father had worked them so hard in the restaurant. It kept them out of trouble and above all, taught them the work ethic.

His mother was primarily responsible for the formation of his character. He remembered how passionately his mother loved them all. He never quite understood what she meant when she said, "*I'm going to make Renaissance children out of all four of you even if it kills me.*" It wasn't until much later, looking back, he understood the many years of piano, dance, singing lessons, Little League and other activities Rebecca unfailingly shuttled them to. She was his inspiration to do the same for his two boys. He and his two brothers were typical boys and mischief was no stranger. His father worked a sixteen-

I think what the hell is next and then sure enough, some new crazy thing comes along. He stood there for some minutes, oblivious to everything except the realization that whatever had happened to him seemed to be constantly expanding.

The other men were staring at him. “Mr. Marcus.... Mr. Marcus.... Mr. Marcus.” Dr. Miltner had to say it three times before he snapped Iggy back to the present.

“Oh, yes... I... uh... uh...was thinking about my boys. Sorry, I'm a single parent,” he fumbled, “and I worry about them too much.” He put his hands in his pockets. One thing for sure, he wasn't going to shake any more hands.

There was a knock on the door and Dr. Peterson entered. Relief washed over Iggy when he saw Dr. Peterson. He was anxious from his recent profound experience, and felt he was perched on a tight rope, surrounded by one man he didn't particularly care for, and five other men he didn't really know too well. Dr. Peterson was sort of an emotional safety net.

“I hope I didn't take you away from anything too important, Dr. Peterson,” said Iggy. “I appreciate your coming more than you know.”

Iggy felt a little foolish standing there with his hands in his pockets, but he wasn't going to shake hands again, at least not until he experimented with this new ability a little more. He greeted Mr. Klein and Mr. Redford from a distance. *If they think I am aloof for not shaking their hands, well, they'll just have to get over it.*

The three members of the board of directors expressed how pleased they were to meet Iggy. They mentioned they had heard about his healing abilities and were very eager to find out more about the process. They chatted about the weather for a few minutes. Once they were past the social amenities, Dr. Packwood was the first to speak.

“We are extremely interested in your condition, Mr. Marcus. We understand you were almost killed by a direct lightning strike approximately two weeks ago, and your injuries were critical when you arrived here. I have seen photographs exhibiting their severity. This healing transformation you have gone through, in such a short time, is truly remarkable. In fact, it's hardly believable. Frankly, after seeing the photographs, if you were not standing here in front of us just eleven days later, apparently with no ill effects, I would *not* believe it.”

Dr. Miltner broke in, “We, the Board of Directors and the doctors present at this meeting, are hoping for, and highly anticipate, your cooperation. We would like to learn, if we can, to understand and, then perhaps duplicate what has happened to you, in other patients. Our hospital is a very fine research

facility. We believe it would be to all of our advantages, yours and ours, if you would give us the opportunity”

“Well,” said Iggy, “I completely understand what you're asking. I believe the advancement of medicine resulting from such research would benefit everyone. However, I am a self-employed structural engineer in private practice. I am also a single parent of two young sons. Since my wife's death a year and a half ago, my life has been a very full plate. I might be willing to cooperate with the hospital, to some degree, on an outpatient basis because I see the importance of the research. We *can* further discuss this. I will not, however, allow anything to become a full-time impediment in my or my children's lives.”

Boy, is this new mental condition of mine a real game changer. He could sense their emotional state when he concentrated and focused on each one of the men in the room. There were other things he couldn't quite put his finger on, yet. He had Dr. Packwood figured out. His brief electrical communion, or whatever it was, had been extremely revealing once he had the time to sort it out. Packwood's motives were considerably less noble than those he had sensed in Dr. Peterson. Dr. Peterson had a love for medicine, and his primary concern was the care of his patients. He knew Dr. Packwood, on the other hand, was more interested in studying him to advance his career.

Iggy had always known there was a fine line between selfishness and greed. Selfishness as he defined it, was the primary concern for one's own well-being, which was a virtue considering the fact an individual must first take care of himself before he could take care of another. Conversely, greed was the primary “me first” concern of an individual; even if it meant their self-aggrandizement was often at the expense of others. The character of most people was a balance sheet comprised of opposite poles, selfishness on one side, greed on the other. It was rare to find an individual with character residing exclusively on one side. Most people vacillated between the two sides, to one degree or another. Their position on the balance sheet always defined their intellectual and moral stature.

He chatted with the other two men for a few minutes more. They verbally expressed similar viewpoints to those of Dr. Packwood. He had not shaken their hands or touched them in any way. Consequently, he did not have the intense familiarity with them as he had with Dr. Packwood. But even from a distance, Iggy could sense their mental and emotional composition. This sense of other people's persona was all new to Iggy. It wasn't like a photograph. It was a mental image with observable parameters, as explicit and tangible as a photograph, just not visible. He knew, like both Drs.

Packwood and Miltner, their primary focus was less on the advancement of medicine to alleviate suffering, than it was about the advancement of medicine, which would place their name and the name of this institution atop the fame and fortune pedestal.

“Well,” said Dr. Miltner, “we had better get started. We can sit right here at the conference table. Dr. Collins has brought the files and test results with him.” Iggy's treatment team, Dr. Packwood, and Dr. Miltner moved to seats at the conference table. Mr. Klein and Mr. Redford, again, told Iggy it was a pleasure meeting him as they walked toward the exit.

They took seats at the conference table. Dr. Miltner, of course, was at the head of the table. Drs. Packwood, Roberts and Collins were on one side. He and Dr. Peterson were on the other.

Dr. Miltner spoke first. “I'm going to let Dr. Collins lead this off. He is our leading neurological expert at the hospital and is best qualified to explain the results of the testing.”

“What do you understand about the human brain, Mr. Marcus?” asked Dr. Collins.

Iggy thought for a moment before deciding his reply. He would leave Dr. Collins in control for now. “Not very much compared to the level of expertise I'm sure you possess. I'm quite well read about many things and have a smattering of knowledge about those types of things. Why don't we just presume I'm pretty smart guy, but don't know much about anything concerning the physiology of the brain. What I would like to find out, here, is what *you* consider the implications are for me.”

“Okay,” said Dr. Collins, “that's a starting point. I'll describe the components of the human brain. It is comprised of two hemispheres, a right and a left. We understand the left hemisphere generally controls the right side of the body, and the right hemisphere generally controls the left side. I brought a diagram of the brain for you to look at. Both hemispheres are comprised of four lobes. Those four lobes, in total, are called the cerebrum.”

“The frontal lobe is associated with reason, problem-solving, emotions, movement and speech. We understand you are an engineer. That is the portion of the brain you most frequently use for volitional activity. The parietal lobe is associated with movement, orientation, recognition, and the perception of stimuli. The occipital lobe is associated with visual processing. The temporal lobe is associated with perception, recognition of auditory stimuli, memory and speech.”

“The cerebellum is similar to the cerebrum in that it has two hemispheres and a folded surface. It is associated with movement, posture, and balance.

The limbic system, another portion of the brain is found buried within the cerebellum. It is often referred to as *the emotional brain*”.

“For the purposes of this meeting, I do not feel we have to delve into any greater depth than that.”

“You have been tested with an electroencephalograph. It measures the electrical activity in the brain that is the result of electro-chemical signaling between neurons. Like all electrical energy, signaling can vary in frequency and amplitude. I'm sure I don't have to explain anything at all about that to you. Basically, the EEG measures the electrical activity of the brain in response to stimulation of specific nerve pathways.”

“Across the board, there is a general norm for analysis of the results of an EEG. We use the device to inspect the electrical wave patterns for irregularities that may be associated with various anomalies, such as stroke, dementia, epilepsy, memory changes, brain tumors and a host of other things. When we read an EEG, something we do very frequently, we are able to compare wave patterns existing somewhere in the normal range, with wave patterns existing outside the normal range. Often things are revealed to us as they fit within a specific wave pattern caused by a specific abnormality.”

“It can be an excellent diagnostic tool, but it also lacks a certain specificity. It may not exactly describe what is causing the problem. It may just exhibit what the problem is. Prior to the advent of CT scan and MRI machines, especially the MRI, there were not many devices or methods that would refine testing to determine the root cause of physical abnormalities. X-rays of soft tissue may be inconclusive and exploratory surgery is often not an option. The new technology allows us to see all the aspects of a certain portion of anatomy by creating layered visual images. We are attempting to assess your brain wave activity, with a simple EEG scan, because of the pain you experienced during the MRI scan. He removed the printouts of the EEG tests from a briefcase and placed them on the table in front of Iggy.

“Frankly, Mr. Marcus, your EEG readings, if I were to see them without knowing the integrity of the test, I would say they were a fake...a fraud. I would say no human being could possibly have brain waves such as yours. The frequency is so compact, and the spikes or amplitude is so high, the machine will not measure the limits. Simply put, your brain waves exceed the capability of the machine to measure and record. The machine was designed to measure the electrical waves of the normal or average human brain, not the intense electrical activity your brain apparently produces. Our first reaction was the assumption the machine was defective. After testing you on two different machines, both having the same results, it is obvious

there is no mechanical problem. You, Mr. Marcus, are unique. Had someone other than myself administered the test, I would assume there *must* be either an equipment or an operational error. That is how bizarre the results are.”

“However, you are sitting here in front of us and appear to be completely normal, Mr. Marcus, and that is a contradiction. The electrical activity of your brain exists outside normal medical parameters, as we know them. We cannot explain why. We’ve never seen anything comparable, so we have no idea what is producing the effect...yet. Consequently, we have no way of accurately measuring the extent of the electrical output of your brain with a conventional electroencephalograph. To conduct this research, a different method of testing your brain waves must be employed; perhaps an oscilloscope that would measure a broader waveform on the electromagnetic spectrum. That would require a collaborative medical and scientific effort to find or modify a machine to do the job. That puts you right in the middle of the mix, Mr. Marcus. You are the only test subject.”

“The implications for you are another thing, altogether. You remember how I described the four lobes of the brain and what activities they are responsible for controlling. Let me draw you a simple analogy, describing the disparity between the average normal electrical activity of the human brain and the electrical activity your brain exhibits. Imagine normal human brain waves are comparable to a motor scooter. Mr. Marcus, your brain waves are comparable to a Ferrari. I don't mean to be so simplistic, but I hope I'm getting my point across. Normal electrical activity of the brain, as measured by the electroencephalograph, is the baseline. However, your brain waves exceed the parameters this machine is designed to measure. We can discover the answers to most complex questions with research and analysis. I'm quite sure your use of the scientific method as an engineer is along those lines. However, it is impossible to predict what the long-term effects of your condition will be with the information we possess at this point.”

“I understand you had an MRI scan, and it was agonizing. We will not ask you to do that, again. A CT scan, or CAT scanner, is a glorified x-ray machine. It is actually more than that. Its operation is based on x-ray technology, but I don't need to elaborate now. A CAT scan might be useful. The MRI tunnel subjected you to an intense magnetic field. Dr. Roberts and I believe it was the intense magnetic field that caused you pain. Dr. Peterson has described some of the symptoms or manifestations of your new brain activity. It is my understanding the lightning strike somehow began this process. When you were exposed to the magnetic field from the MRI, the

condition was apparently amplified. Our assumption is the complex relationship magnetism has to electricity has created this phenomenon.”

Iggy was frustrated as he listened to the simplistic, patient-oriented explanation presented by the doctor. He sat through the entire elucidation in respectful silence. He decided it was time to interject his thoughts and expose himself.

“Excuse me doctors, would you mind letting me take it from here,” Iggy said with a forced shade of humility. “I’ve been theorizing on my own. Please allow me to elaborate.” He continued without waiting for their permission or affirmation. “Electromagnetic force that is measurable, is the physical interaction between electrically charged particles. Electromagnetic force exhibits itself in magnetic fields. Electric fields and magnetic fields are almost synonymous, but not quite. Electromagnetic force, sometimes called the Lorentz force, is comprised inseparably of both magnetism and electricity.”

He elaborated on a concise, technically detailed definition of the minimal differences between, and similarities of both, as well as the corroborating mathematics.

“I could further define exactly what electricity is, along with its complex relationship to magnetism, but that isn’t necessary to our purpose here. Suffice it to say, analogously, it is the glue holding all matter together and allows matter/energy interactions. It is also the component force of all the other physical manifestations of energy we perceive, such as light and gravity, as well as the operating system that allows the brain to process information. I believe what happened to me, partially from the lightning strike and partially from magnetic field of the MRI, is the four lobes of my brain have been stimulated, causing the electromagnetic output of my brain to be exponentially elevated. I’ve been thinking about this a great deal. My technical background and education are ideal for the exploration of this phenomenon, especially with myself being the test subject. My professional expertise has more to do with structural engineering than electrical engineering; however, the physics of electrochemical energy generation as related to brain function is the avenue of study I intend to rigorously pursue.”

He then spent the better part of 30 minutes explaining the complex mathematics of magnetoencephalography, needed to measure his neuro-electric chemistry, as it relates to the radically changed chemical composition of his brain resulting from the lightning strike and the MRI tunnel. He explained how his potassium balance as well as other chemical components surrounding neurons, axons and ganglia must have changed dramatically,

thus exponentially enhancing neural activity. It was somehow facilitating numerous micro voltages and electrochemical activity that apparently gave his brain information processing capabilities unheard of, by creating billions of new neural pathways.

"My brother, Jack, brought me a few recorded books to learn about cerebral mechanics, at my request, allowing me to elaborate on what I suspect has happened to my brain. Two neurons are normally connected via gap junctions which provide for electrical synapses. I believe the axons in the neurons in my brain, which join at the axon hillocks and are connected with each other by dendrites, or dendritic trees as they are usually referred to, have exponentially multiplied creating an abnormally large quantity of connections between neurons, numbering in the trillions. This has amplified the electrical potential of ion flow through the neural membranes, to a degree much greater than before the lightning strike and the MRI magnetic field was applied. This not only increases the chemical synapse action potential, but it also dramatically triggers a much larger quantitative release of neurotransmitters. That is due to the increase of many billions of dendrites, I now seem to possess."

"As you know, electrical synapses are much more rapid than chemical synapses, but usually diminish considerably from one neuron to the next. I believe the enhanced electric neurotransmission, in my electrical synapses, increase instead of diminishing in their longevity. Coupled with the enormous quantitative increase of my dendritic trees, which apparently continue to expand, the electrical activity of my brain has been exponentially increased. It's probably been multiplied hundreds or perhaps thousands of times. This is an apparently logical explanation for my brain allowing a much greater processing speed for information, from one neuron to the next. I believe each dendrite or filament, is a memory storage component, like a computer file, operated electrically; the computer being mechanical, but mine being organic. I have trillions of extra dendrites, or pathways if you will, each of which, represents a memory storage repository."

"This is only my theory mind you, but I am quite confident I'm very close to accuracy. I could go on about this for hours, but I don't want to bore you all with my layman's theories. I intend to study this in much greater depth, until I understand everything known about the mechanics and mathematics of cerebral metabolism to date, and then hypothesize on the increased efficacy of neural messaging I seem to possess. You would think I would have a perpetual, massive headache, he joked."

Only Dr. Peterson chuckled at his effort of humor.

“As far as the healing goes, that is another story altogether. This condition has only existed within me, for the better part of two weeks, certainly not enough time for research and analysis, only conjecture. I do believe my brain, which has somehow been enhanced as I described, is directly responsible for the accelerated healing processes of my body. Consider this; the brain is our biological computer, so to speak. It is the master controller of all the functions of the human body, directing all voluntary and involuntary functions, consciously and subconsciously. One of those functions, a subsystem of the human anatomy, is the brain-directed healing process. I believe the rapid healing process, I have undergone, definitely saved my life, and is directly proportionate to the elevated output of my brain.”

“Usually when the body heals, the process is driven at the local level of the injury, by impulses emanating from the surrounding nervous system. We know how cellular regeneration occurs, so I won't go into that. Normally, the brain is not actually involved in healing on a local level. However, my brain is generating trillions more electrical impulses through electrical synapses, than commonly occur in any process, including healing. My metabolism has been altered so the healing process becomes directly controlled by the cerebral cortex, as opposed to allowing it to take its local course. I can explain this much further, as to how and why I believe this, but we would be here for hours. I don't see any other possibilities. I am quite positive of this. I haven't been able to fully substantiate this theory mathematically, but I am working on it.”

“It is my opinion, unverifiable at this point, duplication of the process that transformed me, from what I was last week to what I now am, may not be repeatable. The odds of me surviving that lightning strike are, who knows, a million to one, perhaps. The transformation, the freak accident or coincidence of my improbable survival of one million volts of electricity passing through me, certainly can't be successfully deployed to others via instrumentality. There would be an enormous risk to the subject.”

“My abilities seem to be consistently expanding, so I intend to leave no stone unturned when I explore every possibility, which I am convinced is the best way to understand what is happening to me. What I'm respectfully saying, doctors, is I intend to do this research on my own. By this statement, I am not saying I don't want to be associated with the hospital or its research facilities. I am only saying I would prefer to do this on my own, and from time to time, cooperate and share my research with the research staff here.”

Doctors," he addressed them. "I am now a freak of nature, an aberration, and I intend to use this constructively."

The doctors sat in silence after Iggy finished. They were more than just slightly intimidated by Iggy's description of matter and energy, relating to his theories about his new elevated intellect. Except for Dr. Peterson, Iggy sensed insecurity. They had just listened to someone who apparently had a far better grasp on the physics of electricity, as it relates to cerebral function, than they did, and lecture them in simple terms so they would understand. They had been trying to do exactly that to him. That was not supposed to happen in their professional orbit, and they resented it.

Dr. Miltner was the first to reply. Iggy sensed the dismay in him. He also sensed Dr. Miltner's executive mentality considered everything in life to be a game of chess, especially everything related to his position as chairman of the board. He knew Dr. Miltner owned the chessboard and wanted to control all the chess pieces.

"We had all hoped and anticipated you would work with us to explore your new abilities. We urge you to capitalize on the superior medical research capabilities of both staff and equipment offered here and at our affiliated university. Your background and capabilities are impressive. I would like to offer, and I'm positive the Board of Directors will agree, this hospital's facilities as the center of your research on a peer level. You would not be considered a patient but would have considerable control of the research."

Iggy smiled to himself. He knew exactly what Dr. Miltner meant by considerable; only some control, with himself, the chairman of the board, as captain of the ship. He knew Dr. Miltner was considering the accolades and the associated wealth, and perhaps even a Nobel Prize could be snagged, with himself as captain of his team. Thanks to his mother, Iggy had left all those false self-image boosters far behind. Since he was a young man, it had never been even a small portion of his character. He didn't need a captain for anything. All he had ever desired was the unfettered laissez-faire attitude of others as he pursued his dreams and aspirations.

They were ingratiating, as they all profusely thanked him for participating in the meeting, and he knew exactly why. They did not want to offend or alienate him. He knew Drs. Roberts and Collins desperately wanted to study him, to learn more about his physiology of healing and expanded mentality. He was sure their motive was the advancement of medicine, but he also sensed, in them, a flicker of ego-driven self-advancement. And then...there was going to be the money... Lots of money in the form of grants and private capital. He could almost see the dollar signs in their eyes. *This*

new heightened sense of perception is really going to come in useful. He knew he had accurately sensed these things. Iggy also sensed Dr. Peterson was on his side. He was sure Dr. Peterson's primary motive was the patient's well-being. Sure, he would love to discover a way to easily heal the ills of the world, but Dr. Peterson wouldn't take advantage of anyone, purely to advance his own position.

"I was going to have myself discharged this morning and go home to my sons. I guess I can give it a few more days, considering the fact I might have wound up in this hospital for months anyway. If you don't mind, I would like to go back to my room now and rest."

They all rose from their seats. Iggy's hands remained in his pockets. As they walked down the hall toward the elevator, he lagged a little behind until he could talk to Dr. Peterson. He and Dr. Peterson were somewhat behind the others. Iggy said to him almost in a whisper, "Would you walk me back to my room, Dave? I want to tell you something important."

"Sure, Iggy. But we must make it quick. I already have a tight schedule, today, considering this meeting."

After the other doctors had gone their separate ways, Iggy described his experience with Dr. Packwood when they shook hands. Dr. Peterson shook his head in wonder.

"Iggy, you are one horse of a different color. I wondered what was next, the other day, and thought perhaps the next thing would be that you would sprout wings and fly out the window. God only knows what tomorrow will bring. Your statements at the meeting were more than impressive. At the risk of sounding maudlin, even though it's been a very short time, I feel a fatherly affection for you, and I believe you are destined for greatness. I must leave you, now, but will stop in and see you in the morning."

He smiled warmly at Dr. Peterson. "I already know how you feel, and appreciate the fact you've become a friend, as well as my doctor. I thank you for it. See you later."

Iggy was lost in thought as he descended in the elevator and walked across the hospital. *I must find a way to experiment with my new cognitive powers, without letting anybody other than Dr. Peterson know.* He didn't want to compromise Dr. Peterson, as a member of the hospital staff. Even though Dr. Peterson had his own private practice, he was affiliated with the hospital and had a duty to inform his superiors about anything pertinent to an inpatient. He wondered if perhaps he had been too casual, informing Dr. Peterson about his incident with Dr. Packwood. He decided he had given Dr. Peterson very little empirical proof of the incident, so no harm had been done.

He had a life with his sons. Now that Clara was gone, they needed him more than ever. He wasn't going to allow a barrage of research testing and the ensuing publicity come between himself and his two boys under any circumstances. His crystal-clear vision displayed the possible difficulties of the hospital staff's knowledge of his enhanced capabilities, as clearly as if he were reading a technical manual. He must avoid the consequences of that. The usual trauma and confusion resulting from severe injuries had subsided completely. He had healed to the point he felt completely normal, other than the fact his mind had been so dramatically expanded, and his new skin was mildly irritated here and there. He couldn't wait to apply his new abilities to his profession. He saw incredible possibilities opening to him. He saw his life spread before him. He realized Dr. Peterson was correct. He was immensely excited with the realization he would be able to achieve much more than was possible to him prior to the injuries.

Iggy had always been different, emotionally, and intellectually, then most people. His rigid principles, attitude and sense of morality stepped outside those perpetrated on society by mass media and social mores. What other people took for granted, he thoroughly explored before accepting it as dogma. He didn't think he was better than anyone. He just was always sure of himself, technically, as well as esoterically. As for the technical aspects of his life, his confidence was due to his education and analytical mind. If he wasn't sure, he explored and experimented until he was confident, he had discovered all the features of the subject. His confidence about things more esoteric came from analyzing every existential question. He read just about everything every philosopher had ever written and had an enormous mental library to tap for information. His newly expanded mind gave him an enormous capacity for intellectual multitasking, and he constantly surprised himself as he experienced new capabilities. He wasn't sure about his contact with Dr. Packwood and what the implications were. That still needed to be explored. He was actually becoming grateful for the lightning strike and couldn't see a downside as he became comfortable with the changes. Maybe one would manifest itself later. Hopefully not. There probably wouldn't be anything he could do about it, anyway. His thought process became lightning fast. He didn't think in words, anymore. Images of things or problems flashed into his mind, and it seemed almost instantly, the solutions or answers were there staring back.

He often viewed the human condition and aberrant activities of people and wondered why they chose to do the things they did or stood their ground on futile positions contradicting common sense. Like most people, he

Six months later, almost to the date of his first contact with Iggy Marcus, Tom Rickart oversaw all security for the various subsidiaries and holdings of Lightning Inc. and *American Media Inc.* as well. As it turned out, he was still the head of security for Solex. His visits to various entities of Lightning Inc. kept him on the road for three weeks out of every month. Like his boss, he was a multi-tasker with highly developed organizational skills. He had several hundred men working for him in various locations who reported directly to him. He reported directly to the Marcus family. He had been unlocked by Iggy on several occasions and often remarked to his wife about the strange twists and turns life provides. He had returned to Lightning from Cape Canaveral only a few hours before. Solex was fulfilling its obligations launching satellites, men, and equipment into orbit to join the crew of the space station. He parked his Hummer in the driveway as his wife and son came out to greet him. His two-way radio beeped. "Rickart here," He answered as he planted a huge kiss on his wife's lips.

"It's Lucky, Tom. Did you just get in?"

"Yup, Lucky, about a half an hour ago. I'm standing here in the front yard smooching Evelyn. What's up?"

"How long are you here for, Tom, before you have to travel again?"

"I'm in for the week. I've been to many of our remotes and everything's copacetic. I've got a lot of paperwork to do and organizational stuff ahead of me this week.

"I don't want to rain on your parade, so I won't insist on tonight, but Iggy and I need to see you at L1. We have a particular piece of equipment to give you. I'm sure you'll find it quite fascinating and useful. How about tomorrow morning?"

"Fine. What time?"

"How does 9 o'clock sound? It'll give you some time to have breakfast with the family."

"I'll be there."

"Perfect, Tom. See you in the a.m. By the way, make sure you're wearing the watch."

"The only time it leaves my wrist is in the shower or the hot tub," he smiled and winked at Evelyn who raised her eyebrows and snuggled up to him at the mention of the hot tub.

He arrived at L1, the electronics manufacturing building, at 9 AM sharp to find Iggy and Lucky waiting for him. "Good morning, gentlemen. I would

normally ask what's up, but knowing you guys, I'm quite sure it's something more than a mere curiosity."

"You could say that." Lucky was wearing his best sardonic grin. "We've got quite a little piece of innovative equipment for you, Tom. You're gonna love it; it's right up your alley. Let's go inside and we'll give you a demo."

All three men were in the lab where *Iggy 1* had been developed. There was a 10' x10' x 6" thick steel platform on a concrete base at one end of the lab. Lucky was still smiling and reached into to a box marked EXPLOSIVES where he removed three common sticks of dynamite. Rickart knew what it was but had absolutely no idea what they were going to do with it. He knew for certain it was going to be something fascinating. Hardly a day went by, or any major occurrence happened, involving Iggy and Lucky, that did not involve the bizarre and unusual. Lucky walked to the pedestal and put the three sticks of dynamite on the steel platform after he had inserted blasting caps. Tom stared at them skeptically with raised eyebrows but remained silent, waiting for their latest magic trick.

Iggy was busy entering information into the computer while he held up a small 3" x 6" x 3" thick gray box and turned placing it in Tom's hand. "Check this thing out, Tom. What do you think it is?"

"I haven't got the foggiest, but knowing you guys, it could be just about anything. I would've said some new kind of computer, except I'm wearing one on my wrist in the form of a watch."

"Check this out," said Lucky as he took the box from Tom and placed the gray box about five feet from the three sticks of dynamite on the steel platform.

Tom looked at the two brothers. They wore the mischievous smiles of teenagers about to throw their first beer bash. He loved the Marcus brothers. Since his involvement with the Marcus family, his life had become more exciting and unique than he had ever dreamed possible. For the first time in his life, his job fulfilled him and gave him a sense of purpose. He had no idea what he was about to witness but he was quite certain it would be amazing.

"Watch this," said Lucky, as Iggy pressed a button on a remote-control device in his left hand. Lucky pointed to the steel platform. A semi-spherical dome about 4 feet in diameter and 2 feet high, like a kind of translucent material, appeared over the sticks of dynamite. Tom was just beginning to comprehend what was going on when Lucky grabbed his hand and pulled him over to the platform. "Go on, Tom, try to pick up one of those sticks of dynamite."

Rickart reached to pick up a stick of dynamite, but his hand would not penetrate the translucent dome. "No shit!" He exclaimed. He was educated and astute enough to know he was looking at some kind of magnetic force field surrounding the three sticks of dynamite. Grinning, he looked at Lucky. "You guys are a riot. There's never a dull moment. I get it. I pretty much know what this is but explain to me how it all works."

"Okay," said Iggy. "I'll tell you exactly how it works. The box is the device. It is a power generator as well as a magnetic field generator. Because of its size, it only has an effective radius of approximately 20 feet, but it can be tailored by the user to any size or shape necessary within those parameters. It must be operated in conjunction with the computer in your wristwatch. The computer 'operating system' controls the technology and allows you to tailor it exactly."

"How do you tailor it? I don't see any external controls, like buttons or control pads."

"Herein lies the beauty of this device, Tom." He held out a small plastic box in his hand for

Tom to hold. "Look inside. What do you see?"

"It looks like something a little smaller than a dime. What is it? A chip?"

"Yup, it's a computer chip we implant in your cerebral cortex. It attaches itself to your brain with nanowires. It becomes a control module with a wireless connection to the computer you're wearing on your wrist, which will direct the little gray box you're wearing on your belt, to open the magnetic force field. If you give it the mental order to operate, it will operate instantly and be tailored to the parameters your mental image dictates pictorially."

"You guys have to be shitting me." He had a huge grin on his face. "You guys actually invented something like this? And it really works? Amazing. Being around you guys is like being a kid in a candy store. So, what's with the dynamite? I'm not sure I get all of this completely."

"This is the best part, Tom. We cooked this little demonstration up for you so you can see the efficacy of our force shield. We'll explain, exactly, what it's good for but first the demo."

He handed a pair of sunglasses to Rickart. "Here, wear these. We're about to detonate three sticks of dynamite inside that little force shield enclosure and the flash will be pretty bright."

"I think I'll go in the other room and watch this through the observation window, if you don't mind," Tom said to the two brothers.

Nope, Tom. We are going to be standing six feet from the dynamite when we detonate it. Believe me, it's in the job description."

"I have just one question before you two guys blow us all up. Which one of you is Jekyll and which one of you is Hyde?"

Iggy shook his head laughing as he pressed enter. There was a blinding flash of light under the dome as the three sticks of dynamite detonated, but there was not a sound. "While there was enough explosive power in there, Tom, to blow this room to smithereens, none of us could hear, feel or smell the results of the explosion. I'll leave the force field operational because the residue from the explosion will have to be evacuated by fans after we leave the room, and the force field is turned off. Before we turn off the force field, we must give the mental command through the little gray box to dissipate the energy of the blast via magnetic dissolution. We will teach you how to do that because it takes specific commands."

"Let me call this one, guys, so I get it exactly right." Tom Rickart was laughing. "You guys have invented a little gray box I can hang on my belt that will instantly surround me with an impenetrable force field, and all I have to do is think it into existence when I need it."

"Yup," said Lucky; the sardonic grin was back. "That's just about it, Tom, you called it right. What's more, each device will be tailored or set to the individual user's brain waves and be useless to anyone else."

Tom stood for a while staring at the force field dome still operational on the steel platform and filled with smoke and particles of debris from the explosion. With a broad grin, he was contemplating how these two men were about to change the way every human being on the planet relates to each other, and the entire concept of personal security. "I've got to tell you guys; this is one fun place to work. God, I love this job!"

"Interesting device, isn't it?" Iggy asked. Not waiting for an answer, he continued, "It has a radius of a little under twenty feet, and we want to increase that to at least one hundred. The force field surrounds you on all sides, as well as above and below. You can form a mental picture of where you want the boundaries and that is where they will be. You can encapsulate as many people as will fit in the boundary limits of the field. What it can also do is set up a field excluding the field generator. In other words, whoever is using the device, if it is on his person, he will not be centered in the force field chamber by necessity."

Rickart undid his watchband and held the watch out to Iggy. "Here, Iggy, I suspect you want my watch... That is the reason you told me to wear it...isn't it?"

Iggy smiled at Tom's perception of his immediate environment and swift appropriate response to stimuli. It was the reason the Marcus family placed

him in charge of their entire security apparatus. "Yes, Tom, Lucky is going to make a few alterations to it right now if you agree to become our first cerebral cortex chip implant guinea pig."

"You mean no one else has tried this yet?"

"Not exactly. The entire Marcus family, and Dave and Sylvia Peterson have the implants. You are to be the first person outside immediate family and the Peterson's who will possess this technology."

"Really? You mean you can actually activate the force field right now, just by thinking it?"

"Absolutely. All I have to do is grab one of our little gray boxes, hang it on my belt and adjust the frequency to work with my chip and my watch."

"This I've got to see. Show me." Tom said.

Iggy reached into a cabinet over the workbench and pulled out a small gray box identical to the one on the steel platform. He set the box on a metal plate adjacent to the computer and punched the keyboard. A moment later, he clipped the small gray box to his belt and grinned at Tom Rickart. "Okay, the frequencies are aligned, Tom. Watch this."

The same seemingly translucent field that had surrounded the dynamite sticks on the platform, appeared around Iggy approximately two inches from him in all directions. "If you energize the field and move, the force field stays with you following your contours as prescribed by your mind. Watch Tom, I'll demonstrate." His shield remained two inches from his body in every direction except at his feet, as he walked across the room. "The only place it is not exactly 2 inches from my physical body is at the bottom of my feet. There, it is directly between my soles and the walking surface. All I have to do is think it, and my mental picture does the rest." Both Lucky and Tom wore ear-to-ear grins knowing they were watching science fiction come to life. "What you think, Tom? Want the brain chip?" Said Iggy with a matching grin as he fluttered his eyebrows, Groucho Marx style.

"Wait," said Lucky, laughing. "Let's give him a better demo before he makes up his mind."

Iggy, smiling, shook his head yes as he pointed in front of him. He began conjuring the same substance or translucence in a multitude of shapes and sizes, like stars, animals, and other sorts of oddities, one after another, appearing briefly, then immediately disappearing.

Lucky and Tom laughed heartily. "This is like being at some sort of goofy Halloween party." Tom finally stopped laughing. "Boy would my kid have a blast with this thing. It sure would make one hell of a Christmas present. I see exactly what you mean, now. You can tailor the field to whatever your

brain conjures up. If that isn't the damndest thing I've ever seen, I don't know what is. Okay, I'm sold, give me the brain chip."

"I figured you would want one," said Iggy. "Dave Peterson is expecting you at the hospital. You can go over there now if you like. Being minor surgery, the procedure will take about half an hour. Then it will take approximately six hours for the nano wires to work themselves into the cerebral cortex. After that, all you must do is show up here, get your box and hang it off your belt. I'll adjust the frequencies to align with your watch and your new chip."

"There is another feature we haven't explained to you. This technology is not going to be made available to the public, yet, or to anyone else outside our influence. There's going to be a disclaimer engraved on every box. We expect to give as many of these out to security personnel, family members, and anyone else we feel needs protection. The disclaimer will state: any attempt to open this box will cause the contents to self-destruct, which could be life-threatening or injurious to the intruder."

"I wonder what the government will say about life safety, and not allowing the use of the force field because of the danger it presents if you tamper with it."

"I don't think they'll have anything to say about it," said Lucky. "They let people own guns and drive cars. More people die on the highway every year than from anything else because they don't use vehicles properly. Plus...we're not asking their permission, anyway. We are not allowing them to disallow it. Of course, they will try to confiscate and control it, that's a given. Technology that powerful would prevent them from having control over everybody. After all--remember--we are the 'sheeple' and they are the 'ranchers.'"

Tom Rickart shook his head in acquiescence, "You guys don't let much get past you, do you?"

"No," Iggy responded. "We can't, Tom. This technology is more than sophisticated. It represents entirely new concepts, and the application of new laws of physics that contradict most of the existing concepts the scientific world possesses. Not only that...we have discovered, or I should say invented, a brand-new technology allowing the micro miniaturization of things, which is not just unforeseen, but seemingly impossible to the average scientific mind. The concepts are beyond anything man has conceived to date, or probably would have conceived for hundreds of years. Humanity is not ready for this technology. We are consistently trying to destroy ourselves with existing technologies. This would open the door to a technology that would

give people the ability to destroy instantly. Unfortunately, there are plenty of lunatics to go around who would gladly do it."

Tom Rickart was no longer laughing. "I'm sure you know this, Iggy; you're way too intelligent to not have figured this out already. When this cat gets out of this bag, there is going to be a boatload of freaked out, angry S.O.B.s trying to break your door down. The people who have been running the show for centuries are not going to be one bit happy a single man, you, will be running the show from now on." Rickart started laughing again.

Lucky turned toward him with a quizzical look, "what's so funny now, Tom?"

"Well, look at it this way, Lucky," Rickart began to laugh even harder. "I'm standing here in the room with the two strangest guys I've ever met: probably the two strangest guys anywhere. You're both brilliant, but one of you is beyond brilliant. That's amazing in itself, but the most amazing part is your brother is *Joe regular guy*." He looked Iggy dead in the eye. "I've been hanging around you for a couple years now, Boss. You're probably the smartest guy who ever lived. You make all of them, all the way from Genghis Khan, Julius Caesar, Churchill, Copernicus, Galileo, Einstein, Tesla....every one of them look like a bunch of pikers. No BS, Iggy, I always call it like I see it... you dwarf all of them in every way; intellectually, spiritually, ethically, and just about every other way possible. All that.... and you haven't ever even made me feel insecure, insignificant, demeaned, and substandard in even the slightest way. I guess what I'm trying to say is you are what you are, and I should really feel overwhelmed and minuscule when I'm in your presence. Somehow, I never do. You've got a way about you, Iggy. I can't put my finger on it but as sure as rain, I sense it with my entire consciousness. You somehow pull this off with people. You elevate them. Your very presence makes a man feel self-pride and self-worth. I'd like to know how you pull it off. It sure as hell is the most amazing thing I've ever seen."

Iggy was smiling and almost blushing if you could call it that. "Thanks Tom, but you can hang this one on a small Italian woman named Rebecca... She was my mother and other than a freak lightning bolt in a thunderstorm, I owe everything I am to her and my father."

Let me tell you more," Lucky injected. "I think I can explain this better. Our mother harped on us incessantly through our entire childhood. *Never let anyone's opinion of you define your self-image. A real honest, true, and stable self-image can only come from within ourselves through mastery by achievement.* Everything she taught us, philosophically, inspirationally, and even mechanically, was centered in and enveloped by that concept,

completely. She was relentless, and never let us forget it until it became an integral part of all our characters. That's the way we all feel in our family. It is what we are teaching our children and how we relate to everyone else in the world. So, you see, none of us will ever demean anyone's self-worth to elevate our own stature in our own or anyone's eyes. We could no more do that than bite our own nose off to spite our face."

"I get it," said Tom. "Most of the world thinks and acts exactly the opposite of you people. They let other people decide their self-worth for them. I understand you, after hanging around with you fellas for years now. Your attitude and convictions eliminate the necessity to squabble with your fellow men for position. Hell, just about everybody bases their actions on what other people will think of them, instead of what they think of themselves. I'm just beginning to see what a fool's errand that is. Still, you may never actively try to demean me, yet reality dictates I am standing next to an intellectually far superior human being than myself, and I should feel overwhelmingly intimidated and that never happens. I just don't understand."

"Well, Tom, you didn't let me finish." Iggy was standing there with his head cocked to the side listening to his younger brother prattle on. "You see, there's more to Iggy's mental abilities than simple erudition. He has been mentally enhanced in ways I can't even comprehend and I'm his brother, hanging around him all the time. One thing I do understand is he is able to project. I don't use the term loosely. I am serious. He can project thoughts and emotions into others, especially during unlocking and prolonged contact. It seems the more he uses these abilities, and as time passes, they are becoming stronger. Do you see what I'm getting at? He is constantly projecting that philosophical concept or emotional feeling into you, and everyone around him. This makes them feel all the things our mother taught us. All the good things about human nature, striving for perfection, ethics, and morality... everything Tom. This guy is a walking psychological and ethical aphrodisiac."

Iggy was shaking his head. "Okay Lucky, enough is enough. You're boring me to tears and probably, Tom too."

"Not me, pal. I find this all fascinating. Wild... and all because of a lightning bolt. That sure brings a strange thought to mind. What would we ever do if something like this happened to the Hitler type?"

"Oh, I don't know, Tom," said Iggy. "Once your brain is enhanced and you start to think clearly, I believe you might leave all the childish petulant stuff behind. Perhaps, I don't know for sure, and maybe someone deranged might use these new abilities to destroy, but it wouldn't make any sense."

The demo was over, and Tom Rickart was about to head to the hospital to get his brain chip. Iggy put his hand on Tom's shoulder, smiling, "I promise, you won't even have a small headache. One more thing before you leave, we are all having a family business meeting Friday night in my conference room. Please be there, Tom. You're going to play a key role in our upcoming plans."

"You can count on me Iggy. That's the day after tomorrow. I think tomorrow, once my brain chip is up and running, I'm going to make translucent animal figures for little Tom and Evelyn in the living room," he chuckled.

At 7 PM, Roger had the coffee pot on. It would be a late night. Iggy had briefed him on the ground to be covered. The Petersons were the first to arrive, followed by the Marcus family.

They heard footsteps pounding the stairs to the conference room until Luke burst through the door. "Dad's gonna be late, one of the giraffes is really sick and he's got to deal with it."

"What do you mean by sick" Lindy asked.?

"I'm not sure. Brett called looking for Simone. He said something about a surrogate mother."

Lindy's face lit with a dazzling smile. "This meeting is going to have to wait, I'm outta here. I wouldn't miss this for the world," as she pushed her chair back and ran for the door with Marty on her heels. Everyone in the room looked around wondering what was going on.

Lucky got up from the table watching Lindy and Marty disappear through the exit, "I'm outta" here, too, I don't know what the hell is going on but I'm sure it's going to be interesting and probably even fun." So began the mass exodus from the conference room to the vehicles. Everyone was on the way to the gardens to see exactly what was up with the giraffes.

Many years before, Melanie and Iggy had traveled to Angola at friend's request. Tula Malango had contacted Melanie about her nine-year-old niece, who was sick with fever and near death. Melanie and Tula had performed with Alberto Coletta's orchestra for years, as incomparable operatic sopranos, and had become inseparable friends. Iggy landed the Gulfstream in the capital city of Luanda. Apparently, Tula Malango's niece lived in a village 250 miles from Lawanda in the jungle and was extremely sick. Her parents had died, earlier, from some tropical disease, and she had been mauled by a

small predator. Tula waited in her Jeep by a hanger until the Gulfstream taxied to a stop. Melanie descended the steps as Tula rushed to embrace her.

"Melanie, I am so happy you could come. My niece is in a lot of trouble! Her parents have died, and she has been mauled by an animal. She has a high fever. If something isn't done quickly, she may die or lose one or both legs from gangrene! She is with a doctor near her village, but he has neither the facility, equipment nor medicine to deal with her problem. I am frightened for her. You are a doctor, Melanie... Please help us!"

"Surely, Tula," Melanie replied. "Just lead the way. I'll get my medical bag and antibiotics from the Gulfstream."

"Wait," Iggy said. "We need another vehicle.... larger.... something we can use as an ambulance. We will not be able to transport the three of us and a girl with severe injuries, 250 miles in a Jeep."

"You're right, dear," Melanie responded. She turned to Tula. "Do you know where we can get an ambulance or something to fit the bill?"

"Yes, my brother-in-law has a van, and he doesn't live far from here. I will leave immediately and bring him back here with the van."

"Hurry," said Melanie. "If her injuries are as severe as you say, we have no time to waste."

Six hours later, after madly careening for the last 20 miles on a crater-filled jungle road, they arrived at their destination. Tula led them into a plywood-sheathed building with a thatched roof acting as a makeshift local hospital. Tula approached the old man wearing a white doctor's smock, "Dr. Motessi, I have brought my friend Melanie Coletta to help. She is also a doctor. I would like her to help you with the treatment for my niece, Simone."

Dr. Motessi's eyes were wide with surprise as he stared at Melanie. "You are Melanie Coletta, the famous opera singer! I heard you sing in Cairo several years ago and immediately fell in love with you! My goodness, and you are also a medical doctor? This is one of the great pleasures of my life Miss Coletta! I have several recordings of you, they are my favorites."

"Thank you, Dr., I am very flattered. Can we see Tula's niece immediately?"

"Of course. Come with me into the infirmary."

Melanie pulled the sheet away covering Simone Nuella's body. She had been severely mauled on her left leg, and had several deep, infected scratches on her right leg. The wounds had been inflicted by a predator, undoubtedly by claws and teeth contributing to infection. The left leg was extremely swollen. If it wasn't treated immediately, it would probably require amputation.

"We have to get her aboard the Gulfstream immediately. That will take at least five hours of travel time. We have everything aboard, including an entire medical surgical capability in the rear of the aircraft. I have all the antibiotics I need, and this girl is strong. I think we can save her legs if we move quickly."

Simone opened her eyes. She was obviously in pain and fever had set in. She saw Aunt Tula standing over her and managed to mutter in Umbundu, "Who are all these people Aunt Tula?"

"They are friends Simone. Friends of mine...they have come to help....to save you."

"Oh no," Simone said. "What about Kiume? Who is going to help Kiume?"

Tula put the palm of her hand on her niece's forehead, brushing her hair back, "who is Kiume Simone?"

Kiume is my friend, and he has a wife, Waikiki. They have a baby, Toto. Kiume has a broken leg and a lion, or the hyenas will come and eat him if someone doesn't help him. That's how I was injured, trying to help them. Please don't let them eat him, Aunt Tula."

Simone Nuella passed into unconsciousness, not to awaken again until they were almost across the Atlantic.

Iggy looked at Dr. Motessi and spoke to him in perfect Umbundu. "Do you have any idea, Dr., who Kiume is?"

Dr. Motessi laughed, shaking his head as he replied in perfect English. "Yes, Kiume is a giraffe. It is unusual, they don't come to the village often, but sometimes they wander here from Zambia or the Congo. It depends."

Iggy's eyes were wide. "A giraffe, with a broken leg? And where exactly would he be?"

"Well, it's kind of a long story. Evidently, as I understand it, the baby giraffe, Toto, was stuck in quicksand. The two adult giraffes were unable to save their offspring who was about to disappear in the muck. Then Simone came along and saw what was happening. She ran and got two villagers who brought a rope, and they rescued the baby giraffe. Since then, this family of giraffes has been hanging around the village. Simone can go up to the baby giraffe, touch and brush him. Everyone in the village thought this was a very nice thing until the infection came through and people began dying. Simone's parents succumbed to the illness; we think it is smallpox. Well, somehow, the adult male giraffe managed to break his leg a few days ago. He is lying in the jungle not too far from here. My guess is he will become food for a predator if he has not already become that."

The day will come when duty calls...as adversaries breach the walls...each must choose to take the stand...with sinew flexed and sword in hand...discharge obligation with great temerity...and so, pass our fathers' gift to posterity.

President William James Sledge

CHAPTER XXIII

STATESMAN

The following Friday, Jake and Iggy stood next to the Senator's Beechcraft awaiting the arrival of Air Force One and William James Sledge. Jake called the President early in the week and extended the invitation to Alice Sledge. "Don't leave her in Washington, Mr. President. Bring her along. I know she will love it. Melanie wants to meet her, and there are so many interesting things going on here. I'm sure she will have a delightful time."

Air Force One landed and taxied to the parking apron. Brett, Luke, and some of the older students jockeyed the elevator stair into position at the forward hatch. The door opened and a bevy of Secret Service agents descended and surrounded the aircraft as a tall older, well-muscled man approached Iggy and the Senator. "I am Milo Dean, head of this Secret Service detail. You understand, of course, I have to deploy my men around the ranch to make sure there is no threat to the President."

Tom Rickart pulled up in a Land Rover moments later. He jumped out of the Land Rover and walked briskly over the head of the Secret Service. "I'll be damned! Milo Dean! I haven't seen you in 15 years. How the hell are you?"

"Well, if it isn't Tom Rickart! I guess it has been that long, hasn't it? I thought you were the head of security for Solex. What are you doing here?"

"I still am, in a manner of speaking. I am now head of security for all of Lightning Inc. I'm sure you know the Marcus family bought Solex several years ago."

"Yes, I had heard that. You're really moving up in the world, aren't you, Tom, Lightning Inc.'s holdings are huge." Dean said with a grin.

Tom turned to Iggy, "Milo and I flew together overseas almost 20 years ago. We spent a lot of time arguing over who was the better pilot and had the biggest set of balls. I'd like to introduce you to my employer, Iggy Marcus."

Iggy, meet Milo Dean, the second-best pilot in the world. Of course, you already know Senator Dorian. He's out on this fishing trip, also."

"Absolutely. Senator Dorian is often in the Oval Office. We've met several times. As for the better pilot business, I'll never buy that. I'm still sure I'm the better pilot but I have to tell you, after watching the video of you hauling your ass out along the wing of a 747 in-flight, to clear an obstruction from the jettison tube, definitely gives you an edge in the big balls department." Dean laughed. "I'm sure you know, Tom, I have to deploy my men all over this ranch. It's my job to make sure no harm comes to the Commander-in-Chief."

"Of course. Bob Cummings was out here two days ago. He and ten men spent the night and went over a good deal of the ranch, checking the place out in advance. He's still up in the garden, right now, with the giraffes but his men are deployed around the ranch."

"Yeah, I know. I've been in contact with him by satellite phone... he never said anything about giraffes. What's with the giraffes?"

Iggy smiled, "We have all kinds of exotic animals here, Mr. Dean. We're going to give President Sledge a tour of the ranch. You'll get to meet all our furry friends. I suggest we all head up to the pavilion and have lunch before we start."

"I have 50 of our men deployed around the ranch, also. We hired all of them right out of government. Most of them had high security clearances already, but we've done thorough background checks on all of them. Many of them are Navy SEALs and Green Berets. I assure you, even though I know it's your job, this place is more secure than the White House." said Tom.

"No doubt, Tom... No doubt, but my job is not discretionary. It is what it is."

The usual lunch buffet was served at the Pavilion. The typical seating arrangement remained unchanged, as well. William Sledge had mentioned to Jake Dorian, earlier that week, he did not want a lot of pomp and circumstance. He and Alice wanted to fit in with everyone at the ranch since it was a vacation, not a party for a dignitary. When he entered the pavilion, all 200 students present stopped what they were doing and stood to salute the president and welcomed him with "Good afternoon, Mr. President" with one voice. He had followed the trial closely, watching Tom's pirated video. The whole world, in fact, had seen the same video broadcast repeatedly over many networks. Both he and his wife were impressed with the comportment and eloquence of the children.

President Sledge sat at the same large circular table with the Marcus family that Judge Carmichael, Richard and Laura Balin had their meals at the week before.

Iggy addressed the President. "Mr. President, we would like to show you around the ranch this afternoon. I'm sure the fish will keep till tomorrow."

The President held up his hand, "I'm on vacation. Please let's dispense with the formalities. I don't think I can stand listening to *Mr. President* all week. I'm Bill and this is Alice. We would like you to use our names. And tell me, how should I address all of you, Mr. Marcus?"

"I am Iggy, this is my brother, Jack, my sister, Lindy and my brother, Lucky as he pointed around the table. This man sitting next to us is Tom Rickart, our head of security and a good friend who I might add, has saved my life on more than one occasion. My wife, Melanie, will join us in a few minutes. Jack and Lucky's wives will be here to greet you momentarily."

"Yes," said Bill Sledge. "I remember Mr. Rickart from that famous video on the wing of a 747 over the middle of the Atlantic. Unbelievable courage Mr. Rickert. I was impressed and if you are ever looking for employment in the Secret Service, I will be glad to take you on."

Melanie entered the side door of the pavilion and crossed the room.

Alice Sledge's eyes opened wide in surprise, and she rose from her seat. "My God, Melanie Coletta! What a treat. I am so glad I didn't stay in Washington. I was tempted to, you know. Some of my friends were having a get together and I'm not really into trout fishing. I am so pleased to meet you, Miss Coletta. I have been a fan of yours since you began your career. I always wished I could sing, even half as well as you. It would make my life complete."

"Thank you, Mrs. Sledge, but the pleasure is all mine I assure you."

"Please call me Alice. My husband has instructed everyone at the table to call us by our first names. This is the first vacation he and I have taken together, in over a year and a half, and we greatly desire informality, believe me. Everything in Washington always has to be so formal, prim and proper."

"And I am Melanie to everyone."

Lunch was finished. "I'd like to show you around Lightning, Bill. I want to give you an overview of what Lightning Ranch is before we do any fishing. There is a great deal for you to see here, including many technologies we have developed."

"Yes, I would like to see everything. I understand you have two launch pads as part of Solex, and you have launched many ships from this location. A few of those launches were televised and it appeared they were near a

THE SHADOW OF GIANTS

massive geodesic dome building. I was quite impressed with that and would love to see it."

"Everyone here calls it the garden. It's full of surprises. So, it will be our first stop."

"My God, it's huge," said Bill Sledge. "Just how big is it?" he asked Iggy.

"It's approximately the size of 150 regulation-sized football stadiums, a little more than two hundred acres. In fact, we have one in here, someplace," he chuckled.

"What is it made of? I would imagine this cost a fortune. It's several hundred feet high as well."

"The carbon fiber skeleton was designed and manufactured by a company our family owns. The translucent panels were manufactured right here at Lightning."

"What did it cost you to build this place? It must've been a billion or more."

"Not as much as you would think. It seems we are going to spend the afternoon, Mr. President.... Bill, explaining all the things that comprise Lightning Inc. We can do some fishing, later, but I think once we start showing you things here, you will be fascinated."

He described the process for making the translucent panels, "Iggy glass" and the innovative way microwaves controlled the environment. Bill Sledge was particularly interested with the Solex facility in dome three. The conquest of space had always intrigued him. They toured the hydroponic gardens and the other food-producing areas in the structure. There were about 50 different young people working in the garden, and Sledge commented on how hard they worked, and how orderly everything seemed.

Iggy's radio squawked. It was Melanie. She had gone off with Alice Sledge investigating other parts of the garden. "This is Alice, Bill. You must come where we are and see this. Where are we, anyway?" she asked Melanie. They could hear Melanie's voice in the background. "We are in section 6 with the animals."

Ten minutes later, they entered section 6 to the sight of Alice Sledge having her face licked by two giraffes, while another one nuzzled her from behind. She waved at them as they approached. "Look Bill, they are so lovable. I'm a horsewoman, but I think I love giraffes even more. They're so friendly and they have such sweet-smelling breath; almost like flowers."

"Ha," Melanie laughed. "They have been snacking on some of the tree blossoms. They're sweet and the giraffes can reach them."

"This place is incredible Bill. Have you ever seen the like?"

"I can't say I have. In fact, I don't think I ever imagined anything quite this unusual or splendid."

"Well, we're just beginning, Bill. There is much more we want to show you. We have created some amazing technologies here in the scientific as well as medical fields. We are going to demonstrate every one of them to you, this week. You're the President of the United States, and for a variety of reasons, you need to know what we have here at Lightning Ranch."

Six security men had tagged along: five Secret Service agents and Tom Rickart. The five of them were enjoying the tour as much as the Sledges.

"The next stop is the hospital," said Iggy. "After that, we'll tour the science buildings and power generator. We have a great deal to show you, Bill, and it's crucial you see it. Some can be done, today, but a much we will have to do another day. I think you should intersperse some fly fishing in the middle of things."

Early the next morning, Bill Sledge, Jake Dorian and Iggy Marcus left for Lower Falls to fly fish, with five Secret Service agents and Tom Rickart in tow.

Jake and Iggy remained at the Land Rover, as everyone descended the slope to the pool at the base of the falls. "Don't you think it's a little early, yet, for *contact*?" asked Jake. "He's only been here for one day. Maybe he should get a little used to the place....and you," he said pointedly to Iggy.

"Perhaps, Jake. But the man is either going to cut it or he's not. A few hours aren't going to make a difference, one way or the other. I'm surprised you would be hesitant after having been unlocked many times, yourself."

"Yeah, I know you're right. It's just that we're down to the wire, here, and the rubber is about to meet the road. I always worry about leaving skid marks all over. I guess it's just nerves over the fact you're going to announce your satellite net and the end of nuclear war, in a few days, and it's going to hit the fan. Sorry buddy. We all resist change though, even if it is good change. We know what we already have, and we never do know the future until the change comes along and eventually makes it the new normal. I guess I worry too much. Let's head down to the river."

Iggy intentionally fished near the President, slowly moving downstream, stopping at each pool along the way. They spent the morning discussing politics, philosophy and of all things, chemistry. The President had his master's degree in chemistry. His self-assured manner and innate ability to

communicate landed him the job of editor of the campus newspaper. Those abilities led to his early entry into politics. One thing led to another, and he left his career in chemistry, entering politics full-time.

"I'd like to ask you some pointed questions, Bill, if I may?"

"You can ask, and I probably will be more than happy to answer, as long as national security is not involved. What kind of questions?"

"First a few general questions, Bill, and then some pointed ones. What you think of the state of the world and the future of the species?"

"Ha, it's funny you would ask that. The world is a hell of a mess, and I don't see it getting any better anytime, soon. Our kids are being dumbed down and they walk around with noses buried in cell phones and other assorted nonsense. They are being debilitated, for one reason or another, and they are the future. Alice and I couldn't have children. We are going to adopt after my presidency. It's just as well we can't bring our own children into the world because I don't think the world is going to last too long. At least if we adopt, we will be able to do some good."

"That's interesting, Bill. Somehow, I'm not surprised you feel this way. You're a chemist with a technical education. People of your stripe usually think logically and apply the process to everything."

"Why do I get the feeling you see things differently, Iggy? Correct me if I'm wrong, but that's the sense I get. I guess I'm just a half-empty glass of water kind of guy when I see the handwriting on the wall. I will say this: By your Olympic performances and what I saw of the children at your trial, I would say there might be hope for the future, but there aren't enough of you."

"I do see things differently, Bill, much differently, but that's because I have a different perspective. I don't blame you for your feelings. If I was in your shoes, I would feel the same way, probably. What if I were to tell you that real, dramatic changes could be made that would alter the future of mankind, forever, for the better?"

"I am no longer the optimist I once was. Honestly... I would say you are not dealing with a full deck...slightly off your rocker. I understand all the things you have done with *American Media* and realize you have a big following, but proportionately, very few of them are the young. The young have gone to colleges and universities that have created delusional automatons instead of human beings mostly. They will have the reins, shortly. How are you going to make them better forever?"

"I am heartened, Bill. I didn't know if our conversation was going to go this far. What if I told you I knew the way to make it better, and solve the problems of the world or at least a great deal of them?"

"Well, if I believed one man could actually do that in reality, I would hand him the keys to the Oval Office. That's where he would belong."

"Nobody can do it from the Oval Office, Bill. Whoever enters that portal is shackled by politics and, as you know, politics is nothing more than the struggle for power position. Unfortunately, the struggle for power is always a self-aggrandizement quest motivated by greed. That's what all politics has become you know, a struggle for power position. It is no longer Aristotle's definition in his *Nicomachean Ethics* - *the supreme and most authoritative art in the aspiration towards goodness*. That concept has been obliterated by the avarice of mediocrities."

Bill Sledge's curiosity was becoming intensely piqued. He rarely had conversations with people who were so heady, brutally honest and to the point, especially with new acquaintances. His typical political associates were masters of innuendo and beating around the bush was their stock in trade.

"Just exactly what are you getting at, Iggy? I am a politician and you just stated politics is the struggle for power for the sake of self-aggrandizement motivated by greed. That's quite an accusation. You've got a lot of nerve saying it to the President of the United States, stating I am motivated by personal greed. I just figuratively offered you the keys to the Oval Office, and you figuratively turned me down. Why?"

Iggy had somewhat probed this man's character at the dinner for the Olympians. Now, standing in a stream fishing, just a few yards away from him for an entire morning, he had a clear picture of President Sledge's character. The man had fiber, but was as confused, as most people who define their self-image by the opinions and dictates of the world at large. Society had engineered that psychological component of most human beings, much by the design of others and some inadvertently. It was all a construct of the environment though, but only rarely a product emerging from the core of the individual.

"Yes, I did, Bill, but let me take it a step further by telling you what my mother taught me. *Never let your self-opinion be defined by the opinions of others. A real, honest self-image can only come from within by mastery through achievement.* Think about what I just said, then ask yourself honestly, what motivates you. You are obviously an honest, decent human being who has a good deal of integrity. You want to fulfill your job as President in the most honest, exemplary fashion possible. We both understand all this about you. But down deep inside lurks small monsters."

Again, William Sledge was struck by the honesty and directness of this man. No one had ever spoken to him, like this, in his life. He was captivated. "What kind of monsters would they be, Mr. Marcus? I wasn't aware any monsters were lurking in my mind."

"They lurk in most men's minds, Bill," Iggy replied as he projected benevolence. "Think of the quote from my mother I just gave you. Consider it. Dissect it logically and assimilate it. Think of its rational validity, and how it is essentially appropriate to the life of every human being and the dictates of reality. After you've thought about it and realize exactly what it means, ask yourself--did you chase this job and get elected to be in the history books as the person who did a great job, or do you want to fix the problems plaguing humanity for the sake of themselves. That's the defining difference, Bill. It is the statement defining your motive. It's always either/or and boils down to your own internally derived self-image or the opinions of others."

"You don't pull any punches, do you?"

"Life is too short Bill... for the moment anyway."

"What does for the moment mean? It's the first time you have spoken to me in riddles."

"We are going to show you many things this week Mr. President. You're going to be shown them because you are the President, and for that reason only. You will consider all of them unbelievable, but we will demonstrate them. Many of them are in the medical field."

"I see. I watched the video of the trial everyone is so up in arms about. I remember the doctor who testified, talking about a human lifespan of 300 years. Was that on the up and up?"

"One hundred percent, Bill. In fact, everything Dr. Peterson said, is fact already, or will be soon. Curing disease and extending the lifespan of every human being is about to become a reality for all mankind. That's not the extent of it. There is much more I'm going to show you. I promise you will be surprised. I prefer not to discuss it but would rather demonstrate it."

Bill Sledge pulled another one-pound brook trout out of the water and added it to his creel. "Jake was right, the fishing here is fabulous. I've been catch and release all morning, but I saved these three. I enjoy brook trout. Is there any place I can cook them?"

"Leave it to Melanie. She's got a great trout almondine recipe she does with a slight touch of medium dry sherry and a hint of spice. I'm sure you'll want the recipe, or at least Alice will. You better keep a few more. Everybody's going to want to eat a few and there are plenty to spare in this stream."

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Six Secret Service men posted themselves around Iggy's house while everyone enjoyed the trout almondine. After fresh strawberries laced with Grand Marnier and almond creme fraiche, the dinner party retired to the music room to Luke and Brett's piano while Gloria sang.

"My God, how old is she... I think you said almost six?" questioned Alice Sledge. "She is going to be as great as her mother or Maria Callas!" What an incredible voice. I could listen to her all night."

"Melanie trains all the girls to sing and knows exactly what she is doing. They are all unbelievable. Half of learning to sing is being taught how one should actually do it, and where the voice comes from. It is from the diaphragm, and everyone learns to do it well. Some people, though, are spectacular because they have natural gifts, others don't. The first order of business when teaching them, is to prevent them from straining their developing vocal cords because they're so young."

Melanie and Iggy watched the President and First Lady depart with their entourage of Secret Service. "So, my husband, how did the fishing trip go? What do you think he is going to do?"

"He's intelligent, but he is also a politician. That feature was not born into his personality or formed in his professional life, however. He has assumed the mantle of a politician for the last 12 to 13 years he has been in politics. I believe he will come around."

"Have you had contact, yet?"

"No, I haven't. I was going to but decided to wait for tomorrow. His participation could be critical so I'm biding my time. He's here for the entire week. We are not fishing, tomorrow, so I'm going to start showing him the technology. I think we will go to the hospital, first, to see you, Sylvia, and Dave. Then to the science building. That's where I think it'll be time to shake the man's hand. I was my usual brutally honest self with him, this afternoon. He handled it just fine, even though he didn't like what I told him about himself."

"Are you going to take it any further than contact?"

"Yes, prolonged contact. But I don't think I will be able to unlock him so soon...maybe...we'll see. He'll do fine with prolonged contact. He'll get a healthy dose of my mind and his own mind, but it won't be as deep as unlocking. You know how that's a craps shoot, and the last thing I want to do is create a monster of instability. There are Secret Service men all over this

place. It wouldn't do us much good if we put them in a bad position by emotionally compromising him."

"No, I can see where would hurt instead of help. Well, my dear, you are the Chess Master and I'm sure you will do what is appropriate."

"I did get him thinking. I got him to understand that the *greater good* is often commensurate with the *individual good*, as long as it doesn't prescribe self-immolation. He was a chemist before he got into politics. He already possessed the scientific method mindset, and it was easy to work with that versus some delusional hodgepodge fostered by today's irrational societal mores."

Bill Sledge finished the last of his scrambled eggs as Iggy sauntered to his table. "You ready for the guided tour, Bill?"

"Absolutely. I was up late last night thinking about this morning and all the marvels of this place I have already seen. I can hardly imagine what's coming, today, after your description of how it is much more unique and exciting than what we have already seen."

"Then let's start with the medical center. Doctors Dave and Sylvia Peterson, as well as Melanie, are already there awaiting us. They are the board-certified physicians who really run the R&D, although I put my two cents in from time to time."

"I'm sure it's much more than a few cents," the President said with raised eyebrows. "You said your wife is also a physician? I didn't know that. That's amazing. Are all of you such extreme multi-taskers?"

"Well, we all wear a lot of hats here. It goes with the territory because there is so much to do. We all do the things we specialize in and teach the children, as well. So, let's go. We have a bus outside to take us all there. There's enough room for some Secret Service, and more can follow in an extra car or two."

Iggy motioned to Jake and Sharon Dorian. They rose and joined the group heading to board the bus.

Tom Rickart was the bus driver extraordinaire for the day. "Where to first, Boss man?" quipped Rickart while Milo Dean laughed, wishing he could address the President that way.

"The medical center, Tom. That's the first stop, then were headed off to the science building and the observatory, after that. Please come in with us, especially the science building. Lucky will be there, but I may need a little help with demonstrations."

They stood in operating room three at the medical center. "We have a piece of luck this morning. One of the engineers who works here has a yellow lab with a large cancerous tumor in his abdomen. My father is going to fix it. So, we get a demonstration of how a certain piece of equipment works, said Dr. Sylvia Peterson.

Bill Sledge asked, "You do veterinary, also? In the same facility as you do people?"

Dave Peterson smiled, "If it's alive and broken, we fix it. Two legs or four legs; it's all the same to us. We relieve suffering and pain. That's the oath we took."

The dog was on an operating table sedated, with his owner holding the dog's right front leg between his palms. "The dog's name is Clem and this is John Jennings, his owner, who is an engineer and an essential member of Lightning's research staff. He's been with us for 10 years."

Jennings was smiling as he bid the President and everyone else good morning. "This fellow has been my buddy now for almost 9 years. Best dog I ever had. I love him almost as much as my own kids. Doc Peterson is going to burn this tumor out this morning. He's got cancer and I hate to lose him. The best part of all this... I helped design the equipment that's going to do the job. It doesn't get more satisfying than that.

Dr. Peterson began explaining the procedure. "If you look at the TV screen, it is a combination of ultrasound and infrared equipment that clearly defines the dog's anatomy and the tumor much better than either technology by itself." He moved a large futuristic-looking device suspended above the dog by long arms attached to an equipment base adjacent to the operating table. He spent a few minutes focusing the equipment over the sleeping dog's abdomen. When he finished, he looked up and announced, "This little device we're about to use was invented by Iggy. It operates by manipulating the magnetic forces binding matter together on both a molecular and atomic level. We have an inoperable growth in the dog's abdomen the size of a hardball. It will kill the dog, soon, if left untreated. It remained unnoticed by John, until the dog began vomiting continuously and refused any food. Once we established a diagnosis, the prognosis and treatment are a walk in the park. While I am preparing to begin the treatment, I think Iggy will explain it to you."

Iggy placed his hand on the control panel of the machine. "I'll explain it in detail. This device is one form of the technology we have developed here. The technology supports dozens of other activities having nothing to do with medicine. This particular equipment was designed specifically for medical

purposes. It is a device that can manipulate matter and energy in many ways. It interrupts magnetic fields binding matter together. Thus, it disintegrates the matter as the atomic particles are released from their bondage.”

“I’m sure you quite familiar with the structure of an atom Bill, with your education as a chemist. But for everyone else’s benefit, atoms, especially the elements, lesser in mass, are 99.9% space and only a small percentage of particulate matter. When we interrupt the bonds holding the matter together, it is reduced to the subatomic particles it is comprised of, and they are released. Most of the matter is released as alpha and beta particles or radiation. That is not something you would want to happen inside of you on a steady diet, but it is far less intrusive than standard gamma radiation therapy to eliminate malignancies. In essence, we are disintegrating the structure, and the freewheeling alpha and beta particles are far smaller than the original integrated structure, once they are no longer bound together. At this point they are subatomic particles in motion. We freeze that motion, and they become the smallest particles that can exist free in nature, short of describing particles that comprise protons, neutrons, and electrons such as mesons, etc. We do that by controlling the magnetic field. They then become inert, minuscule pieces of matter and are expelled by the body’s own waste removal systems. The spatial coordinates are dramatic, and I could give you a visual analogous description of the particulate matter/spatial proportions after the procedure is completed. In short, once we apply the therapy, the tumor disintegrates, and the resulting matter is infinitesimally smaller than the structure of the original mass.

"Jesus H..." said the President with his eyes wide as saucers and his mouth open. "Unbelievable! Unbelievable. You've actually done this... Unbelievable" he said for the third time. His scientific background created an explosion of possibilities in his mind for the application of this type of technology. "My God, this is truly groundbreaking and amazing! Let's get on with this. I really want to watch this happen."

"There are other things we have to do so there are no errors," said Dave Peterson. Our infrared and ultrasound scanners are loading information into the computer defining the parameters of the malignancy. The dog is highly sedated and must be strapped in place, so he doesn't move during the process. We direct the magnetic beam or field much in the manner of a laser. A laser would burn it and reduce its mass but would kill the dog. This process can only harm a portion of the dog if it is misdirected somehow. The technology will disintegrate everything it is focused on, but it is computer directed and only can harm the subject during the disintegration of the peripheral portions

of the mass. We don't want to disintegrate any healthy piece of the dog. Depending on where the tumor is, that might not be a compelling problem. You can disintegrate portions of organs accidentally and it wouldn't be fatal or even debilitating, for that matter. You wouldn't want any inaccuracies, however, if you are disintegrating a brain tumor."

"Jesus! said the President again. I'm stunned. This is miraculous. It's beyond anything known to us now. I'm no doctor but my chemical engineering background has required me to work with doctors and I understand exactly what's going on here. Stunning!"

The four Secret Service men and Tom Rickart crowded in closer around the operating table. Everyone wanted to see this miracle transpire.

"You would all be better standing back and looking at the television screen on the wall. You would actually be able to see the tumor being disintegrated that way," said Dave Peterson. "Watching the dog's abdomen is a little pointless," he chuckled. "All you're going to see is Clem's furry belly, unless of course you have x-ray vision," he said still smiling.

They were ready and started the procedure. The emitter glowed with a soft blue light. there was a buzzing that continued for almost 15 minutes, as the emitter imperceptibly moved to direct the magnetic field to all parts of the tumor.

Everyone watched the television. The tumor was slowly disappearing, almost as if by magic.

My God, Bill Sledge said again, only softly. He glanced in Iggy's direction. Iggy was watching the television screen and didn't notice. The President's background as a chemist illustrated the unbelievable stature of this technology. He saw the possibilities if it was applied to many fields of endeavor. He knew, for sure, this was going to change the entire world in many ways.

The machine shut itself off when the computer told it the tumor was vaporized. John Jennings face was lit with a jack-o'-lantern smile as he hugged his dog, as a couple of tears fell on Clem's nose. "Thanks, Dave. Thanks, Iggy! Clem and I owe you big time.

"All in a day's work at Marcus General Hospital," said Dave Peterson with a giant grin. He loved saving lives. It didn't matter if they were people or animals. It was all part of the mission. "As soon as Clem wakes up from the anesthesia, he'll be running around like a puppy and won't know anything ever happened to him... as good as new... for sure. The best part of this technology... There is zero recovery time and no convalescence, whatsoever. It doesn't get better than that."

President William Sledge could hardly keep his eyes off Iggy. His invention was overwhelming, and the President knew the day was just beginning. There were going to be other amazing things. He was quiet and pensive, thinking of the repercussions from this technology. It was going to turn the industrial world upside down. It wasn't just the ability to disintegrate matter, it was all the other applications he considered. Still thinking, he asked, subdued, "Where to next?"

"Our electrical power station, Bill. You're going to find it every bit as amazing as this technology. Before we leave, I want to explain we have developed a method to destroy all pathological invaders of the human body in virtually no time at all. It doesn't matter if they're bacteriological, viral, or fungal infections. We can eradicate them with simple therapies that have zero side effects, now."

Twenty minutes later, the bus stopped in front of the power station. Everyone exited and stood in front of the entrance. Bill Sledge noticed the door had no handles. A curiosity, he thought, until Iggy spoke "open door" and the door swung open. Lucky looked at the President chuckling, "voice print activated Bill." Bill Sledge nodded and thought, 'of course, why would it be anything less in this place.' As they entered, the room lit up brightly but there was no apparent light source. The walls and the ceilings all seemed to emit a radiance. In the center of the room, mounted on two long steel rails, sat the power generator, Iggy 1. Electricity was not Sledge's specialty, but he was technically oriented and knew no generator, anywhere, looked like this contraption. He looked at Iggy, "Same technology, isn't it?"

"Yes, the same. Only with this device, there is a 40% energy gain."

"What is its output?"

"5.3 Gigawatts," replied Lucky.

"This little thing! The President exclaimed. "This 15-foot-long by 8-foot-high generator actually puts out 5.3 GW and at a net gain of 40%, no less? "Have you considered the impact this will have on the marketplace, especially where energy is concerned? He still wore his expression of surprise as he considered the magnitude of what he was looking at. "I can see this will change the world in dramatic ways."

"Yes, we have," replied Lucky. That is our greatest concern. We can't just drop this into the marketplace, overnight. Not only will it disrupt world commerce, but it will also alter employment for millions of people. However, the technology exists now. Sooner or later, it will have to be deployed. It will have to be phased in over time, giving the global economy time to adjust."

Tom Rickart stood behind him chuckling. "Mr. President... you haven't seen anything yet."

President Sledge turned slowly facing Tom, "I can imagine you are right Mr. Rickart. You said it was going to take two days for us to see this place in its entirety, and this is only just the first afternoon of day number one. What's in the other rooms?"

Lucky pointed to the door on the right. "That's the Tesla coil powering the entire ranch. We have no hardwired system here. Each major facility has its own generator of the same technology in the event something happens to the power station. It's strictly standby, though."

"And the other door, where does it lead?"

Iggy turned to the door behind him with a command "open door." He entered, inviting everyone to follow. "Come in. This is the central nervous system of our security apparatus." They filed in as all the TV monitors sprang to life. "We can view every square inch of Lightning Ranch from this room. There are 2800 devices along the borders of this ranch. They only activate an alarm when there is an anomaly. They operate with both visual and infrared. Our computers can distinguish between the flight of a butterfly and the flight of a moth. They recognize every species of animal and register every movement, everywhere. There are no holes."

"Very impressive!" said Milo Dean, speaking for the first time. "What do you do, however, if there is an invasion from multiple quarters when you don't have enough security people on-duty to handle it?"

Lucky, Iggy, and Tom all wore smug satisfied smiles. Iggy said, "Tom, invite Yosemite Sam and Elmer Fudd to the party and introduce them to the President, Mr. Dean and his associate."

For about two or three seconds, both men, including the President, began to think maybe Iggy Marcus was just a bit crazy, until two Loony Tunes characters appeared surrounding the two secret service men. They laughed at the facial expressions of the two men, and Alice Sledge was laughing with them. She hadn't made a peep all morning, but this was too much for her as she watched the Secret Service chief and his man pummeling both characters from the inside, trying to escape. They were obviously yelling but no one could hear them. "The best part about your device is the sound of silence," she said still laughing.

"You better let them out now, Tom," Iggy said. "I think we made the point."

Elmer Fudd and Yosemite Sam disappeared, leaving both men standing there wondering what had just happened. A few seconds later they realized

what had encapsulated them was a kind of containment field and they hammered Iggy for an explanation.

This is a device I tinkered together some years ago. It is an impenetrable shield. No technology exists today that can breach it. No kind of matter, no sound waves... nothing. Here's the bonus, Mr. Dean, it answers your question about invasion. We can encapsulate the entire ranch, all sides, above and below to any height or depth we choose. So, for all intents and purposes, this ranch is the safest place to be on Earth.

William Sledge was speechless. He couldn't think of a single thing to say to this "inventor" who displayed something more bizarre and unique with each revelation.

Milo Dean had something to say, however, and Tom Rickart knew it was coming. "We want this technology. I believe it's vital to the national security, as well as our jobs as bodyguards for the President."

Iggy turned toward Dean, looking him directly in the eye, "Sorry Mr. Dean, the technology is not for sale, nor is it free."

"Why would you think you should be the only ones allowed to possess it, Mr. Marcus? Don't you think you owe this to your country? I don't think the government is going to give you a choice when they learn what the capabilities of it are. The Fifth Amendment will see to that."

"Well, Mr. Dean," Iggy said, addressing him in the same disrespectful way he had been addressed, "Your arrogance is the perfect illustration of why I will not allow you, or any other public or private entity to have this technology. And there is no existing power capable of confiscating it. If you try, the device is engineered and poised to destroy itself instantly, and very possibly anyone who tries to fool with the mechanics of it. If I allow you to have this technology, you will all kill yourselves with it in less than a year. That's how powerful it is, and how weak and immoral man is still. Man's constant tribal warfare against his brothers is a perfect illustration of his maturity. Humans are not ready to wield this much power yet, even though it exists. You're just going to have to live with my decision."

"When I report this to the Pentagon and the Senate Armed Forces committee, I don't think they will give you a choice. I mean, who do you think you are, holding this kind of technology back from your country?"

"Mr. Dean, the question is not *who* do I think I am. I know exactly who and what I am. I'm the man *who* created this technology. It is the product of *my* intellect and no one else will decide what happens to it. The real question is, who do *you* think *you* are, to arbitrate what is good for me, as well as the rest of the world? Let's not mince words Mr. Dean. I know exactly who and

what you are. You have initiated a power struggle. I have it, and you want it! The difference between us is, I will never use it to abrogate your rights. You on the other hand, will have no compunction about depriving me of my rights, given the power this represents. Consequently, my refusal to hand it to you, *carte blanche*, makes you determined to confiscate it from me, by force if necessary. Have I made my point adequately, Mr. Dean?"

"Gentlemen, please... Please... Alice and I are on vacation, no arguments."

"Mr. President, what you just heard from me was not an argument. An argument is surrounded by debate. What you heard from me was a statement of unequivocal fact," replied Iggy.

Milo Dean, the chief of security for the Secret Service detail, knew he was out of hand, addressing Marcus the way he did. After all, nothing would be resolved at the moment. He was convinced; however, this technology was much too powerful for one man to own and control, despite the fact it was his brainchild. "Pardon me, Mr. Marcus, for goading you into an argument. It was not my intent."

"No problem, Mr. Dean. Like I said, it was not an argument, but a statement of fact." Iggy knew way back in the beginning, when he first conceived of all these new technologies, the Milo Deans of the world would determine they should be the ones who controlled the technology, not the inventor. It always boils down to politics... the struggle for power positions, and that struggle was always born of a weak self-image.

Tom Rickart eyed Milo Dean suspiciously. He had been unlocked on multiple occasions and his already significant sixth sense had been elevated exponentially. He knew his friend was not going to let this sleeping dog lie. "So, Milo, it looks like the Secret Service has changed your philosophy quite a bit. You never would've made a statement like that fifteen years ago. What happened to you?"

The First Lady had excused herself to go to the powder room to get away from the squabble. "Nothing happened to me... Nothing at all... I'm the same person I always was, Tom! It's just my opinion happens to differ from yours and your boss's. What makes your opinion so compelling and legitimate?"

"So, all this is a matter of opinion to you, huh? Let me tell you something about opinion Milo. I'll draw you a little analogy. Opinion is like dog shit. If that's all you have ever eaten for your entire life, I will cook you up a big pile of it with enough butter, herbs, and spices, so you will think *IN YOUR OPINION*, it's the best meal you ever had in your life. But in the end... it's still dog shit and no amount of opinion will make it *filet mignon*."

Milo Dean angrily excused himself, leaving for the rest room. It was time for a satellite phone call. Iggy took President Sledge aside and spoke to him quietly. "President Sledge, there is much more here than you have seen up to this point. I have more things to demonstrate. You're the Commander-in-Chief and you should learn of these things because it is going to be critically important. I would ask you to leave Mr. Dean out of the equation and have a few words with me alone in the observatory. You are in more danger because of him than you are from any of us. What do you think?"

Bill Sledge looked Iggy in the eye, subtly shaking his head, yes. "I think you are right, Mr. Marcus. I think it would be a good thing if we have a few words alone. This is no longer an eye-opener; it is earth shattering, especially because you're telling me there is much more to come. Let's take a walk up there, but first," he turned to the other Secret Service agent, "Lonnie, Mr. Marcus and I would like to be alone for a few minutes. When Milo comes out of the restroom, tell him that and instruct him we do not want to be disturbed."

Bill Sledge looked up at the giant motorized dome and synoptic survey telescope. "This is quite a piece of equipment you've got here. I'm sure it's right up there somewhere in the top ten. Why do you need this sophistication here? I'm sure it cost more than half a billion, which is a bit much for a hobby"

"All in good time, Bill. When I explain everything else to you, the reason for the telescope will be evident." Iggy paused for a few moments probing William Sledge to assess his mood and receptivity. "Mr. President," Iggy said pensively. "Are you in the mood to try a little experiment? You will find it quite unique, informative and compelling."

"What kind of experiment would that be, Mr. Marcus?" Sledge asked with the same formality.

"I will describe this to you, so you understand before you consent. I'm sure you see how unusual and exceptional Lightning Inc. is. You know I am the one who catalyzed all of this. Something happened to me, many years ago, that elevated my intellect and obviously gave me extraordinary abilities. I was struck by lightning. When I woke in the hospital, I found I had undergone many changes. Those changes have increased in potency, to a great degree, over the years. I am able to make psychological contact with other living creatures by simply touching them. We become mutually aware of each other's psyche in every way. Brief contact exposes us to each other minimally. Prolonged contact exposes us to each other exponentially. If you agree to this, it will explain a good deal of what is going on here. I can

perceive much from a distance and I have assessed you. You have the strength of character to handle this, so I am offering.

“William Sledge silently reflected on the offer for several minutes. He was the President of the United States, an enormous weight for any shoulders, considering the times. Whatever occurred to him, occurred to the country in a sense, and he was obligated to fulfill his duties to his maximum capability. He debated internally... to commit to this, no doubt would alter or influence him in some way or Marcus wouldn't be offering. If it was something that would harm him or the country, it was off limits. On the other hand, he had gotten to know Marcus over the past few days and was quite certain this man had no ill will for the United States or its President. It was quite conceivable... compelling, in fact, Marcus was offering something he should leap at the chance to experience, in performance of his duty as Commander-in-Chief, but there was no precedent.

"Before you decide, Bill I'd like to tell you something, but first a question. What you think of Sen. Jacob Dorian?"

"He is an honest man, far above average in intelligence with enormous energy and dedication to his office. I have tremendous respect for him."

Iggy nodded his head affirmatively. "Sen. Dorian has had, what we call *contact*, with me on many occasions. He has undergone prolonged *contact* and something we call *unlocking*. *Unlocking* is extreme and is not something to be done, at first. Trying to explain it is difficult, but a good friend drew a very appropriate analogy, some time ago. He wittily equated it with the proverbial *Vulcan mind meld*."

"I see. That explains why Jake seems to be such a cut above so many of his contemporaries. So, you attribute his apparent lofty intellect and work ethics to his involvement with you." It was a rhetorical statement as Sledge weighed things in the balance. He made up his mind. "I will try it, Mr. Marcus, but only a minimal exposure at first. What do we do?"

Iggy smiled, "A simple handshake will do, Bill. I'm sure you've noticed I shake hands with no one, not even you upon your arrival."

"Yes, I wondered about that. It seemed a small thing, but I did wonder. Now I know." He said as he offered his hand to Iggy.

Iggy grasped the President of the United States hand, and the connection was made. He held on as William Sledge's natural reflex made him attempt to withdraw. Iggy held on, creating a prolonged contact, as he assessed the President.

William Sledge reached for the seat behind him...overwhelmed by the experience. The man had strength. But, just as everyone who experienced

prolonged contact, his knees were like rubber as he tried to pull away even though the prior conversation had prepared him for the experience. He had just seen the staggering intellect and psychological constituents of the man standing in front of him. He also knew it was reciprocal. He wasn't embarrassed, but he felt subdued and diminished somehow. He had seen the quality of Iggy's character.

Iggy was projecting. Contact was much more robust and profound than it had been in the earlier years. He planted the concept in William Sledge that his self-image should only come from the character foundation within himself. He always did that, now. His values would not allow his abilities to denigrate another person's character or self-image.

"Don't let it affect you that way, Bill." Iggy said to him as if he was reading the man's mind. "You're not being fair to yourself. Do not compare yourself to me. It would only be valid if you had been struck by a million volts of electricity also." Iggy's brutal honesty forged his next words. "You now realize I am not the average man. I have been altered to something man may become in a few thousand years, or more, through evolution, so no comparisons are valid. I must live up to my potential, however, and cannot diminish myself for any reason, whatsoever. I have a purpose and a mission. Everyone here who is tied to Lightning Inc. has joined hands with me in the achievement of that outcome."

William Sledge rose from his chair and faced Iggy. He was smiling but there was a knowing look in his eye. "I believe I understand, now. This entire fishing trip, engineered by Sen. Dorian, was to get me out here for exactly this moment, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir, it was. I knew you would realize it at some point. This is that moment."

"You want my assistance. That is obvious. You may get it, Mr. Marcus, but before you do, I must understand exactly what it is you want of me and why. My first duty is to the people of this country. While that may coincide with your purposes and devices, it will always be my priority, no matter what."

"That is as it should be, Mr. President. I would expect or accept nothing less. I wanted to achieve this moment with you before I show you the other scientific wonders we have created here. You already know our electrical generation facility is a self-perpetuating power source. That and our advances in medicine, by themselves, are groundbreaking and will change the face of the earth. That is only a small piece of what you will see."

"I can just imagine, Mr. Marcus, or I should probably say, I can't imagine... just yet. So, let's get on with it. Time is wasting, and since you managed to get me here, I expect you to give it your best shot."

Iggy smiled at him genuinely, "You're not half bad for a politician, sir. You are also a chemist and I'm quite sure that helped."

A door opened behind Iggy. He sensed the presence of a newcomer, probably Dean. "Are you all right, Mr. President?" asked Milo Dean from the doorway.

"Why would I not be Milo? Mr. Marcus and I have been having a conversation about technology and related things. Didn't you get my instructions from Lonnie?"

"Yes, sir, but you are my charge, and it is my job to protect you from any harm. I take that to mean not letting you out of my sight in a strange environment, and this is definitely that."

"No need to worry. I'm just fine. Mr. Marcus and I are going to be having a few meetings this week that will be private, as well as sensitive. You can station your men around the buildings we occupy when we have those meetings. I am 100% certain I will be safe inside with Mr. Marcus or members of his family."

"Yes, Mr. President, I understand." Milo Dean wasn't happy. His job was to protect the President and ultimately that's who he was working for, the *Commander-in-Chief*. He worked in government, however, and it was his life's career. Presidents would come and go, but he would be there consistently doing the same job for all of them.

So, in essence, he worked for a higher authority than the President. He answered to other bureaucrats above him in the food chain. They were the people he owed allegiance to because they were the ones who would assure his future, not a term-limited politician. That was the reason for the satellite call. He had been told by his superiors to not only do his job, but find out all he could about Lightning Inc., Ignatius Marcus and everything going on at this facility. He had reported in to explain the magnetic field defense screen. He was on the phone, however, and not present to see the raised eyebrows and sideways glances between his superiors. He had not surprised them. They had already heard about the technology from Ainstead Crenshaw, but no one yet had any idea of its scope or limitations.

He knew nothing about the several hundred people, all professionals in many different fields from scientists to paid assassins, who had been mobilized to deal with Lightning Inc. and Ignatius Marcus. He, as well as his superiors, would be quite surprised to know of two men sitting in the security

control center at Lightning Inc. who had just intercepted, and recorded Dean's sat phone conversation.

"Son of a bitch," said Tom Rickart to Lucky. "The lousy bastard! I've known that guy for 30 years and never knew what a miserable prick he was."

Lucky was laughing. "Can you imagine how freaked out they would be if they had any idea we had just listened to their super-secret conversation? Wait till my brother hears this."

"I'll bet money he already expects it," said Rickart. "Aren't you supposed to meet your brother and the President and the science building shortly? Why don't you head over there, while I stay here monitoring all this business? I'll intercept any more phone calls from the security people as well."

Lucky was in the lab when the President and Iggy arrived. They exchange greetings. "What you think about Lightning Ranch at this point, Mr. President?"

"I'm ready to see more of these amazing technologies. Especially since your older brother has had contact with me."

"So, you're that far along? Well, get ready for some more surprises, Bill. Here's where it gets really interesting."

Lucky lead the way into the inner chamber where the original matter transmutation prototype still sat on the same platform. It was the working device and basic technology all 32 space satellites had been designed after. He repeated the performance with a lead bar like he had used to demonstrate the technology to Jake Dorian nine years earlier. He handed the 32-ounce lead bar to Bill Sledge. "Scratch it, Bill, make sure it's lead beneath the surface. There's going to be no sleight-of-hand or trickery here and we want you convinced of that. Then set it on the floor of the glass chamber. If you walk around the other end, you'll see the access hatch. Then lock the door and come to where we are."

"What actually is this device, Lucky?"

"As a chemist with a graduate degree, I'm quite sure you understand the complex relationship between matter, energy and magnetism. We call it a matter energy transmutation device. If you'll give us a couple of minutes, we will demonstrate exactly what that means. But first, please put the sunglasses on and keep your eye on the lead bar in the chamber while my brother programs the computer."

Iggy hit enter and the machine began to emit a soft humming noise. The lead bar rose to the center of the chamber. The president stared at the lead bar through his sunglasses as the blue popping lights appeared around the metal and it slowly faded from view. Bill Sledge had the same reaction as Jake Dorian many years before. "Where in hell did the damn thing go?"

"It's still there," replied Iggy. "You can't see it because the atoms have been split apart into their basic subatomic particles, and are being held by magnetic containment, in stasis, while we decide what to do with them. The magnetic field encapsulates and maintains their particle spin until we reconstruct various elemental atoms or release them as alpha or beta radiation. That is going to be your decision, Bill."

"You have to be kidding me! Exclaimed the President. You are telling me you have done this? You have dismantled elemental lead into subatomic particles, are holding them in stasis and you can put them back together again. Unbelievable!"

"It gets better," Lucky said. This is more than just a method to disintegrate matter. We can integrate it again and form an entirely new element."

"That's impossible. How can you do that? The masses are different." William Sledge had spent a good portion of his twenties as a chemist. He fully understood conventional science about the composition and characteristics of matter on both the atomic and molecular level. What the Marcus brothers were claiming they were going to do, was theoretically and physically impossible. The concept had been chased by scientists throughout the centuries. Yet, he realized he was about to witness the impossible. If this was truly the case, these people had entirely rearranged the laws of physics!

Iggy's face was lit with the usual grin he wore when demonstrating his baby... "What kind of souvenir bar would you like to take home to the White House, Bill? Gold or platinum? How about one of each?"

Bill Sledge was dumbfounded. The day had been intense. First, he had *contact* with a man who had peered into his mind and vice versa. Now he was being given the demonstration of a device that could disintegrate and rearrange matter into different elemental or molecular configurations. He watched the two smaller bars materialize in the center of the chamber, surrounded by the same popping blue lights, and then settle to the floor. He was watching the Marcus brothers from the corner of his eye while walking around to the hatch. They were smiling broadly. He noticed how much they enjoyed showing off their brainchild. He reached into the chamber and lifted the bars. They looked like gold and platinum and were certainly not lead.

Still, he was skeptical. This had to be some sort of misdirection or parlor trick. He had a difficult time believing the two men had rewritten the laws of physics, in a tiny laboratory, in the middle of rural Montana. It just didn't make sense."

"I see you're still a doubting Thomas, Mr. President." said Iggy, laughing. "I have an idea that will convince you. Hand me the Hershey bar you've been carrying around in your breast pocket."

"That's my midday snack," said Sledge, chuckling.

"Worry not, Bill. When we are finished, you will have pockets full of them. The scanners will analyze the Hershey bar, then program the computer to reproduce organic matter." He set the unwrapped Hershey bar on a platform and began the scanning process. As they waited for the scanning process to complete, he programmed the computer to reproduce the scanned product with the equivalent mass of the metal bar. "So which bar do you want to give up, Bill, the gold or the platinum... It's your choice... One of them is going to become Hershey bars," he said, laughing.

Lucky was laughing, too, "we've never done Hershey bars before, Ig. I'd like to try one to see if they taste a little metallic. One thing for sure, they will be the most expensive Hershey bars in history."

"All set," Iggy announced. "Put one of those bars back on the floor of the chamber, Bill. It doesn't matter which one, then lock it." Bill complied, walked around, and stood with the brothers watching the blue popping lights start, and the metal bar disappear. The humming continued for five or six seconds, then Hershey bars began to appear in the chamber.

"I'll be damned!!" said the President. "I'll be damned!" He repeated. "You guys have gone and done the impossible. My God, this is going to change everything... everything," he repeated softly. The things he had witnessed at Lightning Ranch were the stuff of science fiction, once written about to entertain, but now reality. He began thinking of the repercussions. "You were right the other day, Lucky, when you said, 'I hadn't seen anything yet.'" He was shaking his head, no longer skeptical, just amazed.

Lucky, still smiling said, "you ain't seen nothing yet, Mr. President!"

"There's more?! How much more than this could there possibly be? You gentlemen already have my head spinning."

"Let's go back to the observatory, Bill. There is a great deal more. In essence, it is the most important reason you are here."

They arrived at the observatory. "This is for your eyes only, Bill," said Lucky as they entered. "This observatory doubles as a planetarium. We use holography to teach celestial mechanics to the kids. Tonight, it is going to

illustrate reality." They walked to the center of the great dome and climbed the stair to the platform where a telescope observation seat was mounted. There were five chairs on an adjacent platform with a computer terminal built into the arm of the center chair.

Once seated, Iggy pointed up and instructed the President to look at the dome where he had a perfect three-dimensional image of the planet rotating, along with the earth's moon revolving around it.

"It's so real looking," was Sledge's only comment.

"Do you see the many hundreds of white lights revolving around the earth at different altitudes?" He didn't wait for a reply but continued. "They are all satellites with various functions. Some of them are communication satellites and observation vehicles. The large bright one is the international space station."

"What are the bright blue ones? There only seems to be a few dozen of them."

"Thirty-two of them, to be exact, and if I blow it up, you can see the small blue ones traveling along with the larger blue ones. We call them sidekicks. They are independent observation vehicles controlled from here or by the principal satellite. They have robotic arms and onboard computers. They can make repairs and give us constant status of the principal. Both vehicles are perpetually shielded and unassailable. We launched all of them, Bill. Two from Vandenberg, and a few from Cape Canaveral, but most of them right here from Lightning Ranch."

"Are they communication satellites, as well? What exactly is the purpose?"

"They are a much larger, much more powerful device that mimics what you just saw with the disintegration and reconstitution of matter in our research building. Not only that, but they also have power-producing capabilities enough to energize and operate themselves indefinitely. It is the same technology as our power generator, operating with a net energy gain that will never exhaust the fuel."

Bill Sledge was becoming uneasy. He wondered what this man, probably the greatest genius who ever lived, wanted with 32 satellites revolving around the planet that could disintegrate matter. "You didn't tell me what the purpose is, yet gentlemen. I need to know."

"Yes, Mr. President, you do. The satellites cover every square inch of the planet with an overlapping net. Their capabilities are not just the disintegration and reconstruction of matter. They are also capable of creating the same shield as Elmer Fudd and Yosemite Sam you witnessed, only on a

global scale. Those satellites eliminate the possibility of nuclear or biological war, forever. No one can launch nuclear weapons against another country without this technology instantly intervening. Its sensors can pinpoint and analyze fissionable or biomaterial anywhere within 25,000 kilometers. We operate it from this ranch. That's where control will continue to remain into the foreseeable future."

"Jesus... Jesus," he repeated. He stared at the man across from him...speechless. No doubt this man's intellect was unparalleled. He had seen the integrity and dedication to purpose during *contact* and was convinced this man was honorable and meant the world no harm. He instantly realized if Marcus had been of a different stripe, he could rule the world and there would be nothing or no one who could stop him. He understood why this technology could not be confiscated by those who would enslave. He and Iggy had discussed philosophy on and off for two days. Now, he knew he had been set up for this, and understood why, as he ruminated about the consequences of this revelation. He wants my help, to minimize the shock and repercussions while the world learns to cope with reality and to adjust socially, psychologically, and financially to this technology.

Iggy understood exactly what he was thinking. "It's not just that, Bill. Yes, we must help people cope with the changes to minimize collateral damage while the world adjusts. Entire fortunes will be reversed, and new ones will spring into being. An example would be the demise of big Pharma. Once the medical technology is released, everyone will realize there are better ways to treat disease and illness than drugs. We have already established that."

"Always in the past, Bill, whenever someone of genius came along and tried to introduce avant-garde holistic medicine, they were ridiculed and derided until they were considered fringe kooks, even if they were respected doctors. Big Pharma owns many politicians, doctors, and the AMA, as well. Interlink owns a good portion of that industry. Fight big Pharma and you fight Interlink. They are the people who believe all mankind exists solely to serve them. Well, they aren't going to get away with it this time, because our footprint is far too large for them to sweep away in the sand. We have *American media Inc.*, and we also have lightning Inc. We won't allow them to suppress the future. They will try but we will overcome anything they throw at us."

The economic structure of the planet will change in terms of energy as well. We are now going to have unlimited free energy because it will cost absolutely nothing on the production end. The heat produced from all the free

energy will have to be mitigated and will cost something. This isn't going to sit well with a lot of people, Bill, and you know who they are. They have often contributed to your political campaign as they do to everyone's. They buy favors. You understand the political game, so I won't elaborate."

"The military-industrial complex is going to take a kick in the pants also, Bill. There isn't going to be a valid reason to manufacture billions of dollars' worth of weapons, to arm a world that can't use them anymore. That's a lot of jobs, Bill. It will be a difficult transition."

"You are aware of how this technology is going to turn the world on its ear. People will have to learn to retrain themselves and learn to be productive in ways adding value to society. The entire last century, and most of this one, has been plagued with war after war after war. Each time, untold fortunes in infrastructure were destroyed by munitions and then rebuilt at enormous expense, often only to be destroyed by munitions in another pointless war. Millions were murdered or died as victims of warfare, and always, statesmen and clergy pompously claimed the act of war was moral if you were on the side ordained by God."

"Every one of those wars were propagated by authoritarian profiteers to amass vast fortunes for themselves, and unlimited power at the expense of the population of the globe. That stops now! It must stop here because eventually the nuclear age will annihilate us. The profiteers know no boundaries to their greed and insidious machinations. They will push us to the edge and before they stop at the precipice, they will push us over the brink. The next time, everyone dies."

"This may seem arrogant to you, but we, at Lightning, will not allow this, simply because we have the ability to stop it. We are the only ones who can. You have just heard a synopsis of the presentation I am going to give the entire world, in every language, from right here at lightning Ranch. You will have the choice, Mr. President. You can be part of this, or you can run from it. The choice is yours, but no matter what you decide, *this will happen*."

"One thing is certain; no one will starve again. This technology can synthesize an ear of corn, a kernel of wheat, or even a piece of meat, just as fast as those Hershey bars appeared. And it is not genetically modified or artificial any way. It is a perfect reproduction of the scanned sample in every way, identical down to its smallest molecule and atomic detail. It is how matter is held together on its basic level. We have cracked that code."

Bill Sledge sat silently, contemplating. It was so much take in, and it was a while before he finally mumbled. "Hard to find words to express myself, which has always been my strong suit. That's why I have been politically

successful. This time I'm at a loss. You said a moment ago, that you people of Lightning Inc. will not allow Armageddon but will stop it. What I think you should have said, because it is the truth of the matter, *I, Iggy Marcus, will not allow it to happen, because I am the only man that can stop this.* The immediate repercussions of this are staggering. I'm sure there are a million smaller repercussions not obvious, yet. Why everything at once, Mr. Marcus? Why not dribs and drabs... perhaps trickle this technology in slowly."

"That's an easy one, Bill. You're already aware of the mess the world is in. You are no fool. I didn't know that before, but I do now since we've had *contact*. You understand exactly what the story is. Everything is foisted on us by controllers. You know who and what they are. The reason you have been allowed to become and remain President is because you are innocuous to them. You do not threaten them, but your apparent indifference assists them."

"Once we begin this, there will be no stopping it, and the opposition will try everything they can to destroy us and anyone who is actively in our corner. We have created technologies that will leave them physically powerless, however. They will then resort to the only thing we have left them. It is what they have used for centuries to intimidate mankind, psychological indoctrination, and control. They are masters at it, but it will be to no avail because it is the only weapon left to them, and it will eventually fall on deaf ears from excessive overuse. Eventually they would have to lose by attrition because we will live longer than them... Probably 300 years..." Iggy smiled at the President of the United States.

"I am sure you see where I'm headed with this, Bill? The wealth of this country has been squandered and America is perched at death's door. This has been done by our politicians. It's always the politicians, but it is not by their design. They are the mediocrities who march to the tune played by the same people who have called the tune for centuries, who have allowed politicians to assume the false mantle of greatness by their office. They have squandered it for various reasons, but it all boils down to self-aggrandizement by stealing from every man and woman who has ever produced. You have allowed yourself to become one of them. That may seem offensive to you, but you know I am correct. You're at a crossroads, Mr. President. You can either do the job you were elected to do with honesty, courage, and impunity. Or you can remain a politician and be the captain of a sinking ship. You will go down with it. The choice is yours, and it is now time to make it."

William Sledge was spellbound, listening to Iggy's every word. He knew this man's description of global power and manipulation was accurate. Those who were aware of the power behind the thrones of the world always threw their hands in the air in resignation with "what can I do? I'm only one man!"...He had been one of them. He also knew that as a man and the President of the United States, man's greatest political accomplishment, he had abdicated true courage and dedication in favor of complacency and the status quo during his first term in office. His meek acquiescence to such a posture was now becoming a hard pill to swallow. He had seen the power structure of the world, and knew his position required *laissez-faire* if he was to survive. He had always felt he could help with the continuance of American opulence by being a middle-of-the-road President, knowing no single man could really change the structure of absolute power possessed by so few.... until now... and that man was sitting next to him.

"So, this is a deciding moment, isn't it, Mr. Marcus? You have placed me in quite a position, haven't you? I must choose between delusion and reality. There is no *in between* with you, is there?"

"No, Mr. President, there is not. In fact, there is no such thing as *in between*. The choice is either delusion or reality. Reality gives no ground. It never allows delusion to be a part of any equation. It is either/or, and that is simply the way it is...reality. Apparently, your vision of reality is explicit and genuine. That makes the decision much more difficult for you. It is easy to choose delusion when you negate your intellect and perception of the consequences. Yes, you are correct. I have placed you in that position. But because you are President, elected by all the people, it is exactly what you deserve and is truly just and appropriate."

"Will you change your charted course depending on my participation?"

"Yes, slightly, but it will not affect things in the final analysis. What your participation will do is ameliorate the consequences to society. If I could have refrained from offering you this opportunity and placing you in this position, I would have done so. Reality and my integrity, however, demand I must pursue every avenue to make the transition as painless as possible. But Mr. President, the transition must occur, or we will not survive as a species, and we will take the entire planet to our destruction with us."

"You are that sure of yourself? You're obviously of the belief your actions are the only means to ensure our survival. Tell me more, please."

"We are heading in inexorably towards nuclear Armageddon. It is definite and unavoidable. I could spend an entire week explaining the inescapable logic of this. In the end, however, the reality of the words will

be subject to debate, but only by irrational minds. That is what most debates are, an argument about reality versus opinion. If reality was accurately perceived by all, there would be no need for debate. Reality always dictates the consequences of any action. The only necessity for debate is to determine what consequences are acceptable...given reality. We all have a choice. We can choose reality no matter how dim the prospects are; or we can delude ourselves for the sake of momentary complacency. Reality is always the final arbiter, however, and it will always be what it will be."

"How can you be so sure our own self-annihilation will be the ultimate end result?"

Iggy smiled, "We are having a debate, Bill. That is the hallmark of all politicians regardless of how crystal-clear reality is. You obviously want proof. I can offer that, but it will be very difficult for you. Along with your crystal-clear vision of true reality, will come the crystal-clear vision of your own subconscious mind. We all call it *Unlocking* here at Lightning Ranch. It is never for the timid or people that exist in a state of extreme delusion. When it is successful, it is an epiphany for the participant. One thing I cannot do, is promise success until I see the depths of your subconscious. You see, it is a catch 22 situation. When I unlock someone, I don't know whether I will do harm or create value until after it occurs...and there is no return; it is a one-way street. That is why I have not asked you to submit to this."

The President of the United States, William Sledge, sat staring up at the holographic projection of the earth, with the little white and blue dots revolving around it, thinking about everything he had just heard. His vision was blurred by the internal conflict of indecision as he wrestled with his desires as a human being and the obligations of his office. He harbored no resentment for being subjected to this. The genius of Iggy Marcus existed and had now become part of his existence because of his office. He had run and been elected. Obligation was as much a part of the service to his country as was the pomp and circumstance of the office. He was no fool, flawed, yes like all people, but he saw the reality of what he would become because of his choice this day. He began to think about Iggy's statements concerning self-image and the dictates of reality. At the close of this day, he would become much more as a human being than he was at this moment, or he would recede into delusion and cowardice. He understood all this clearly and knew this choice would be the definition of his character as a man.

Iggy was off, tinkering with the telescope while he left the President to his contemplation. Today was a turning point. It would either remain a

fishing trip, or become an epiphany, for one of the most important and powerful men in the world.

President William Sledge rose from his chair and walked to the telescope. "Mr. Marcus, I have decided. First however, I must spend some time with my wife and try to explain this adventure I am about to embark upon."

"I believe I have already helped you a great deal with that, Bill."

"Oh, how so Iggy?" They were back to informality again.

"Melanie. We all understand what an imposition this is on you, personally. But you chose your path when you ran for President. Your success places your path at an intersection with our path, so it was inevitable. Melanie has spent a great deal of time with Alice. You will find you have far less to explain to her than you think at this moment. Why don't you go find her and see how she feels and thinks?"

"Why do I get the feeling we are being manipulated?" Bill Sledge asked with a short laugh.

"Because you are, of course. What else could you call this?" Iggy returned his laugh.

"That's exactly what Melanie said, Bill. She said it was not an easy thing to endure. Some people couldn't handle it all and might have a mental breakdown. She said people who had erected less barriers to the world than other people, had a much easier time. She also said once you get through the first one, subsequent unlocking becomes very easy because of familiarity. You have nothing more to learn about yourself that is hidden and have accepted your own subconscious mind with your conscious mind at that point. She says it relates directly to your strength of character and honesty."

"After everything you've told me about the first incident between you and Mr. Marcus, that you called *contact*, you have an idea of how invasive it will be. The next question is, do you want that degree of subliminal and emotional contact with another human being, and will it compromise national security in any way?"

"I think it is good Melanie briefed you. I would have a very difficult time explaining all this to you without her doing so. One thing he told me, and I believe him because everything else around here is so extraordinary, is I will be irrevocably and dramatically changed because of it. He says the ensuing self-awareness will make me a better person for it, however, but he and I, as well as you in this case, will have a permanent psychological bond. He also made another suggestion. He said he had done it once before to a doctor,

whose wife was a judge. He unlocked them simultaneously. He said it was more difficult, but also more rewarding. He also said a man and wife will learn everything about each other there is to learn, and their psychological bonds will become much more personal and intense. They will learn each other's every secret, hidden desire, and every hidden fear... all the way back to infancy. He said it is all there, buried but accessible. He also says we will learn the exact same things about him."

"It sounds very scary, Bill. Do we really want to know so much about each other? I don't know. I know I have things deep inside of me I have repressed. I'm not sure I even want to look at them myself. What you're telling me is they will be on display for all three of us to see. Do you think you can handle my weaknesses and inadequacies, Bill?"

"As if I didn't have any weaknesses or inadequacies, my dear wife. We have a good marriage and are bound to each other. We rarely play games with each other, other than in the bedroom," he laughed. "I would consider all this playing with fire and too uncertain if there weren't so many things at stake. This man, by himself, and with his family, of course, but they are peripheral, is going to change the entire nature of man's existence. It will be done in a greater fashion than it has ever been conceived of or done before. It is tremendous in scope, and the small part I will play will be to mitigate collateral damage. I am not sure of the ways I will be able to do this, outside of the bully pulpit. He said he would explain everything eventually. Supposedly, it has a great deal to do with the deep State and bureaucratic government."

"Sen. Dorian told me the one thing I had to experience here, before he and Sharon left yesterday, if nothing else, was your famous scampi," said William Sledge, looking at Melanie as everyone seated themselves at Iggy's dining room table. "He said nobody does it better."

Melanie laughed. "That proves the old adage the surest way to a man's heart is through his stomach."

"Is there anything I can do to help?" offered Alice.

"No, it's all done. Gloria, Sarah and I have it under control, but thank you very much Alice." Melanie replied as she and Gloria ferried dinner to the dining room table.

"I can understand why he told me not to miss your scampi, it smells fabulous!"

Unlocking hovered over the evening, but the dinner was enveloped with relaxed, casual, good humor as the two couples described funny and delightful experiences of their past lives. Only Melanie understood Iggy had set this mood.

Melanie served dessert and Gloria cleared the dishes away afterwards. "Are we going to sing tonight, Mom?" asked Gloria, as she loaded the dishwasher.

"You're in for a treat," said Iggy. "I can never get enough of listening to them harmonize together. Melanie has been training Gloria and Sarah for years now, and you have heard them. When they sing together, you will think the Angels have visited. You'll love it. I think," he said with a smile, "we'll save it for later. First, we have some business to attend to if you are still in agreement and ready. Remember, there is no commitment, here. However, we have explained the process to you, and I believe we will be just fine."

Iggy had spent the afternoon preparing them for the evening. He had prolonged *contact* with the President one more time, and the First Lady, twice. She had been intensely startled the first time and pulled away quickly from her handshake with Iggy. The second time for both was considerably more subdued and she actually enjoyed it. The simple clarity and benevolence of Iggy's mind was soothing and relaxing. Iggy had spent twelve years developing the process. He understood how invasive it was and refined the technique to subdue the experience after the initial impact.

Unlocking was different. It required strength of character and great mental stability of the participants. It was much more invasive. The person, or people in this instance, would relive their entire lives during a very short interlude. The process was overwhelming and always evoked a very strong emotional response. He had become much more adept over the years, learning to soften emotional surges as people uncovered long buried memories, fears, and apprehensions. It was always daunting, and Iggy had developed a way to gently shepherd his companions through the odyssey. Other than self-exposure, perhaps the most difficult part of the process was the barrier free exposure of one's deepest character framework to another person.

Iggy explained the procedure and prepared the President and his wife to join him in an embrace, while Melanie and Gloria left the room to busy themselves in the kitchen.

Iggy drew from his experience of unlocking Laura and Richard Balin. "Don't let your rising emotions inhibit you. It's a normal effect from what we are about to do; especially as we progress deep into your subconscious mind.

Everything that happens between us tonight will never leave this room. You will each experience various emotional responses as you relive some of your experiences, but I promise you it will pass. You will understand why I had to assess you both during *contact* this afternoon to ensure you are capable of doing this without serious repercussions. I am convinced you will both be fine, so just let it flow.”

“Before we embark, there are a few more things for you to consider. Once the sleeper awakens, he can no longer sleep and becomes the victim of his own perpetual awareness. Further, you will never be able to lie to yourself again. To many people, that might seem a small matter. Most people don't realize how often they lie to themselves to evade reality. Consequently, the inability to negate reality and thus obscure the burdens of existence, will cease to exist completely for you. To abandon all fantasy and live exclusively within the bounds of reality is a ubiquitous life changing journey for most.”

"How long will this take?" Alice inquired nervously.

"About 20 to 30 minutes," said Iggy. It depends on you. "I will ease you out of the experience toward the end. I was able to see how devoted you are to each other, this afternoon. This will make you much closer than you thought possible, and more securely bound to each other as a result. You will both have a permanent psychological bond, with me, for the rest of your lives as well, but it will not be detrimental." He dimmed the lights moments before the President of the United States, his wife Alice, and Iggy Marcus embraced each other.

Thirty minutes later, Iggy softly played the piano. It seemed to help after first unlocking someone. William and Alice Sledge sat in a silent embrace. Alice was crying and her husband pulled her close as a few tears trickled down his cheek. He knew why she was crying. They had been exposed to each other in the most intimate way possible, and now understood even the smallest intricacies of each other's persona, as well as their own, and that of Iggy Marcus. They had both experienced the total of their lives' experiences, with all the emotional repercussions, as poignantly as if they had just occurred.

Alice had relived the most difficult parts of her life, especially her teenage and college years. She had always thought of herself as a wallflower, never coming out of her shell or experiencing romance, until she met her husband. They had studied chemistry together and been close companions during the last three years in college. This night, for the first time, they became intimately aware of the enormous depth of feeling between them, and it thrilled and validated their commitment to each other. They had each

cringed at the site of their own flaws, past exaggerations and spoken untruths. But along with that came acceptance and the realization no one was perfect. The solid fabric of each person's character was the stable foundation that allowed them to view the depths of their own subconscious minds and survive it.

President William Sledge had discovered no such feelings of inadequacy as he viewed the landscape of his youth. As a decent athlete and an honor student during his pre-college schooling, his life was two-dimensional, uncluttered by peer envy or adolescent frivolity. His monsters resided in the domain of his political career. He had made trade-offs, compromising his integrity on occasion for career advancement and political expediency. Those poor choices had been assaults on his integrity and haunted him; he rarely allowed the memory of his failings to surface consciously. Periodically, a contemporary political alliance would drag one of those memories from his subconscious, forcing him to sidestep the embarrassment of his past shortcomings. Unlocking had dredged them from his subconscious for all three of them to see, but now they understood learning to correct and live with mistakes is the hallmark of character.

Beauty does not always lie in the eye of the beholder. It is rarely a matter of opinion, but pure, authentic, and subtle with its own unique identity often hidden beneath effort, emerging only after sunrise.

Sarah Louise Billings

CHAPTER XXVIII

SUNRISE

Iggy was restless. He never slept much past 3AM. Rising quietly to not disturb Melanie, he swung the French doors to the stone terrace wide and stepped into the thick fragrance of wild mountain aster, as he admired the moonlit panorama of the mountains crowned with silver gilded cumulus clouds. It was a beautiful night. He thought about the previous week, the trip to Argentina and how close he had come to losing his son. I won't let that happen, again, he promised himself. He began to think about the future and the enormous task he had set for himself when he sensed Melanie's consciousness. She padded quietly to him from behind, and he felt the warmth of her body as she wrapped her arms around him, resting her chin on his shoulder. He turned slightly, nuzzling her forehead with his cheek.

"That was quite an Argentina vacation, my husband," she laughed. "Our first one in years. Maybe next time we can find something exciting to do when we are away, instead of just lounging around."

"He kissed her cheek softly. "My wife, you were... no... you *are* magnificent. You should have seen yourself in that room in Argentina. You are a pillar of strength and courage. I sensed you were shaken, but you held your own in a fashion that was incredible. I love you. No man, except perhaps my father, is or has ever been as fortunate as me."

"That is exactly how I feel, every waking moment of my life, my dearest. I once said to you, the night we met, you were my knight in shining armor. I expected that to wane over time. But no, it has grown into a burning flame within me. I did not know that a love, like this, was possible.

Iggy turned, cocking his head slightly, admiring her beauty as the moonlight caressed her skin and made her blue eyes sparkle in the night. "Why don't we grab a cup of coffee at the Pavilion and drive up Coletta Mountain and watch the sunrise."

"I love it. What a great idea. Thank you for naming an entire mountain after my family, my love. I'll leave a note for Gloria and Sarah."

"I decided on that name the day we brought your parents up there when they first arrived at Lightning to show them the ranch spread beneath them. Remember?"

"I remember everything like that. It was there we first discussed the wedding with my parents." She was smiling at the memories.

They entered the kitchen of the Pavilion and heard someone rustling at the far end. "I wonder who that could be at this hour? The breakfast crew doesn't usually get here till four thirty," said Melanie.

Her voice carried across the quiet kitchen. The occupant heard her voice as a cooler door swung open. Lindy's smiling face popped around the edge of the door. "Hi guys, what are you doing here this early?"

"I might ask you the same thing, little sister." It's kind of early. Are you alone or is Marty in the cooler rummaging with you?"

"No," she responded dejectedly. "Marty was held up in New York for two more days. I was lonely and couldn't sleep. So, I decided to get up early, get a cup of coffee and watch the sunrise."

Melanie smiled, "That's what we're doing here, also. Only we are driving up Coletta Mountain to watch it."

"Oh!... Can I come? I would love to watch the sunrise from there!"

"Absolutely, Lindy! We would love to have you come with us. Have you ever watched the sunrise from there?"

"No, never. Marty and I talked about doing it once, but we haven't gotten around to it, yet."

"You don't know what you're missing, sis. It's magnificent."

"Let's go then. I'll bring a thermos of coffee."

The Land Rover bumped along over the ruts, until they reached the parking spot high atop the mountain. "It's about half an hour till sunrise. Let's have coffee."

Lindy poured and they sat on the rocks sipping the hot liquid... waiting for Mr. Sun.

The silver moonlit gilded outline of the billowing blue-gray cumulous clouds scattered across the eastern horizon began to fade as the sky brightened, transforming their azure and indigo contours to a brilliant crimson explosion as they welcomed the sun.

"God, it's beautiful," said Lindy. "Who could not see this without believing we already live in paradise?"

THE SHADOW OF GIANTS

"I'm glad you chose to bring me here this morning Iggy. The top of Coletta Mountain is the perfect place to tell you I'm pregnant. I wanted to wait for the right moment. I tested myself last night and Sylvia's ultrasound confirmed it."

Iggy held her hands smiling. "I thought you looked a little more radiant than usual Melanie. How exciting! Do you know the gender?"

"Both...twins!" Said Melanie as he embraced her.

Lindy wrapped her arms around her brother and sister-in-law, kissing them. Whoopee, Melanie, more Marcuse's to liven up the party! Congratulations! She said with her usual tear.

They stood, facing east, in a salute to the coming sun that radiated the dazzling promise of humanity's future. Melanie knew mankind's new sterling path to tomorrow was a spectacular gift to men and women everywhere from the man standing beside her. The first brilliant sunbeam pierced the morning sky, exactly from the summit pinnacle of Lightning Mountain, the highest peak on the eastern border of the ranch. It was like a beacon planted, at that very point, by a wandering explorer, to light the way for followers. The beacon intensified as golden rays fanned the clouds, transforming the crimson fringes to brilliant orange.

Iggy sensed a combination of joy and sadness in his sister. He glanced her way; tears streamed down her cheeks.

Iggy shook his head, knowing.... "Mom?"

She couldn't speak for a moment but shook her head through the tears. "I wish Mama could be here right now Iggy... She would be so proud," she finally said, sobbing.

He chuckled. "You're always crying Lindy. You have to learn to curb it a little," as he embraced her. "I told you before, you are going to get dehydrated."

She laughed. Her brother always knew the right thing to say.

The sky was becoming brilliant, and now, the large orange-yellow beacon seemed balanced atop the sharp pinnacle of Lightning Mountain. The three of them stood, Iggy in the middle, with their arms around each other's waists gazing east.

Lindy looked up at her brother. "You won, Iggy. You beat them all and saved the world. I had my doubts that anyone, even you, could do this, but now I know better."

"Don't count the chickens, Lindy. The eggs have been laid and are beginning to hatch, but this is only just beginning. We have a long way to go,

and the fight will be intense. We'll win though. We have to because it is man's destiny."

Melanie leaned her head on his shoulder, her arm still around his waist and his around hers. "Are you ready for more kids, Melanie? The first group is about to leave and make their way through life. They will begin the change. The next group, you know, is going to be over a thousand. Are you ready?"

Melanie wasn't as often given to tears as Lindy, but one ventured down her cheek. "When I am with you, my husband, I am ready for anything."

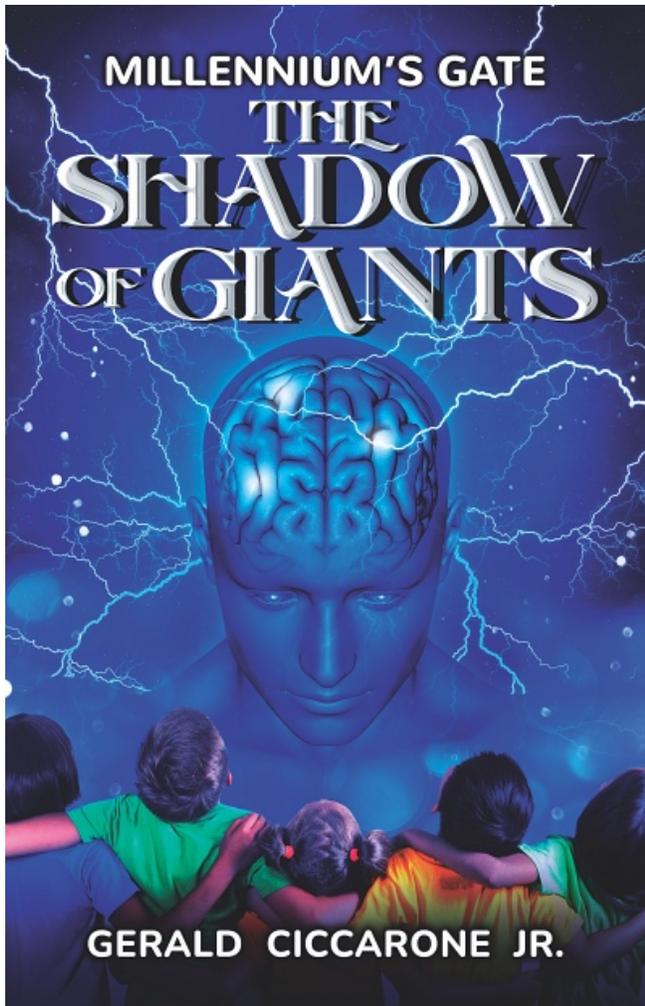
The Author

In The Shadow of Giants

It is probably safe to say, if you are reading this page, you have read the preceding book. It is apparent to many of us, society seems to have lost its way and is meandering purposeless through a world shackled by previously unheard-of technical wonders, collective promiscuity, and lack of intellectual vision that threaten to usurp our individuality.

What once held true for our predecessors, seems to have diminished, if not vanished altogether in the face of contemporary influences and a prolific social media. It is obvious we are rapidly abandoning the philosophical underpinnings and societal precepts, once the foundation of this incredible country.

I have been fortunate; raised and educated by a loving family and given all the tools provided by a classical education. In short, I was taught to critically think, which is a blessing most of the time. Often however, it is gut wrenching to behold the foundations of my country atrophy and crumble. Critical thinking is the only venue that makes that vision possible. Both our public and private institutions have abandoned teaching our young to think, in favor of indoctrination and the permanent extinction of intellectual individuality. I have attempted to resuscitate common sense and critical thought here. This is the beginning, but the saga continues as my hero, Ignatius Marcus, Junior, proceeds to enlighten, change, and save the world, from itself, for his posterity. The story continues... on *The Shoulders of Giants*...and....in *The Footsteps of Giants*.



The Odyssey of a man who suffers a bizarre accident by design. He is chosen by the universe to shepherd the world of men through the minefield that will inevitably destroy them, and lead them to millennium's gate.

MILLENNIUM'S GATE: The Shadow of Giants

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