

PORTHOLE

By MJ Politis, Ph.D.

mjpolitis@yahoo.com

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CHAPTER 1

Professor Vladmir Ivanowitch Kinski could best be described as a quiet man, one possessed and infused by the mystical quality of Silence which was never stirred by any disturbance created by man, or even women. No one in his laboratory had ever heard him raise his voice in anger at a piece of machinery that decided to follow its own agenda. Or when his application for funding needed to keep his lab bench filled with supplies, or his refrigerator supplied at home, was rejected. Or even when a trusted colleague who had reviewed a paper he submitted for publication informed the editor of the journal that it was faulty science, then published the results himself with his, or her, own name as the originator of the idea and the implimenter of the experiment.

“The universe, and universes, will balance themselves,” the 60 year old rock of stability would say with every setback, as well as every success he encountered. Just like the Dalai Llama, nothing about Kinski had changed for the last forty years. Indeed, if you took a photo of ‘Professor Vladimir’, as those trusted him most called him, the only thing that would be different over the last four decades would be his graying hair, which was still styled in the same regular, non-offensive manner that was the fashion, and requirement, of professional men in the Soviet Union during the time of Kruschev. His wardrobe had not changed either. Though ties went out of fashion, then use, for neuroscience and paranormal researchers as the 21st century was inflicted upon the world, Professor Vlad could never be seen without that garment around his neck, a white or on ‘racy’ days, a blue shirt under it. His glasses were still black rimmed, thick and only off his ears when he cleaned them.

On the outside, Vladimir presented a portrait of the perfect Soviet citizen, giving according to his abilities and thinking that he would get everything according to his needs, and wants. His favorite music was Dimitri Shostakovitch, Stalin’s poster Soviet showpiece of Communist culture, because it was ‘interestingly symmetrical’. His favorite food was boiled cabbage, a taste acquired by both choice and necessity. His reputation as mapper of neurological pathways was always respected, his results always verifiable by scientists in the US who doubted Soviet science, and fellow Russian researchers who, when they had to, had reported progress in their investigations on more than one occasion to Comrade Chairman so they could keep their jobs, houses, families and heads.

But in the ‘New Russia’, where there was a ‘President’ in charge of the Kremlin, Vladimir was considered an anachronism. Most of his students ridiculed him for being dry, linear and pathologically philosophical in his lectures. A dinosaur who still carried a briefcase to work rather than an I-pad. And who did his research by reading books in the library rather than downloading synopses from google. Yet, by some miracle that the universe needed to stay Alive, or intact, Vladimir still kept his position at the University in a city that few Americans could locate on the map, and most Russians never had a need to.

But there was one thing that made Vladimir an ideal citizen for the Soviet Paradise that never happened, and a threat to the new Russia that had evolved from the ashes of the Cold War. He was service rather than profit oriented. He preferred cooperation to competition. And he was completely unable to fight back in the 'grab what you can because that's the only way yer gonna get it' world that his beloved Russia had become in a 'cool to be cruel' world. Still, the powers that had emerged on top needed Professor Vladimir to maintain his profession and research. For the moment anyway.

It was an exceptionally warm February evening, rain coming from the grey skies overlooking the University of Rostovik rather than snow. Professor had started out the day as Professor Vlad. But he ended up as Instructor Kinski, having given up trying to convince his students that they should be more concerned with what is NOT the exam rather than what they would be required to regurgitate so they could become princes, princesses, queens and kings in the regurgitation game now called 'education'. One that was about data rather than knowledge, the showdown trophy going to the Clone who can google a correct answer rather than the Mind that figured out that the right question and the correct answer were both wrong. He gazed at the copy of 'Fahrenheit 451' that he had tried to instruct the students about, thinking that he could maybe get them to read that apocalyptic novel about an Underground society in an illiterate (and because of such, happy) futuristic 1984 world that tried to keep Enlightenment Alive by tricking them into thinking it was a physics book about a new model of mathematical systems. Then again, when he brought Orwell's '1984' into the classroom, people thought he had given up teaching contemporary neuroscience in preference for reading history books.

A thought occurred to Vladimir as he walked past the photos of the faculty dating back all the way to the time when pleasing Stalin was more important than pleasing your students, or the international investors. "You all are dead now," he said to the pictures of the men, and few women, whose eyes still lingered in the consciousness of anyone walking through the hallways who chose to look ahead of them rather than at text messages displayed on their phones. "You couldn't see where this place you worked so hard to maintain, and keep going, was heading to. But I can." He cracked a sad smile. "We are all becoming...American," he said to the ghosts he could feel in the pockets of 'cold' that only he and his specialized machinery could detect, and then himself as his eyes were taken hostage by a mirror placed on the left side of the exit door.

"What are we going to do with you?" he said to the company of Comrades, strangers and enemies felt but not seen. "But more interestingly, what are you going to do with us?" he continued.

Natasha Dmitrovitch watched as Instructor Kinski cracked a smile, then allowed a chuckle to crack open holes in his aging face that seemed to let blood out of them. Blood that seemed to become red, firey and spooky when he burst into a laugh, emerging into Professor Vlad. Then, someone who she was responsible for taking care of. "Professor Kinski," she said, rushing over to him before anyone else would notice him going 'aloof' again, or care to notice such anyway. "I have these papers for you to sign," the 40 year old Ukrainian-born Departmental Neuroscience Secretary who looked more like a guest

Romanian gypsy instructor for the Fine Arts Division said as she pushed three documents in front of his face. "Please, we need these signed," she said, then insisted.

"Very well," he finally conceded, pulled back into the world of the 'living' by a gentle touch of Natasha's slender fingers on his arthritic shoulders. "I'll put my signature on them." With that he looked at the submission pages for the newest papers about to go out for review, nodded his head three times in the affirmative to each of them. He then took in a deep breath into the nostrils which had almost as much hair in them as the mustache still holding onto his upper lip. He opened his mouth and let hurl three well placed wads of spit, each hitting the envelope to which the papers were to go.

Natasha quickly wiped off the saliva off the address on the envelopes with a tissue from her purse. "What are you doing?" she demanded. "A man of your reputation as a man of logic, science and reason should----"

"---Use every trick available in a world still operating on dumb luck," he said by way of explanation. "Haven't you heard that spitting on an envelope going out into the world will insure that the letter coming back to you will have good news in it?"

"No, I eh..." Natasha replied, feigning an apology. "I suppose that custom was before my time," she said with a wide smile.

Even Professor Vlad, who preferred to live in the laboratory between his ears rather than any bearing his name on the front door, knew it was a forced smile, almost an American one. Indeed, he could see Natasha's youthful face turn old. Older than even his. But, she was getting paid hard-stolen money by the University to take care of him at work, and by government officials he knew nothing about to see that he got home safely, and that he remain content to not leave that home. She needed the job, and was doing her best to keep it.

Vlad let Natasha drive him to the market, help him choose the best produce and fish for his evening meal, cooked said meal, and dined with him. At the end of that culinary experience, she said with an alluring voice, "And now for dessert, birthday MAN." She stroked Vlad's cheek, took him by the hand, and led him towards the bedroom. "Your wish is my command," she said with a courtly bow as she whipped off her blouse, revealing size perfect breasts under it. "And pleasure," she continued with an alluring light of love in her coral green eyes, framed by a mane of long black hair that allowed the onlooker to see any color he wanted to in them.

"But is it your true Calling?" Vlad replied, in a voice as firm as it was kind.

"My what?" Natasha asked.

"Your Calling, my dear, dear,..." Vlad said as he put the blouse back on Natasha, like a father putting a child to bed. "My dear, dear..."

“Common Law Wife!” Natasha reminded Vladimir with a volcanic burst of indignant rage.

“You mean assignment,” Vlad replied, calmly. “Assigned by...hmmm.”

Natasha ranted on, making yet again all sorts of claims that she was not on anyone’s payroll to be the caretaker for the most brilliant, insightful and accomplished scientist who had ventured into investigations of the paranormal. She said that the reason why she stuck with him was because she loved him. On most nights, Vlad believed her. On this night he couldn’t, and wouldn’t. Something else in the room told him not to. As well as the data he had extracted a week ago on machinery he had finally been able to construct. A feat that would not have been possible without Natasha’s technical knowledge, her help dealing with the suits and the funders, and her love.

But as of the last set of experiments, Vlad was finally able to not only prove the existence of parallel universes, but could calculate the power that could be wielded in the one he currently dwelled if you accessed the right worm holes. His next step would be to discover the intentions of those in those worm holes and alternative universes. A task he felt Called to, even though Natasha said continuously to him that he was unable to read the minds of anyone in the ‘real’ world he lived in now. Including hers.

That night, Vlad slept alone, going to bed without desert. A just punishment for a Visionary trying to do the Right thing in a universe where he now knew there were many realities, and moralities.

CHAPTER 2

It was a long day at the Russian Consulate in New York or Rhonda Petrovski. She had worked hard for a week getting all the paperwork together. Getting all of the certificates saying she was a legitimate writer, a legitimate US citizen, a legitimate owner of a legitimate albeit small publication and new film production company, a legitimate bank loan from a legitimate institution, a legitimate arrangement for ROI from co-signers who had co-signers behind them, a legitimate university grad from a legitimate university, a legitimate assurance from Ministers in both countries that said she was a help rather than hindrance to the Russian and American economies, and a legitimate copyright to the book she was assigned by her dying grandmother to take to take to the home of her ancestors to make a film about a legitimate topic which was humanistic rather than political. And of course, legitimate papers from the five countries that she had lived in over her 26 year old life that she had no criminal record, along with a letter from the Canadian consulate stating that she committed no civil or Federal offences while in the womb of her American Mother when she went North of the 49th to visit her pot-growing relatives in British Columbia. The forms verifying the above occupied the better part of her lap top carrying case. The papers verifying that they were her papers filled the pack slinging over one shoulder that was exhausted from carting such to ten offices in as many buildings that week. The back under it so warped from bowing to administrators on the other side of the desk and having to sit on chairs designed to make seekers of approval both uncomfortable and hunchbacked during the ‘necessary to insure fiscal solvency and legal security’ interviews.

“Only one hoop left,” she said to herself as she sat in the waiting room for the final stage of the process so that her papers could be officially stamped and she could get the plane from JFK bound for Moscow and beyond. She had of course dressed for the part, a basic black suit with black hose, black librarian pumps, her usually wild, blonde hair her hair tied up in a matronly bun, to hide the various colors it had been in the past. “And then,” came out of her mouth as she took out the final form, to see that it was all in order.

“You’ll die of good health before you get to actually do anything with it?” said a fellow Millennial in a Greek accent carrying a mandolin over one shoulder, a ‘so what can they do to me that life hasn’t already?’ fire in his eyes that complimented his bright, Einstein-doo mop of unruly hair. “Of course, you’re probably afflicted with Dull Out Disease, a contagion that kills with lifelessness and boredom. But until the world wises up and puts THAT on a form for insurance policies, VISAs and work permits, you’ll have no problems at all in life. Which in itself probably IS your problem. Like that elevator music over the loudspeakers here that is designed to keep REAL artists sedate, and quiet. Unless it is accompanied by....hmmm.”

The gypsy rebel whose jeans, shirt, shoes and bandana clashed with each other in terms of hue and style, took out his mandolin and played a riff to ‘Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head’ that had soul, style and flavor to it. As Rhonda felt it, he seemed to be a reincarnation of Zorba, informing the soul-dead engineer who was the first person in that

book which Rhonda read as a university student, taught as a grad student, now was making money selling special editions of.

“So, how was your week? Did it work for or on you?” said the Greek troubadour who seemed to be inviting her more on a magic carpet ride to Valhalla rather than a boink in his loft in Soho. “And what did you do? What did you feel? What did you seek?” he sang.

“Accomplishment, I guess,” Rhonda replied, looking at the stack of papers she would have to present to the Rep for the Ministry of Russian Culture. “The final loop in a long series of...accomplishments.”

“Ah yes, all the forms, filled out to specifications. Which no doubt satisfied, nay, pleased the administrators and gatekeepers. Which must have pleased you as well.”

“It was...part of the process,” Rhonda said.

“Ah yes, a process which was directed towards what produce, or inspired by what Vision?” young ‘Zorba’ continued as he played with, then against, the Musak to the consternation of the security guards who came his way, then was stopped by one of the gatekeepers, a respectably clad older senior official who seemed to be reminded of his younger days when hearing it.

“You see?” he said to Rhonda as the Putin-look senior administrator acquired a smile and vitality behind his eyes more akin to poet Puchkin and composer Prokofiev, who was unable to get his co-workers to listen to this Zorba, but still had enough authority to allow him to wield his hands on the strings rather than on the . “Obeying the rules pleases administrators. Breaking them inspires them.”

“Even when you come to them without any paperwork?” Rhonda retorted. “Paperwork that took me a lot of time, effort and applied intelligence to get done. And even Jesus, who was a rebel, said you have to render under Caesar that which is Caesar’s.”

“And render unto God that which is God’s.” Zorba continued. “An end to those procedural means that you can only reach if you consider that the only real accomplishment when dealing with administrators is if you get through the gates by paying the MINIMUM amount of toll. And if you consider anything more than that a failure on your own part. Giving to Caesar that which belongs to God, or the Beyond God, who is Life. Life that is to be lived rather than administrated, or watched, or...recorded.”

It was the last word that hit Rhonda hardest, as Zorba looked at the book atop the pile of ‘permit’ papers.

“This is you, Rhonda Petrovski?” young Zorba said, regarding the soft cover re-release her hands grasped onto with as firm a grip as he had on the mandolin. “Who wrote a book about Ivan Petrovski?”

“Yeah,” Rhonda said. “Mostly collected memoirs, but more fact that’s more alive, and I hope sellable, than any fiction. My great-great grandfather.”

With pride in her ancestry that seemed to overshadow her writing about it, Rhonda went on to describe how Ivan, a Cossack, fought against oppressive Czarina Katherine the ‘Great’, then Czar wannabe Pugachev, then against several kings in Europe on his way to the other side of the Pond where he established a community just West of the Mississippi which was the envy of the Canadian, American and Indigenous People’s governments, where freedom was based on intellect and everyone was not only encourage to speak their mind but required to express the Passion in their Soul. Camelot West was indeed a magnificent place which survived suppression from governments seeking territories of their own, as well as microbes that sought to bring down the multi-cellular species that thought itself superior biologically and otherwise to the ‘lower’ life forms. Ivan’s sons, and daughters, went on to become revolutionaries in America, and eventually, back home in Russia. In politics, the arts, and even science.

But something other than ancestral pride infiltrated Rhonda’s soul as she concluded the tale which she was commissioned to produce as a movie. She was a recorder of those heroic and artistic events, not one who did them. She was a producer of this film, whose only ‘canvas’ was putting together the right directors, actors and screenwriters who would be the Creative elements in this Endeavor. And as for even making movies, Rhonda wanted to be something else. The direction of her stare and the way she held it showed Zorba what her real desires were.

“So, you are looking at the paintings on the wall, and my mandolin,” he noted. “Which means that you want to use notes to make music. And make paint stains on canvas art.”

“Or, more deeply...” she said. “Make notes on canvas, and paint stains on music,” she said, feeling herself again, somehow. “Which doesn’t make any sense, but it sounds literary. Literary dribble that is,” she continued as another call came over her cell. Another business about art rather than doing art thing that she had to do. Which she was so good at, yet hated so much.

While answering the text, and waiting to be seen by the Rep for the Minister of ‘Whatever’, Rhonda contemplated other realities. The would-ve’s and could-ve’s of it all. Which maybe could be expressed in another dimension. Or, perhaps were already being expressed there. Accessible through print if you were dumb, or brave, enough to write about it. In a trip where you would have to leave everything behind, including a mandolin, and a stack of resumes that, as the song said, ‘mark our life with bookmarkers that measured what we lost’. But there were two credos that Rhonda knew were still essential if life were to work for rather than on her. First, an unexamined life is not worth living. Second, though self-observation is painful and hard, a skill acquired or

inflicted on only the 'gifted', without it, you stumble all over yourself, and bring down others. Even young Zorbas who continue the tradition carried on by author Nikos Kazantzakis and Anthony Quinn.

CHAPTER 3

“Hereye hereye hearye, men of strong stature, true grit and vision!” the kilted, according to most of his forged ID, 30 year old Carnie dude boasted to the crowd with a Scottish accent dressed as Braveheart. “Throw this Ancient Celtic javaline at mean King Edward the Terrible and win magnificent prizes, including honor, glory, and a kiss from me lassie here,” Boris Ivanowitch said as he hugged the maiden in distress he had rented for the day from ‘Kate the Greatest Talent Agency’.

“Or better yet, something more from a yer own lassie, or if ye hail from the Amazon clan, yer own lass, or from the Isle of Lesbos, ye own lass,” the ‘rent-a-Walking-Prop’Ukranian model who was serious about becoming an actress said with a brough that was far more convincing than Boris’, with a dance in her stride that attracted three straight couples holding hands on night out on the town, and two men who looked like they wanted to. It was five more than Boris was able to get to his booth on his own. Despite the prizes of Ancient Celtic made in China replica swords, daggers and pistols that awaited anyone who could put the javaline into the red mark that shone on the holligram of the mounted 12th century.

But once in Boris’ domain, the four couples all eagerly approached to the plastic lance which looked heavier than it was, and toss it at the a floating image of a Tyrant on horseback whose face alternated between looking like Ivan the Terrible, Adolf Hitler, Rapsutin and, for enough seconds to register into the gut but not into the view of any Government officials strolling about, Vladimir Putin. “One at a time, me fellow heroes, visionaries and liberators,” Boris bellowed out, trying to assess who would be the worst javelin thrower with the most pieces of eight in his pocket. It was a skill he was not very good at, as over the last three nights he had lost more money in prizes than gained in rubles, euros or American dollars put into the ‘Liberation from all Tyrants, Assholes and Idiots’ war chest. And he still owed money for the hologram generator along with the associated equipment.

This night, Boris Vasilikov had a good feeling about it. ‘Svetlana’ brought him more people to his booth in two hours than had come in the better part of a week. But, such made sense, as men, or even women, got more pleasure out of looking at her legs than his knobby knees and hair calves.

“Ye look like brave lads indeed,” Boris continued, noting that the candidates to defy the very lifelike holograms in his booth were all men, probably because they allowed their imaginations to see them as real, and men, being visual above all the senses, could not smell the bullshit behind the illusion. He picked up the lavishly decorated, fake-blood stained, flouroscent javelin, pretending that the 5 pound plastic rod with the electronic tip weighted ten times that. He offering the lance that would kill the Demon King to whoever was bold enough to take it. “Ye all look like strong lads.” But as the men negotiated amongst themselves to see who would be the first victor, or sucker, Svetlana intervened.

“And strong lassies as well,” Svetlana said, picking up lance with one hand, and easily tossing it to the women. “Ye nay have ta listen ta this rabid bampot, der ya kin?” she said to the three women with the straight me, who were then joined by the more effeminate man in the gay couple.

None of the customers knew what ‘rabid bampot’, or ‘der ya kin’ meant, but they clearly were given a first lesson in what to call an ‘raging idiot’, and knew how to ask ‘do you understand’ in Highlandese, thanks to Sventlana having gone off script. Indeed, Boris ‘kine’d’ that he was now being cast as not only a ‘rabid bampot’, but a few other phrases in Scottish that meant, whimp, weakling and moron which Sventlana used to refer to him. But, the show worked. Better than expected.

The six foot three German businessman and his five foot 6 schoolteacher wife, both pitted their wits and wills against each other to try to make the javelin hit the moving target. They spent more in euros on attempts than the cost of the Scottish Coat of Arms prizes they both finally won, with equal success each of course, thanks to input Boris inserting the right prompts on his remote control while the tourists were gazing at Svetlana, each other or their own image as Warriors in the various reflective surfaces at the pitching stand.

“Revenge for your grandfathers, who of course you never knew, invading our country back in 1941,” Boris thought to himself, as part of the justification for that action.

The American couple was next, New York Executive hubby and younger Texan wife, or perhaps pretend wife for business negotiation, lost themselves in sticking to the aggressor King’s image and feeling accomplished when the crowd of peasants on the screen cheered at them as liberators. After winning their first few battles with the evil King, they went on a losing streak which they clearly won in the last battle in the war, at the cost of emptying most of the ‘ferin money’ in their wallets, and finally handing over their precious greenbacks from the recesses of their wallet and purse.

“Serves ya right for ‘liberating us’ from theoretically cooperative Socialism by crippling our economy and corrupting our souls with for real competitive capitalism,” Boris thought to himself as he counted the greenbacks and rubbles extracted, half of them taken from his hand by Svetlana just as he was about to envision what he would spend them for. It was a good show of battle of the sexes though., It brought up the third couple, who looked like they were high end rollers from Tokyo, but turned out to be from somewhere else.

“Do not under estimate what a Siberian can do with his mind, wit and throwing hand, Boris,” ‘Papa San’ said in perfect Russian to the Causasion Carnie who thought that the only thing East of the Urals was tundra, dessert and barely-literate ‘Yakuts’. With his wife looking accusingly at Boris trying to manipulate the hologram with his remote control, putting her small Asiatic hand on the handle of a REAL dagger under her coat, ‘Papa San’ landed the business end of the javolin into King Edward’s heart, head and testicals, winning a trophy sword, dagger and pistol. “And now, if you want to play for

her,” he said, challenging Boris to a duel, asking if Svetlana wanted to be one of the prizes.

“She’s not for sale,” Boris replied, feeling his manhood being threatened almost as much as the first, second and third time he put on the kilt. “She’s not a slave.”

“Or maybe she is, or could be?” Svetlana said, alluringly.

The Asian man and woman both seemed interested in the White Russian lass with blonde hair, blue eyes and pale skin.

“The first to get five direct hits gets me,” Svetlana declared, after which she put the hologram back into motion. She threw the apparently economically successful-Siberian Yakut customer and her White Carnie loser boss each a javelin. “And who wants to bet as to who the winner will be?” she yelled out to a crowd that had gathered around the booth. “Who wants to place a bet?”

“We do,” one of two very straight men with muscular physiques and Putin-special haircuts said as they approached. The gay couple in front of them dispersed as they made their way to the booth. One of the muscle men man put out his money on the table, on the side of Boris. The other let Svetlana see his badge. The money man motioned for more of the crowd to come in, which they did, placing their money on both sides of the now dually occupied ‘pitching post’.

“The first to get five hits wins,” Svetlana declared in many different phrases, and languages to a crowd that was gathering to see if the White Russian Highlander-wannabe who had never been outside of Moscow could beat a seasoned Yakut who had, in all probability, mastered not only life in the bush, but how to control the laws that White Russia tried to enforce upon his people.

Boris did win the contest, and he felt accomplished. He had beaten the bush raised Siberian who knew how to throw real spears at real beasts, or perhaps people, in game which he Svetlana made the hologram do things that Boris had not programmed into the machinery. For the first time in a long time, the Carnie dude who was laughed at as a dud by ‘real men’ beat someone else at his own game. He felt like King of the Carnies and his medal-awarded veteran Comrades, as bold and proud as any Scotsman in the days of Yore. But as victoriously as he felt when doing so, it was a short lived victory when he saw a pile of his earnings going to the man who started the wager, who boldly showed him the KGB badge under his leather coat. Svetlana accepted his arm and an offer to go with him to dinner at the food court across the converted parking lot, after which she took another portion of Boris’ winnings for herself, leaving him little more than bus fare to go back to the dump he called home this month.

The Siberian savage-turned businessman took Boris aside, put his brown arm around his White shoulder. “Your game, my game and everyone else’s game is fixed, my friend. In this universe anyway,” he explained like a teacher, brother and friend.

“And if I can find my, our, way to another one?” Boris asked.

“Then we all can be winners, perhaps,” the elusive Siberian said. And seemed to hope.

CHAPTER 4

Anna Fedoroff loved to travel, and not only sight-see, but to change what anyone else saw after she arrived at a given location. Today, the Company sent her to London, to insure that rogue members of The Firm did not join the competition, or worse, share the Company's secrets with the competition. She had just emerged from the London Opera House, with her escort, assigned to her by the British Cultural Ministry, or perhaps M5. Or both. It didn't make any difference at the moment, as Sir William Bently Harrison, III, a handsome 50 year old minor Monarch. He carried himself off as a 30 year old James Bond, a legend in his own outdated mind. But he made 60 year old Anna feel like a 30 year old Emma Peel from the Avengers, that view being confirmed by two eternally beautiful souls who glanced back at both of them as they passed every reflective surface en route to a Block Party in Little India. An Emma Peel with still long light brown hair, an hour-glass figure still held together by a 26 inch underfed waist, and a face whose wrinkles were well hidden with a mixture of botox, the best make up available on the black market, and a whole lot of NON-expression of her real emotions.

"A brilliant production," Sir William said of the London Opera Ensemble's rendition of the Russian opera as he led Anna down the street towards the London Bridge on a night where the usually cloud dominated English sky actually did afford a clear view of the full moon, and the stars around them. "Yes, brilliant, particularly the chap who played the role of Boris Gudanov."

"Your Boris was...good enough," Anna replied with a warm yet still reserved Russian smile, in as accent-less English as she could spout from her Slavically-conditioned tongue, this time NOT rolling her r's. "Yes...good enough."

"Good enough to do what, my dear Anna?" William inquired as he paused to buy her a chapati from a street vendor, pointing to the an item on the menu that few pale faced Anglos ever took. He flipped the lad some coins from his pocket as if they were as worthless to him as pebbles are to a rock splitter construction worker, then said something in Hindi that Anna recognized as 'spare none of the fire nor spice'. Of course Anna didn't correct William's diction, and knew that his palate was as unable to handle everything the East Indian vendor could challenge his former Colonial Master with as he was able to deal with the kind of sex he was imagining having with Anna that night. Anna took a bite from her chipadi, and provided the vender with a nod of satisfaction, then watched as William took a bit out of the imported spiced wrapped within a paddy made from 'one taste fits all' English dough. After two large bites, put out by water provided to him by the vendor, at marked up prices, William asked Anna again. "So, this production of Boris Gudanov is good enough for what?"

Anna thought long and hard about telling William the truth of the matter now, as tomorrow, she would have to lie to his bosses, and perhaps him, in the service of Mother Russia. And her bosses, or course. Still, perhaps half-truths could be the groundwork for a world where lying for one's country, or Cause, was neither necessary, nor 'cool'. That competitively-based and competition-promoting word had forced its way into the Russian

language which her grandfather as a Trotskyite Communist, and Anna as a Gorbechov Socialist, hoped to remain a tongue used for cooperative purposes, in the service of rugged individualism, which was at the Core of the Russian psyche, even during the most oppressive Stalinist times. Still, Anna felt compelled honorably, and drawn personally, to answer William's question regarding the production which featured two of his to-the-Manor born' relations in the cast, and a three defected Russians who became Brits in supporting roles.

"This production of Boris Gudonav is good enough as a lesson in teaching people that the government they get is what they deserve, unless they are workaholic masochists like we Russians are," she said regarding the Tyrant worshipped by the peasants who he oppressed. "Or maybe shit rises to the top because only shitheads with limited intelligence actually want to be the king" she mused, allowing herself the luxury of a chuckle, and sharing it with her always stiff upper-lip escort, or perhaps more. "You know, I have heard that anyone who wants to be President, King, Commissar or Prime Minister should not be trusted with the job," she continued, edging her small bent elbow further into his chest, leaning another portion of her weight into his 'firm and strong' torso.

"What about Philosopher-Kings?" he inquired. "Or...." William continued, eyeing an attractive female figure half his age sashaying across the street, winking to William way while wiggling her ass his way.

"Philosopher Queens?" Anna replied regarding the source of William's eight second very approving and connective stare. "With or without Adams' apples?" she continued, pointing to the lump not in her neck, but very present in the Barbie Babe.

"Yes, quite," William replied, clearing his throat and moving on with his assigned date. And now first-choice lady for the evening. "I was just..you know."

"Being honest with your feelings," Anna said. "Which if we lived in a civilized world, would match our thoughts, and actions."

"And that civilized world of course is the goal of our meetings with our bosses tomorrow," William replied, while moving on. "It is up to us after all to create a win-win international situation for everyone, is it not, Comrade Philosopher Queen?" he continued, with a wide smile that cracked holes in his rigidly held chiseled chin face.

"Da," Anna replied, letting her head fall onto his shoulders. Inches away from a mouth that would reveal secrets of the heart after a 'martini, shaken not stirred' in her hotel room, then secrets of State after the second drink was spiked with real Russian vodka, spiced with an olive from Anna's personal stock. Then secrets of science which Anna wanted to know for her own agendas, which would please as well the bosses she was courting behind the scenes as high above her current station as Big Ben was to the commoners walking on the London streets.

CHAPTER 5

“So, Anna Elena Fedoroff, tell me why you want to work in my lab?” Professor Vladimir Kinski asked the obviously over-50 year old woman who came into his biological studio looking more like a hot 35 year old education major, or if he gazed over her again without his glasses, Julia, the 22 year old dream mate musician he had lost to a scientist who was more about living life than studying it when he was in his twenties.

“Because I want to serve, the world, science and humanity,” the older and, in ways that mattered most to Vladimir now, ‘better Julia’ said. “Such is why we are all here, or should be, Professor Kinski,” she continued as she bowed her head slightly. Her long, red hair lit by the artificial light above made it look like a sunshine-drenched mane blowing in a gentle wind on that perfect Spring day Vlad and the original Julia had ridden through a field of wild grass on horseback. But as this Julia had evidence of grey and white roots on a portion of her scalp, he knew it had to have been dyed that flamingly natural hue. The Professor’s ever self-observant (though some said self-centered) mind knew that it was his imagination that was allowing him to see Julia in this Anna, perhaps activated by some pheromone in the hair coloring. Or perhaps his perceptions were being altered by exhaustion, incurred voluntarily while working on a new project that he hoped would open up a new scientific and humanity serving discipline.

“And I have heard about your work,” the incarnation of the Artist who could have innovated so much science continued, as she looked at the machine that was currently Kinski’s most overused tool.

“You have heard about it, or read about it?” Natasha intervened, coming over to the site of the ‘interview’. She carried a stack of recently obtained data in her hands and, as Vlad perceived it now, a very plain looking dress that made an even plainer body seem painful old and, worse, uninteresting. “Your resume says you were a graduate of the University of Saint Petersburg,” Natasha said, as she snatched the document from Kinski’s hand. “When it was Leningrad of course. In a course of study many years ago where what you learned, or said you learned then, is probably---”

“---still applicable now,” Anna shot back as a bullet between gatekeeper ‘Natasha’s’ eyes, disguised as a gentle reminder ‘amongst us smart girls’. “Because as all of us know, the human body and brain is still biologically the same as it was hundreds of years ago. Therefore just because something was discovered during the latter part of last century, that does not mean it isn’t valid this century.”

“Or future centuries,” Professor Vlad intervened, recalling the line he had delivered to the Neuroscience conference in London. It was an audience of Young Turks who were more fascinated with what computer program they used to process data than what the data actually said about the human body, brain and spirit. Something he also reminded students who handed him review articles they had written which were supposed to summarize everything known about a topic, yet neglected to reference papers more than

four years old. “Tell me what you envision or know, about transmutation of matter and transformation of thought waves into definable constructs,” Vlad continued with a wide smile seldom shown and even more rarely felt.

“Or what you THINK you envision or know,” Natasha added, putting the kybosh on the ‘please, excite me, even if it burns a hole into everything I know or discovered’ glow in her Common Law hubby’s eyes. “We can’t just let anyone into this laboratory, you know. Or should know.”

“Yes,” Kinski continued, trying to piece together how and why this older woman who seemed like the Artist who disappeared from his life, then probably the land of the living as well, according to more than one investigation he had initiated, and paid for. It was also an unexpected coincidence that Anna had come into his lab with a resume describing titles of research papers that resembled his most revolutionary work now and his most beloved investigations in the past. “Yes,” he kept saying as he looked over the research papers Anna said had been written but not published. “Yes indeed,” he continued, allowing common sense and cynicism take hold of him rather than unfulfilled youthful lust, or love. “But there is one question we want and need to ask you.”

“With an answer that...” Natasha said, halting her conversation with an upheld hand after seeing a phone call come into her cell. “I will be informed about, completely, as I have to take this now,” she continued as she excused herself and went into the next room, closing the door behind her.

Professor Kinski noted a smile come over Anna’s face when she thought he wasn’t looking. “I was just thinking, that this place brings back memories for me,” she said by way of explanation before Vlad could ask her anything about that all too seldom Russian facial expression. “That old centrifuge, for instance. A step up from tying a string to the scientist, or grad student, holding a test tube and making him, or her, who ran around the room in a circle.”

“So, what do you want, really want?” Vladimir asked Anna, tempted to enjoy the quip but putting the appreciation of a joke aside, yet again. “What do you really want?” he continued, directing it to a deeper place in her. “Or, if you are devolved, or evolved, past wanting, doing only what you NEED to do?”

“I want, and need, to be a part of that,” Anna replied after a long pause while looking at the energy transmuter machinery behind her. “And all of this,” she continued regarding the rest of the lab as she did a slow 360 degree view of the facility that both imprisoned and liberated Vladimir. “Others say that this temple is where you horde old equipment and older ideas, but I know that unless they are used, everything of value in the world as we know it will be lost. And all that will be left will be people who value nothing. And, as you, I and every thinking person not afflicted with the virus of passivity, defeat and dull out disease knows, ‘people who value nothing are dead. Worse than dead.’ Is that not true, Professor Kinski?”

“Call me Vlad, please, Anna,” Professor Kinski observed coming out of his mouth with glow in his eyes ignited by her quoting not only his favorite book that would never make it on any best seller list, *The Telenkopian Experiment*, but his own writings and speeches as well, written and spoken in places where he knew that no one in the audience really heard him, but someday would. “It is permitted to call you Anna?” he asked with courtly bow. “Or do you prefer Ms. Fedoroff?”

“Whatever you choose will be fine,” the ghost of artist Julia said as a Passion-infused scientist. There seemed to be a halo around her, which seemed more real and more irreproducible than any hologram the Professor was able to conjure up from brain waves recorded from the occipital cortex, no matter what test human or animal they were recorded from.

Indeed, the rest of the day was very fine for Professor Kinski, and Vladimir. He took Anna on a tour of the lab, familiarizing her with the equipment. The matter energy interconverter machine was the one that fascinated her, and by inference, him most. As did the writings and life of the man whose photo was above it.

“You know, future Doctor Fedoroff, I always wanted to know why that image Einstein with his tongue sticking out was so banned in the old days, and ignored in these ‘new open’ ones,” Kinski said of the photo with Old Albert in his most happy state.

“Because he is happy, on his own terms, Professor Vlad,” Anna replied, more respectful of his academic accomplishments than any of his students, assistants or even himself. “And because Albert Einstein figured out that there is a way to escape the dull, procedural, lifeless and sterile material realm of ‘mass’. By converting mass into Energy. E equals MC squared.”

“Yes, Professor Anna,” Vlad said, picking up an electrode containing helmet next to the chair he had placed so many animals, and people, who were never the same afterwards, for better or worse. Usually more enlightened in one way or the other, at least according to the Professor’s construct of the universe, and those parallel to it. “But to become Energy, big E , you have to give mass a kick in the ass and make it move. Up to or maybe beyond the speed of light. Or the speed of logic, the linear sequential brain, or ‘sensible’ reasoning. Fueled by...hmmm.”

“The spark then fire of Creativity so intense that it lets Fire come into the brain, then becomes Fire itself?” Anna proclaimed. “Maximal Creativity where you become a Verb instead of a passive anything else. With the result of transformation into another universe? That some call ‘The Zone’.”

“While in this realm you...lose mass!” Kinski exclaimed. It was the first time he exclaimed anything, in weeks. Ever since the last experiment that worked. “Which I can prove, on this side of the line. As evidenced by the numbers! And as maybe we can reproduce now.” He inserted a stern, lifeless frown on his face and his psyche, looking at pictures of Stalin and Lawrence Welk, then put on the most lifeless music he could find

on the tape deck from the latter. After letting those images of deadness come into himself, he got on a scale. "Seventy four point three two kilos. Record it, please," he instructed Anna.

The new assistant, and perhaps protogee, wrote down the number. Kinski hopped off the scale, put on Beethoven's Ninth, then enthusiastically joined in with the only instrument he had available, a voice which was off tune, off pitch but very on target with the music, as it was playing out in his head anyway. At the height of ecstasy, he hopped back on the scale, threw Anna a pencil, and motioned for her to write down the weight. She did so. Further into the piece, he instructed her to do it again. And again.

Finally the piece ended. Feeling himself in another place, time and dimension, Vlad pointed at the scale. "And now?" he said.

Anna recorded the numbers. Kinski looked at them. "You lost 0.0475 kg." she noted, showing him the data for the n value he had become.

"My colleagues would say that most of it was through evaporation of sweat," he said, wiping off his drenched brow. "Perhaps activated some lipases by conversion of nor adrenalin to adrenalin by means of 'active' stress, then converted to CO₂ after fat tissue was burnt off."

"Weight loss is weight loss, or rather mass lost," she said.

"Yes, but I am still here. In this dimension," he said with disappointment.

"But maybe transform into Energy and projection to other realms when in meditative states?" she said. "Like your subjects seem to," she continued. "The study in Iowa where deep meditators loose so much mass that they float in the room. And their auras, which all of us have, become bright, intense light, which is more energy? I read your research reports on it."

"Before or after the authorities East and West of the still Iron Curtain threw away the data, and deleted the pictures?" he inquired, flashing on something about Anna. And seeing something in her eyes that he both feared, and yearned for. "How is it that you know so much about me, my failures to become a test subject in my own experiments?"

"Because I want, and need, to become part of those experiments. As a collaborative investigator," Anna said, from a place that seemed truthful as well as exciting.

Losing himself in Anna's eyes made Vlad feel lighter than he ever had. Indeed he felt himself floating, nay, flying. Able to hop and fly just like the only dreams that didn't exhaust him after waking up, leaving him 'instructed' and 'inspired' with regard to where he had been when the world of 'earth reality' noted him merely slumbering like a lifeless log. A light log, no doubt. A log that during waking time was able to use several devices to disorient or speed up the movement of matter within test subjects who he had sent to

the 'other side'. Who came back with eyes far more open than when they had left, who became loners upon their return. Who became either non-integratable loners who lived in increasing isolation, or threats to the status quo who were disposed of in Labor Camps, psyche wards, or staged suicides, when they could be caught. With an Energy that was far more powerful than any he had encountered in his current plane of existence. An Energy which Anna seemed to be, and seek, both at the same time.

CHAPTER 6

Rhonda Petrovski was right to drop her married name of Burkholder on all of her documents, as the village being scouted out for the epic about her family still had signs up advising German tourists, even those born after 1950, 'Enter at your own risk to person and property'. Evidence of the latter was a BMW with a defaced German license plate and Greenpeace bumper stickers stripped of its wheels and any intact glass on its windows in front of the 'Heroes Café'. The very Slavic eatery featured portraits of young men and even younger women who held the line against the invasion of Hitler back in 1942 after their parents were shot, or worse. While letting herself become absorbed by the portraits, and perhaps the ghosts that inhabited them, Rhonda considered that perhaps one of the fallen youth who saved Russia from Hitler so it could be re-enslaved by Stalin after the War was one of her relatives, as there were two Petrovskis listed on the plaque next to the front door of the café. A café which provided food that the thankfully-divorced aging Millennial was unable to make, even on those rare occasions when she allocated more than 15 minutes to prepare dinner for herself, or half an hour for a dinner guest she was trying to impress.

It was the perogies-in-preparation that caught her attention. The aroma from them penetrated into her nostrils conveying each of their ingredients in an orchestrated symphony where each of them took turns taking lead expression. Garlic, onions, meat most probably of bovine origin, more onions, basil, olive oil, more onions, then finally, a mixture that smelled far better than anything available at the five star hotel two towns over. Or the company she would have to keep while eating there, each throwing compliments her way so they could get a better part in the upcoming International production, get a bigger salary for the jobs they were already under-doing, or get her to read and pass on to 'the powers that really be' a script written by their 'gifted' mistress, boyfriend or alter ego. Besides, eating alone here, without the benefit of an interpreter, would give Rhonda a chance to practice her university-learned Russian, and perhaps enable her to connect to her genetically-inflicted (according to her ex-German, WASP hubby) Slavic roots.

Upon entering the café, Rhonda discovered that the culinary delights that would attract standing room only crowds in even in Brighton Beach back home were being eaten by only eight customers, one of them a dog being fed while his owners were arguing about matters political and personal between nibbles of food and gulps of vodka. Taking a seat against one of the walls, Rhonda snuck her briefcase under the table. A waitress came over. "What will you have?" she asked, in English.

"Whatever you recommend, will be very good indeed," Rhonda replied, in Russian. She then looked up at the waitress. Rhonda was shocked to find that she was looking at herself. The waitress seemed to have her eyes, her chiseled chin, her curved up nose, her child-bearing large hips with accompanied by small C cup breasts at most, and even the same wave in her hair. However there was something about the waitress that was very different than Rhonda as she described each of the items on the menu, in English.

“Your smile,” Rhonda said in Russian after the waitress had finished the dance with her lips that emitted with a musical lilt the items on the menu, describing their most prominent gustatory qualities. “I was told back home that Russians don’t smile very much.”

“Like New Yorkers, we smile when we really mean it, or when someone else needs us to,” the reply. This time it was in Russian.

“Can I ask you your name?” Rhonda said, smelling, or perhaps hoping for a connection to the past through this woman who was very much of the present. This young woman who, but for a few breaks on an admissions committee at a University or an unexpected ‘in’ with a publisher at a Book Fair, could have been her back in Manhattan, or worse, Queens.

“Tatiana,” the reply. “My grandmother runs this place, sometimes into the ground, but most of time into the kind of place it was intended to be,” she continued in Russian, using far less words than would be required in English. “And she is expecting you,” the appendum, followed by opening of a thick black curtain leading to a hallway of some kind behind it. “I will bring your meal to you when you are ready.”

Rhonda had not announced her coming to anyone in the village. Normally she would be honored and touched to be noticed before her arrival. To be known, recognized and pre-invited into the club was after all better than being ignored. But, there was another concept that came to Rhonda, as she proceeded to the dark black curtain, feeling cold air and something spooky behind it. “A Marxian quote. I wouldn’t want to be part of any club that would have me as a member,” she whispered to herself in English.

A Russian translation came from what sounded like a woman to the left of the dead-ended narrow hallway, followed by, “From Groucho Marx. Proof that intelligence and bravery creates misery that can only be enjoyed with acquired taste,” she continued, in English, its rhythm identical to any true New Yorker with exception of the dropped articles.

Rhonda self observed herself smiling with her lips, then walking with her legs on a floor containing wooden beams that squeaked and moved with every step, emitting sounds that felt like they were from a baby just born, or perhaps a ghost who wishes he hadn’t died so early. It finally led to another curtain, then a woman sitting at a table, smoking a cigarette, inserting figures from a pile of papers into a ledger. Her long grey hair was more knots than mane, her calf-length gypsy dress as colorful as was worn out. “Taxes,” she said by way of explanation, in English. “Jesus said we should pay our taxes, to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s, but he could have told the Emperor to spare us the stomach ulcers when preparing them. Or the bullshit the Commissars make us go through to verify every verification. Or the lawyers and accounts we have to hire to make the books ‘smell’ right to the tax assessors. Who say that anyone who cheats on their taxes is cheating her fellow citizen, unless of course you calculate your deductions legally.”

“Yeah,” Rhonda said as she sat down to the woman who, but for the head of big hair, could be Larry David after an overpriced and unwanted sex change operation. “It’s about the process not the product, on both sides of what used to be the Iron Curtain,” she continued. “But, Emperors, lawyers, accountants and legislators who keep making the tax laws more complicated have to eat too, I suppose.”

“Not in my restaurant,” the pathologically independent woman asserted, after which she closed the book, and looked Rhonda straight in the eye, then into her soul. “So, as neither of us are fans of bullshit, tell me, how did you find me, Rhonda Katerina Petrovsky?” she said, addressing Rhonda by her full name as all Russians do when they want to talk to every part of your soul.

“And how did you know I was coming?” Rhonda asked the woman who resembled her grandmother, great-grandmother and, if you imagined the hair on her upper lip being a thick mustache rather than witchlike peachfuzz, great grandpa. “I didn’t say anything to anyone at the movie set, the press room or the hotel.”

“But we could hear you hear, loud and clear,” replied the still unnamed proprietor of the eatery that was a greasy spoon here, no doubt a five star tourist delight if transplanted anywhere ‘civilised’, or American. “All of us,” she continued with a warm smile as she forced her arthritic legs to push her tired body up from the chair and grabbed hold of a leather bound book. She opened it up, showing Rhonda pictures of her relations. Old photos, and drawings, that all showed bearers of intense eyes and committed souls. The woman named all of them, describing who they fought, why they fought, and finally how they all died, in Russian. Rhonda didn’t recognize the phrase in Russian.

“Spontaneous combustion,” the woman explained with both pride for the departed, crossing herself as she said another prayer for their well being. “Loosely translated that is.”

“And you?” Rhonda asked the gypsy elder who seemed more ghostlike than human, perhaps because of the smoke emitted from the incense burning next to the walls, or second hand ‘happy smoke’ from three cigarettes she had gone through since Rhonda’s arrival.

“I am still alive,” the woman said. “As is someone who you must see before you write another word about your uncles, aunts and grandparents. Or yourself.”

With that, the woman handed her a faded newspaper clipping. “Vladmir Kinski?” Rhonda said, trying to read the worn out Cyrillic print on the headline, then looking at the picture of the man being awarded a Soviet prize by a uniformed presenter. A man whose eyes seemed proud and scared, both at the same time.

“Where he is now,” the woman continued, handing Rhonda a card. “In this universe anyway,” she continued, turning from a kvetching accountant into bliss-drunk Visionary,

losing herself in a laugh that echoed against every wall in the room, and recess of Rhonda's mind.

CHAPTER 7

It was said by the Moscow City Council and every other newspaper with a license to print, as well as those without such, that the Spring Carnival was a win-win situation for everyone. Foreign tourists had spent money there and would go home to tell their rich, or overspending, friends about it. Everyone on the streets or a paycheck away from being such were given work for 2 weeks. The best, as well as most mass-appealing, art was displayed for the world to see, elevating the city as a center of new, vital and Alive artistry as well as a museum featuring the works of beauty built by Czars and Czarinas with ugly souls. But as in all win-win situations, there is always a loser. Such was Boris Vasilikov.

Though the Carnival was given abundant federal funding and a plethora of money from private investors, it chose to cut certain venues and people for future expansion. First on the list were the Carnies, whose gypsy souls and demeanor were the initial attraction of the traveling circus, but whose presence now was ‘contradictory and contra-indicated for a more internationally palatable and sustainable brand of entertainment,’

“So what does ‘contra-indicated’ mean?” Boris asked his fellow diner at the dumpster behind ‘Catherine the Great Food Emporium’ after he had finished reading the newspaper that had been an effective roof to the wind last night, until it started raining water from the sky, then chamberpots filled with urine from the polysci students living in apartments four stories above him. “And what do they mean by a palatable and sustainable brand of entertainment?”

“That the public has voted us dinosaurs into extinction,” the ragged clad diner next to Boris grumbled as he washed his overgrown, knot-infested white beard with vodka. A ‘cleaner’ he claimed kept the germs away from his wrinkled, leathery skin which doubled as a great mouthwash, particularly when swallowed. “And that until we can find a way to eat grass and convert it into protein, we have to adjust our intestinal tracts to other sources of nutrient,” recently ex-Professor Lazinski said, after which the sixty-years defiant hobo pulled his arthritic legs up onto the apple crates he had piled next the dumpster, and prepared to go in for another ‘treasure hunt’ of food in the darkened abyss at the bottom. “I smell good fishing tonight,” he said after taking in a good whiff, then checked the rope tied to his rumbling belly. “And if any big whale down there decides to try to pull me into Davy Jones’ locker, it’s your job to pull me up again.”

“I can do the diving,” Boris said, as he held on to the other end of the rope. “I’m younger, stronger and---”

“---not the one who is going to get first pickings!” the old man blasted out at the younger one. “The diver is the one who gets first pick of fish, and makes the rules about how it will be served. Now, when I say pull, you pull. And if you see any Cops, muggers or rich kids who think that beating up urban pioneers like us is cool, you will do what?”

“---I’ll pull you up,” Boris answered as he lowered Lazinski down. “After the coast is clear. And I’m sure that...” Boris could not recall what the other procedures were for the survival manual the Professor was writing in the book between his ears, and when he could, the paper he could scrounge from the back of print shops were.

But there was something that worried Boris more than loss of memory made worse by hunger. It was the silence in the alley. A silence which was not broken by another Lazinski ‘song’ he always belted out, or at least hummed, while he was ‘deep sea’ diving in the dumpsters that had, according to him anyway, kept him alive for two years on the streets. All Boris could hear was heavy breathing, then a thump, then...nothing.

Boris climbed up the apple crates and gazed down below. Indeed there was an abundance of meat below. Fresh red meat. Fresh filet of Lazinski, his neck severed by sharp chainsaw he had apparently slipped into and turned on. The arteries in his right leg and left arm cut, leaking out a steady stream of blood which coated everything in the dumpster with a carpet of red, the only thing not colored with that hue being his pale going to white face.

It was not the first time Boris had seen a fellow member of his species dead. He had crashed funerals with dictated letters from the deceased claiming that he was a War Buddy of his. On two occasions it led on to a good lay from with bereaved rich widow who would, the next morning, found her reproductive parts well satisfied and her jewelry box emptied. However such resulted in Boris acquiring another bout of venereal disease and being told by the Pawn Shop owner that the worth of the jewels would not cover even a fifth of what the medicines to cure him would cost. Then there was Boris’ experience as a photographer and undertaker for the recently departed, offering his services to people who wanted to fake their deaths so that their proxies could collect on their life insurance policies or start a new life with a new family away from the wives who were killing their will to live every day. Such resulted in accidental overdoses of death-simulating sedatives by the hand of Boris, as well as the departed themselves.

But this time, Boris saw something in the old hobo’s lifeless face other than a failure for him to effectively learn the criminal arts. He saw himself, if he didn’t fight back against the lucky and economically fortunate. To fight back stronger, and better.

Boris asked the Universe, or God, or whoever else was in charge of looking after drunks, fools or self-sabotaging ‘outliers’ for what to do next. A sonic boom came above him, forcing his head down, but pulling his eyes up.

“Yeah. That’s what we should have done,” Boris said to himself, and then Professor Lazinski, as the gigantic plane came down from the heavens, taking its passengers to the airport. “What I’ll do anyway.” With that Boris gathered the best of his own belongings, and those of the Old Man, and rummaged through whatever sellable valuables were in the dumpster.

The next stop was a sponge bath with water instead of vodka, said fluid pilfered from a leaky hydrant. Then a pawn shop to see what Boris could get for the Veteran Dumpster Diver's watch and glasses. Then a wig shop that was buying hair, the Old Man's chopped off mane, once washed, fetching a nearly sixty American dollars. Then a second hand clothing shop, labeled "Fashion Village," the newest establishment for down and outers in the New Russia. Inside, the deposed Carnie dude found everything he needed to look respectable, clean and even rich, as if he owned the circus from the top rather than fed off it from the bottom. The most important accessory for his new role was as as mothball smelling black designer label suitcase and carry-on bag with a sort of matching camera case. The ensemble was put together in a rent by the hour hotel after a long needed shower.

As Boris remembered it, baggage was offloaded at the airport in a common area accessible to passengers from the plane side, and visitors picking them up from the other side. He took care to locate the place where the first class passengers picked up their luggage and planted himself there, along with the suitcase he had carried in. "I'm not going to make the same mistake again," he told himself regarding the last time he crashed a luggage belt and walked away with four bags belonging to someone else. "I'll walk, not run to the parking lot," he promised the set of eyes looking at him from the wall. "Besides, I'm doing this as a civic duty, to you," he continued to the photo of President Putin welcoming visitors to the city in Russian, English and Chinese. "And the Socialist ideal, the real Vladimir, whose picture used to be right next to yours," Boris whispered to the space on the wall that had in past times he remembered a boy was the resting place for the photo of Lenin. "If the rich won't give to us, we have to take what they have from them so we can give it to the poor," he continued as he eyed the passengers who wore so much of their wealth on their person come to collect their baggage. "After, maybe, I experience what it's like to be one of the rich, for educational purposes of course, so I can understand their pathology. Right, Comrade?"

The ghost of Lenin Boris imagined permeating the picture-less portion of the wall seemed to say 'yes'. With that, Boris snatched luggage which seemed to look like his, along with two extra bags. He then made a phone call on a fake cell phone with his best Putin act out, ordering the mythical and imagined underlings at the other end to forfeit all of their dignity or pay the consequences when he got back to the office. He then slipped walked away from the conveyer belt to the sidewalk outside.

Taking a shuttle to another terminal, Boris ducked, or rather 'Putin'd', his way into the men's room, taking shelter in the stall for the handicapped. After taking a stress-induced shit and piss, he opened the suitcases and found inside the austere first class designer label luggage something he hardly expected in the luggage that seemed by its austerity and plainness to be owned by a rich business MAN. "Dresses, skirts, high heels, and..." he said, pondering for a moment what it would be like to assume a different gender as well as name for his next con. Then he then discovered something entirely useless. "Books!" he grunted while letting out another wad of loose manure into the porcelain can. "Good for...yeah...only one thing," he pondered about to tear the pages out and use them as asswipe, as the supply of toilet paper in the stall was exhausted. "Or..." Boris

considered, after seeing feet of what looked like Cops, and Military Police, come into the bathroom. They asked some questions of two gentlemen taking a leak, first in Russian then in English.

Maybe it was his fear of Cops, or his assessing a dwindling of luck (an instinct that saved Boris from total disaster on many occasions before), but another thought occurred to the well seasoned yet still horrible at his craft Carnie con man. “A library is a library,” he whispered to himself. “And when in Rome, do what the Greek Scholars did,” he continued, opening up one of the books.

The title was Revolutionary Blues, an interesting enough book at first glance of its cover art and verbal pitch. The translation of the latter into Russian said it was a ‘Faustian Western set against the backdrop of the Yaqui Indian Revolt in Mexico’. A note from the owner of the book summarized it as ‘man does battle with the devil in the huya aniya, the dream world, depossesses him there in Creative combat, then wakes up in the real world and finds that he has changed himself and the outcome of the Revolution’. It was written in a mixture of English and poorly spelt Russian, matched only by the scribbler’s lack of familiarity with the six cases which haunted and embellished Boris’ native tongue. The handwriting was a woman’s. As was the scribbling on the copies of research papers in the recesses of the suitcase that described some kind of matter-anti-matter interconversion process which could enable one to enter alternative and parallel universes. Inside the smaller matching suitcase was jewelry, not worth enough to fence or bother with selling on the street. And family photos. And a script about how they came to be who they were, along with credentials for person responsible for bringing the two dimensional print into a three dimensional story.

“So, Rhonda Elena Petrovski, you are probably looking for these,” Boris said to the picture of the American on her Literary Agent Guild ID and Union Signatory Producer membership card. As surmised by a sneak peak into her partially translated ‘personal development journal’, she had apparently come to Russia to connect to her old family roots, and perhaps a job in a movie about mad scientists, or to work for mad scientists who could create something far more fantastic than a movie. “I can send them back to your address in New York,” Boris said, having understood enough English from his High School days to read it on her business cards and other contractual documents. “But I think that I will take a visit to this Professor Kinski. Particularly because I can go into business with him, or in business for myself after he shared more of his ideas with me, and only me.” It was the article bearing Kinski’s name about transforming thought and energy waves into three dimensional images that attracted Boris most. Though the mostly self-taught high school drop-out couldn’t understand the scientific mumbo jumbo in it, Boris smelt between the academe that this theoretical technology could at the very least allow him to create better holograms for his next Carnie booth than he had before. And maybe even use his ‘dream machine’ to make images that haunted, or pleased, people in their dreams come to life when they got up. Either trick could make Boris money in the ‘real’ world. And if it didn’t, he could steal or barge his way into a porthole to the ‘huya aniya’, or any other parallel universe, till the heat cooled off in this one.

CHAPTER 8

Professor Vladimir Kinski promised Anna that everything she learned in her course of independent study with him would count towards credits for the Doctorate degree she had to abandon when she got pregnant as a student. And indeed, Anna had acquired much knowledge about matters scientific during the three weeks she spent with her new Mentor, Teacher and Mark. Time spent in the lab working overtime. Time spent at greasy spoon eateries that no Professor ever dined in, even the folk-loving Kinski. And time spent overnight at mountain cabins that his, presumably anyway, common law wife Natasha didn't know about and had no interest in trudging off to, or so it seemed.

For every new piece of data regarding Kinski's theories about matter-energy interconversion or transportation of investigators to universes where 'knowledge is more powerful than guns, and guns are as irrelevant as enlightenment and compassion are to popular culture here' that Anna had acquired, Kinski came up with at least ten new ideas and ideals. He attributed his 'liberation' to Anna's being 'around and inside' him, though such did not refer to biological body parts, as of yet anyway. The old man who had been converted into being a young one also attributed his burst in Creativity, and perhaps ability to transfer his own mass into astrally-projectable energy, to a third party. 'A third brain' which he claimed dropped in to the middle of the desk in his laboratory at the university, and most particularly the eating table in his cabin. A third brain that had 'a thalamus far better at integrating cross modalities of the flesh and spirit' than the one in his own head, 'a cerebral cortex that allowed new data to be viewed more universally' than any circuitry in Einstein, Telsa or Ramon y Cajal's head, and 'a limbic system which allowed for one to experience emotion and observe it at the same time.'

That 'feelable but not seen' third brain seemed to stare into Anna's soul as she sat at the breakfast table in the cabin, illuminated by the morning sun as it rose to its assigned place in the bright blue sky behind her. "So, what are you going to tell me today," she challenged the ethereal visitor that Kinski bowed to in gratitude with each new thought that came into his head, after of course thanking Anna for allowing It, big I, to 'allow a new idea to be born in the minds of two rather than merely one soul'. "Your master is asleep, so we can talk," she said to the 'Entity' that Kinski claimed materialized between them. An Entity which Anna had to admit she even felt on more than one occasion. Perhaps it was due to exhaustion this exceptionally cold morning. Or the flying dream she had the night before, made possible by being grounded to the Professor's naked body before nodding off. "You know, Professor Vlad is sleeping now," she said to her fellow body-less diner at the table she visualized as present. Awaiting his, her or It's response, she took another sip from a cup of coffee made from beans that she had bought at the store in the village, rather than the various teas of unknown origin that Kinski has brewed and shared with her. "Doctor Kinski, or as he now insists I call him, Seeker Vlad, says that you're real. An Energy that needs no power to be expressed but...I know you are powerful. Powerful enough to materialize and be used by us, stuck here in the 'world of forms'. But though I can't see you, I can feel you," she found herself saying, and believing. "And this time I KNOW it's not because of any funny weeds Alchemist Kinski put in my tee, or mushrooms he always puts into every sauce, ommlette and meat

pie I have to share with him to continue gaining his confidence, trust and pathetically-underused scientific knowledge.”

Anna contemplated the matter as she heard Vlad, snoring as loud as thunder in bedroom at the other end of the cabin. “He’s out of REM sleep, which means that he isn’t in the dream state,” she noted to the Third Brain, that now seemed to be asleep as well. “Vlad said you wanted to do something to us, but what about us doing something to, or with, you?” While awaiting for a reply from the recesses of her mind, or perhaps her ears this time, she, chomped on a commercial brand of wheat cakes which tasted more like the box than anything that grew from the ground. She leaned in towards the location where Vlad said the body-less visitor lay and covered up the plate of cookies that had been set out for him, her and/or it. But---she felt something push her fingers back somehow, feeling a tingling in the tips of her fingers. “Some kind of electrical field,” she whispered to herself, sneaking a look at the Tesla coils on all four sides of the cabin, then up to the sky for a saucer whose purpose was to fly rather than hold store bought coffee or hallucinogenic tea.

Anna was aware of the presence of ghosts, and had even seen a few when she was an impressionable and fun-loving girl. Now, as an intelligent, and perhaps therefore misery managing, adult, she pondered the nature and intention of ‘the Entity beyond man or woman’ Prof Vlad was devoting his life to, or throwing it away for. She asked it for its name, origin, beef with life, and unfulfilled desires before it lost its body, and finally its gender. “So, are you must be gay, bi, or...”

“Beyond gender,” Anna heard from a voice she didn’t recognize. “Beyond form, beyond description and beyond definition on our crude terms,” Vlad continued as he stode into the kitchen with what seemed to be twice as many grey hairs on his head than the night before, but twenty times more energy in his now NON-hunched over body. “That means that...”

“...This ‘third brain’ is God?” Anna observed herself proposing. “A communicable knowledge, communication and feeling that comes between us when we summon It, Him or Her into the world or mortals?” Anna reflected on what she just had said, or allowed to be said through her perhaps. Her very Orthodox Christian grandmother would say that she was a finally becoming mystic, such gifts skipping a generation. Anna’s mother, who denied her inherited faith so that Anna’s mother could not be sent to a Gulag and Anna would be given the best opportunities the USSR could offer a free thinking woman, would tell her daughter to not rock the Socialist boat as it would take her straight to a very locked nuthouse. Professor Kinski, who had voiced on more than one occasion that ‘each gives according to one’s abilities and takes according to one’s needs’ was as much of a Christian idea as a Marxist ideology offered another perspective on the matter.

“You are familiar with distant viewing, no doubt, Professor-Seeker Anna?” the old man who had become a younger one said as he cracked four eggs into a beaker, adding a generous portion of moldy cheese and specially seasoned mushrooms to the mix. “The transmission of thought ways from one person to another that gets modified and

amplified through the ethers,” he continued, stirring up the concoction on a 19th century vortex mixer. “Such as if I am eating an omelet in Minsk and you are in a Siberian cove a hundred miles north of Vladivostok seeing a fleet of American ships carrying nuclear warheads dock, I can see what you see if you send that thought to me.”

“Assuming that our brains are synchronized,” Anna said, keeping to herself for the moment that the coordinates Kinski had described were exactly the ones Anna had taken part in during very secret experiments, in which the Professor was a known participant. “Or I’m in Moscow enjoying a well done Chekov play and you’re in Saint Petersburg where five plane loads of executives from Hollywood have landed with a Mission to replace the Bolshoy Ballet with a theatre devoted to shows like CATS, Mama Mia or Yankee Doodle Dandy.”

“Yes, indeed, an even greater danger,” the Professor said with a warm smile, and a gentle laugh as he poured the omelet ingredients into a pan atop three Bunson burners, mixing in a generous portion of onions, garlic and the staple of all Russian food enjoyed or endured, cabbage. “But communicating through brain waves on this plane is only a small part of my main purpose and mission. And now, OUR purpose and mission,” he continued, looking at, and into Anna.

“And the Third Brain’s Purpose and Mission?” Anna inquired, pointing to the middle of the table, realizing too late that there were more appropriate and effective words she should have voiced. Indeed, though she came into Vlad’s life to inflict a spell on him, she was under his spell as well. Perhaps due to something emanating from the omelet that she was obliged to share with him. Or maybe the ‘spirit’ in the middle of the table that she felt all around her, and now inside of her. One that could possess her. Or, if she was strong, or clever enough, one that she could control and become the most powerful mortal in her presently observed universe, or perhaps in others as well. She would have to have a talk with her earthly bosses about the terms and details of such very soon. But sooner seemed to become ‘now’ when she heard a knock on the door to the cabin.

“Looks like we’ll have an extra guest for breakfast,” Vladimir said as he looked outside the frosted window at a bearded visitor clad in black, a hood covering his head. “He looks cold and you, my dear and esteemed Professor Doctor Anna look...” Professor Kinski said, after which he held his breath as still as his eyes, those oculars gazing into and locking into Anna’s.

“Look like I have to let him in before he freezes both of his testicals off,” Anna replied, after which she went to the door and opened it, feeling a message from the Third Brain that she shouldn’t have.

CHAPTER 9

The black coated visitor to the ‘all conveniences included’ cabin that had no number on its door nor even a post office box associated with it said nothing about how he found the place. Nor the identity of the young woman shivering behind him who was cursing the weather, the fates and herself in very American-accented Russian as well as English. What he did say was something that Vladimir Kinski hardly expected, at least now. “Is that your glass cubical connected to an energy coil on the roof, connected to a compressed copper wire buried in a pool of conduction fluid, connecting back to the another glass cubical that’s generating holograms move a lever and push away any branches the wind blows its way?” the cold visitor in front of his shivering companion inquired. He pointed to the jungle of equipment surrounding the cabin, interwoven between tall pine trees that afforded support to the structures, ground for the electric current and an inability to spot it all from the surrounding hills or the air.

“Yes, it is,” Professor Kinski replied, feeling proud, accomplished and honored, most particularly when he saw that the man bearing circus tattoos on his arms and upper chest, and a five hundred dollar haircut above his neck, had a briefcase over his shoulder containing some of his most recent research papers that had become very popular. And others from his past that he was still awaiting recognition for having done. “Indeed, all of that out there is mine,” Vlad boasted, smelling honest sweat and grime on the unexpected intruder rather than anything official, or corporate. “Or rather, it is—“

“---Broken,” the visitor interjected, asking his female assistant to pull out spare parts from her jet black parka pocket that Vladimir recognized as needed elements of the equipment. “Due to vandals taking what they thought they could fence in town. Who we thankfully were able to stop.”

Vladimir was thankful that the generator units in the mass-energy converters containing diamonds, gold and silver were intact. And that these over-aged Goth-Hipsters out on a walkabout in the woods to find themselves and the wonders of nature had found him. Until Anna stepped in. “And you were able to stop these vandals how? With your spells, and incantations?” she inquired of the self assured dude and his terrified female companion.

“We’re not Cops,” the not young but not yet old man offered. “Or military. Or agents of any government.”

“And we’re not crooks either,” the woman with the chapped face and shivering teeth affirmed.

“We’re just two recently-wed Crusaders for humanity who read about your work, Professor Kinski,” the man continued, wrapping his big, bear-like arms around his petite, delicate beloved.

“And think we can work out a situation between us that can be of mutual professional, financial and aesthetic benefit,” the woman said, sounding like a six-figure salaried executive who neither needed nor wanted a husband. Even Vlad could pick that up. As always, Anna picked up more.

“How did you find us?” Vladimir’s new protégée and, in his own way, beloved inquired of the couple, after which she pulled a pistol from her pocket and aimed it at the happily married couple. “And how did you know enough about the equipment to bring us the parts that the ‘vandals’ took, or perhaps you did?”

“We came to help,” the woman said, in a voice that sounded sincere to Vlad.

“And to be of service to your Vision,” the man continued, coming from a different place entirely. Though Vladimir could read the mind of the ambitious young man who was already on his way to becoming a broken old one, he could not read his soul. Either this visitor bearing good will and protection from vandals ‘just in time’ was good at putting up walls, or Vladimir’s inner eye was even more blinded to seeing the way the world as it was, in this dimension anyway, really was. Still there was something about this crook who talked like a Cop, the Goth who knew how to sound like a Government agent, the hipster pacifist who was always battling the world or himself that he connected to. “You want to do great things in life, don’t you?” Vladimir asked him.

“Or profitable ones,” Anna interjected.

“And without making profit, none of us can create any Visions,” the mousy woman with the straggly hair and, upon further examination, top of the line ‘back to the earth’ outfit under her coat, pointed out. “A fact that is both sad, and true. In this universe anyway.”

“But maybe not in the other universes importable to here, or accessible through here, or creatable here,” hubby offered, to Vladimir only. He threw the Professor a big, wide smile that Vlad recognized as being that of a salesman, or a con man, or worse, an American. Or even more dangerously, a wannabe-American.

Anna moved the business end of her quickly-withdrawn pistol closer to the golden goose and gander’s heads, checking them for any weapons they were carrying on them. Vladimir put his hand on his unshaven chin. He stroked the four day old beard and moustache he had not raised since his ‘wild’ days with his first, and very missing from the land of the living, dream mate musician, who could only marry someone else who was betrothed to the Music the way she was.

“There’s someone else you have to ask about my offer to participate in our Vision?” the man asked.

“OUR offer,” the woman behind him appended.

“I’m guessing, someone else other than pistol packing Mama here,” the man offered through a chuckle, throwing a condescending ‘shoot me, if you dare, you coward’ stare Anna’s way. “A business partner? Professional Colleague? Ghost of a girl who got away before you were able to be enough man for her who you look for in every woman you meet, even this opportunist bitch?”

“An opportunist bitch who loves this man!” Anna found herself saying, and meaning. “And would do anything for him. Die, kill or---”

“---her name was Julia,” Vladimir interjected, seeing behind the stranger’s. He allowed himself to see Julia again, long blonde hair flowing over gentle fingers that converted vibration of the strings on her mandolin into musical magic, at a time when young Vlad was scientifically analyzing the physics of the sound waves. “With eyes so wide open that the Light she let come in set fire the brain, and---”

“---She was burnt at the stake for her hard earned Enlightenment?” the visiting woman offered, very accurately. “Or died of some other form of spontaneous combustion, somehow. Too much fire between the ears for the world and their bodies to handle?” she offered, from a deep place. A place which Anna seemed to come from. And before that, Natasha. And a place where Julia lived, and, perhaps somewhere else, far, far away, was still living.

“These people know too much about you, Vlad,” Anna warned. “And what they don’t know, they are too good at figuring out. I say we dispose of them.” She edged her index finger slowly against the trigger.

“Before he finds out about you?” the man offered, neither scared of the bullet nor the raging Walkurie holding the gun.

As Vlad saw, felt and intuited, something in Anna had been found out, or at least glanced at. A secret that she was now willing to kill for, given the fact that she put the revolver into the recesses of the visitor’s forehead. “Tell me who you are and what you want,” she inquired as she squeezed her way into the trigger, slowly. “Tell me what you want!!!”

“What we all do, in the end,” Vladimir said, having noticed at the book under the mousy American woman’s arm. “A world where everyone gives according to their abilities, takes according to their needs and realizes that everyone is both useful and essential. Even me.”

With that, Vladimir introduced himself by name to the woman whose calling card was from a large Manhattan, and NOT Brighten Beach, based publication and production company. A woman who introduced herself as by name to him, her full name, as was the Russian custom.

“I’m Boris,” the man said to Anna. “And you are?”

“Anna,” Vladimir interjected, after which he gently put his hand on Anna’s forearm, lowering the gun that she seemed so intent on shooting a minute ago.

Anna provided her full name to the man. A name that had a few more names at the end of it than she or her papers had provided to Vladimir, and the now very absent Natasha, thankfully. “A few of my own dream-mates who I married and found out were nightmares, or disappointments,” she gave by way of explanation to Vladimir regarding the long list of married names she still retained, for better or worse. “But in the meantime, we should all gather around the table, where we will share our thoughts, and be inspired by a collective synergistic intelligence that only happens when we share ideas, ideals and Passions,” Anna continued as the perfect hostess while leading the guests in for tea.

Mixed feeling generated within Vladimir, as he saw the two guests being welcomed into his cabin by Anna, the woman who, for the moment anyway, reminded him most of Julia. Maybe she was Julia, he considered. Anything was possible, for better or worse. As for which of those was operative, perhaps the now ‘fifth’ brain at the kitchen table would provide some clues. Or perhaps not, as Vladimir felt himself more like part of the experiment rather than the experimenter. Something that he told his students was a very good and necessary thing to do if you wanted to do anything of real value and impact. Such now scared him to death, or to whatever lay beyond the walls to dimensions he was still not able to connect to, at least on his own terms.

CHAPTER 10

It was the kind of non-fiction that was more exciting than any fiction Rhonda Petrovski could envision, commission or even write. And she was in the middle of it. A Professor seeking connection to and council from more Enlightened Universes than the most of the pathetic excuse for evolution called 'humans' were stuck in. A self-sabotaging Carnie dude, or dud, who wanted to create holograms that would please his customers, make him king of the circus and perhaps even channel or create an image that he could have the best sex of his miserable life with for as long as the electrical juice kept the generators going. A former official 'something' from one side or the other of the cloak and dagger set who wanted to access power of the paranormal so she could either make a killing selling the secrets to one side or another, or blackmail her way into becoming the boss of the bosses who kept her, and other women, under the thumb of men who were idiots and/or assholes. And add to the soup, herself. Rhonda Petrovski, the soon to be liver of stories rather than merely the recorder of them, who perhaps could go back in time to see her heroic ancestors and change history with, and for, them, though Kinski's trans-dimensional machine. Or perhaps 'what if' universes in which heroes of the past were promoted to position of power rather than martyred, or forgotten. Not a bad place to do research, or perhaps become part of the story.

There were many theories about parallel universes that Rhonda had read about, but never experienced. According to Buddhist ideas, there are at least 11 of them. Einstein said that time was not absolute. Perhaps going 'back' in time could change the present, or get you to parallel universes where the present was being molded by the future. What better way to make history better than it was, or is, or will be? To overthrow powerful tyrants, and replace them with Philosopher Kings, or Queens. And NOT bitchy asshole Czarina's like Catherine 'the Great'. Not Pugachev, illiterate, egotistical, cruel and, tragically, charismatic bigamist Cossack wash-out who raised an Army of fellow Cossacks, religious traditionalists, peasants, serfs and even Moslems who stood up against the bitch, but also crucified anyone who threatened his authority or questioned his claim that he was Catherine's murdered enlightened husband, Emperor Peter. Maybe going back in time or finding Peter, the only thinking, enlightened and caring Czar, and preventing his murder by his wife 'Kate' would extend his rule to beyond 6 months, setting in motion a dynasty which would have made Lenin unnecessary and Stalin preventable.

But, for the moment, there were other things that had to be done. Smaller steps before metaphysical leaps that transformed Realities. "So, how does Professor Kinski transport entities from 'here' to 'there' or 'there' to here'?" Rhonda asked Anna while preparing the evening stew. "Using these 'herbs' on the shelves that are labeled with chemical equations rather than names?" she slurred out, having put the fifth item into the pot, at the prescribed time, measuring the amount with a weighing the quantities of such in grams rather than pinches like her Granny did. "If all of this astral travelling is an illusion---

"-----you can sell it to the public like the other illusions about real life that you put on screen or in print," Anna barked back. She prevented Rhonda from smelling ingredient number 5, then held out a spoonful of the stew for the American to taste. "As we both

know, people buy what you sell them, not what they need. And, like you, they would rather vicariously watch others undergo transformations rather than undertake them themselves.”

Rhonda declined the offer to taste the soup, stew or whatever it was that smelled so good, yet seemed to be fed to her by someone who was not so good. Someone who had the same look in her eye that her ex did when he dared her to share a tab of acid.

“So, you are not ‘experienced’,” Anna said with a condescending sigh. “You have never left home.”

“And you are OVER experienced?” Rhonda shot back. “And as I intuit, from where I am, in my home between my ears, you can’t go home.”

“I’m trying to redefine it!” Anna blasted back as the final word. “As should you, if you are intelligent enough to overcome your fear of becoming something better than you are now. And don’t want to grow old and stagnant like the rest of your family in Queens.”

“New Jersey,” Rhonda replied to Anna as she exited the kitchen, leaving Rhonda with the rest of the cooking assignments for the dinner everyone was to share that night. She looked once more at the chemicals that occupied every spot on the spice shelves, and the kitchen utensils which were all laboratory instruments. All measuring quantities in the metric system of course. A system that, as she recalled, was inflicted on Russia somewhere in the 19th century. She found herself thinking about her great-great Grandmother, and the Aunt who had sent her to Kinski. The Aunt who looked at her palms and told Rhonda that she would meet a ‘mysterious stranger’ who would bring her to the Professor who she was related to by ‘blood and destiny’. A prediction which of course was proven by reading the bottom of the cup of coffee Aunt Svetlana (if indeed that was her real name) afterwards, repeating the procedure three times. But there was one thought that Rhonda had when going to item number six, gazing at its prescribed quantity. “How many milligrams are there in a pinch?” Rhonda asked herself, then the ghosts she felt were watching her. “I know, this and other questions I will never find out until I become less intelligent and more....experienced.”

With that, Rhonda dipped a spoon into the stew and put it on the tip of her tongue, then let it slide down to the back of her throat. “Hm...different,” she said, unable to define what ‘different’ actually was by way of sweet, sour, salty or pungent. And not sure if ‘different’ was better, or worse. But Rhonda did know that without more ‘different’ in her life, she would wind up like the living corpses that was the rest of her family, dying of comfort, security and predictability in New Jersey.

The stew, to which was added chemical formulations item seven of ten, spoke back to Rhonda through a belch that emanated up from her belly just after her palate said ‘me like this a lot’ to her very experienced culinary cortical taste area. That belch was not only felt as purgative, but seen as a multicolored cloud. Trying to push her way through it, the very drug IN-experienced 21st century Yuppie heard, then saw, a white horse through the

cabin window. “Bolshoy Vetar,” she said, addressed the Polish Arab as he spoke to her again, this time with that ‘feed me’ knicker which Rhonda recognized all too well from horses on both sides of the Pond, and the new redecorated Iron Curtain. “You heard me belch, not reach for the grain bucket to feed you and your two buds,” she said to him in English, which felt like another language entirely to her ears, spoken by someone who was not her.

The horse stomped its feet, nudging the saddle and reins hung next to him. With each pawing of the snowy ground in front of the horse, Rhonda felt a mini-tremor on the floor under her. “Okay, biochemical spice number seven, or maybe 3, 4 or 5,” she said to the jars of culinary ingredients on the shelf identified by chemical formula rather than names, as was most everything else in the kitchen. “You’re making me see, and hmm..maybe hear you saying something to me,” she continued as her eyes saw what they had never seen before, or perhaps were programmed not to. Jars then hopped up from their assigned position, emitting barfs, coughs, and belches with an assigned pitch that made them sound like notes when they landed back on the shelf. The notes merged into a melody that Rhonda recalled all too well from the time she had to put in jurying the Alternative Visions New York Film Festival, which was held in New Jersey. Indeed, it was Beethoven’s fifth symphony expressed in vulgar sounds, with a syncopated rhythm according to the manuscripts of Barfalomew Beethoven, Ludwig’s very illegitimate son, re-discovered by the indy (even to the indies) producer who couldn’t afford to hire professional musicians to do his periodically-acclaimed mocumentary “Unstrung Heroes of Classical Music”.

“I get it,” Rhonda said to the musical jars, then glasses, then flying boxes that hopped, leaped, then jumped so high that they landed on the floor and broke. “I’m in an alternative universe now,” she thought to herself, and heard in a voice inside her head, louder than any spoken voice, or catchy musical melody that one can’t get out of one’s head. “One of those alternative universes described in the manuscripts I’ve had to edit, then re-edit after the author, who can’t handle living in the one life assigns him to, reviews them again. Parallel universes described in sentences that change tense every third thought, replete with typos and inappropriate Capitalizations, and which never come to either a conclusion or a structural ending which can legalize the page long discourse as a sentence which...”

Rhonda knew that she was composing run on sentences in her head which started in Oz and landed, maybe, somewhere inside the wormhole of the ‘Ring’ in ‘Lord of the’. She also realized that the auditory, visual and olfactory cortex allow our Mind to experience ‘images’ of the world that we can understand, or handle, rather than what the ears, eyes and nose sent into the brain. And that we all live in different universes, different impressions of illusion, as the speed of sound and light were constant and the distance people even in the same room from the source of what is heard and seen is always different. And that there had to be something beyond logical reasoning which made having to apply such in everyday life livable.

But now, 'Responsible Rhonda' felt like she was part of the story. Yet, still, she needed to be in control of what was going on. Falling in front of her eyes, as imagined or real, was a copy of Revolutionary Blues, blown off its shelf by a wind coming in from a window to her left that somehow was now opened. "So," she said to the author in absentia (maybe) of the novel in which the protagonist does battle with evil incarnate in the Yaqui Indian 'alternative universe', then returns to the land of the 'living' to find that the outcome of that private metaphysical battle has irreversibly affected the outcome of the Spirit-inspired Indian revolt against the industrial-funded Mexican Federales. "You say Art, in that 'other dimension', changes life, but that only happens if you can sell books. Which thankful to ME, who lives in the REAL world, made SOME book sales happen. But..."

Rhonda stopped herself in mid thought as the elements outside the cabin merged with those inside, and perhaps vice versa. She wondered why this very brilliant, moving and in its own way, humor evoking Faustian Western made it into Russian translation, and into the hands of her relatives, and most notably, Professor Kinski. "A series of coincidences," she considered. Coincidences like the horse pushing its head inside the window like 'Mister Ed', displaying a light brown five sides star on its forehead identical to the one described in 'Blues', speaking to her in a voice that sounded like the rabbit in Messenger Animals in that novel.

Now echoing into Rhonda's head was not the continuing Beethoven symphony played by the Kinski Culinary Orchestra, but White Rabbit, from Jefferson Airplane. Big Wind farted out background harmony percussion to the 20th century alternative-universe Battle Cry, or seemed to anyway. Rhonda's third eye observed her two 'real life' oculars looking toward the traditional Cossack tack in the Professor's closet. Her nose was drawn to a blanket that smelled of sweat, and a tinge of blood. Her tender-skinned fingers, which were always gloved when she did the thrice monthly rides on horses in Valhalla, New York, an hour's drive up from Manhattan, felt as hard as nails, were able to feel electrical 'signals' from the tack which she grabbed hold of it, then 'messages' from the horse when she put the blanket, saddle and bridle on Big Wind.

Rhonda self observed her legs hop atop the 15 hands, long-haired steed, then heard herself request him to move on at a brisk trot, then ease his way into a rhythmic lope as its feet hit the snow-covered grasslands surrounding the cabin. She felt the Silence of the woods around the huge meadow louder than any subway car pulling into the Fourth Street Subway station, or the yelling of the vendors on board the cars collecting money for Political Causes. She felt the presence of her Ancestors beside her. Uncle Basili galloping to do battle against Empresses Katherine's soldiers, who were determined to turn his fellow Cossacks into obedient, happy and industrialized serfs in 1773. Her Uncle Ihar, defying with his sword Stalin's tanks and trucks, which had taken away food, people and hope from colorfully-dysfunctional Ukrainian communities during the Holodrom of 1931. Her Aunt Svetlana, galloping against the German Army in 1943, whose mission was to turn the inferior Slavs into workers for German factories, or soap after they were exterminated.

Whatever this 'trip' was, it was well orchestrated. A snow covered sign in the distance said 'Enter' with an exclamation mark on it afterwards. Behind it was a clearing in the woods in which the natural vegetation seemed to have grown around some kind of tunnel where there seemed to be an illuminated fog at the other side. En route to such, the images emerged behind Rhonda's eyes, which were so open they hurt, seemed to become reality as she slashed her invisible sword through them. Just as she had done during the Mastery Workshop where she was pushed to yell, scream and rant at people she had long ago forgiven for their transgressions against her, Rhonda imagined some principalities of evil, some of which were still the people who represented them. The latter included Donald Trump, poster psycho for stab and jab competition. Then Jennifer Emerson, classmate and power bitch at New York Literary High whose 'cool to be cruel' motif turned everyone against each other, then against themselves. Then 'I'm cool, artistic and talented and you'll never be, unless I allow you to be' Tanya Weinstein, Rhonda's roommate at Ithaca College who was so good at quenching anyone's aspirations of being a musician, writer, actor or anything else creative, in ways you never saw coming.

The horse seemed to want to go into the above ground 'tunnel' in the woods, as did Rhonda. As did the Ancients riding with, and as, her. On the other side, the images became real. The battle against evil escalated to high pitch. A loud battle fought in fog against images that popped up as they chose to. A Holy War which kept Rhonda on the horse, slashing off heads, arms and in the case of men who mistreated women, testicals. A final showdown which culminated in Rhonda encountering, on horseback, someone who was by all appearances anyway, none other than herself. That showdown ending just as swords of both combatants had finished clashing metal, and were about to slash into flesh.

CHAPTER 11

“You can’t read a simple sign!!!” Professor Kinski yelled at Rhonda as she lay on the bed in his cabin, holding such less than a foot from a face that was battered, bruised and by all measure of its visual appearance in the morning light, a decade or two older.

“It said, ‘Enter!’” Rhonda blurred out of a mouth that was dry, injured and somehow not her own, her eyes adjusting to the light forcing her out of a deep sleep.

“And above ‘Enter!’” Kinski growled, moving the sign closer to Rhonda’s blinking oculars, as the American woman still clad in his ancestor’s hat and coat struggled to read it.

“Do not” Rhonda saw, and read.

“Put together that says, requests and commands, DO NOT ENTER!” the Old Russian Professor blasted at the Young American Woman, in his native tongue, then hers. Afraid of what he would do with the clenched fist that about to outvote his still thinking mind, he pulled himself away, stormed into the adjacent room and hammered a hole into the rotting wood. A big hole by the sight and sounds of it.

“The sign must have been covered by snow,” Anna offered by way of explanation as she put another blanket over Rhonda’s shaking body. “Nature can do that.”

“As can vandals,” Boris asserted. “Vandals who---“

“---Are maybe standing in front of me?” Anna replied, after which she quickly unsheathed the Ancestral sword on the wall, holding its razor sharp blade at Boris’ throat. “Tell me why you’re really here, and who sent you!” she demanded.

“What brought all of us here,” the Carnie con man replied, finding himself experimenting with something he had never experienced, nor trusted---the truth. “The fates, opportunity and chance,” he related, and shared.

“Something more specific than that!” Anna blasted into his face, nicking the first layer of skin on Boris’ neck.

It wasn’t the blade that scared Boris, nor the woman who was holding it, but the sword itself. According to everything Boris had learned about how to assess the authenticity of a fenceable antique, it was real. It was not present anywhere in the cabin before Rhonda went on her trip to Strawberry Fields, or the Siberian District of Oz. Upon finding it in Rhonda’s hand next to the horse that threw her off in the snow covered bush, Professor Kinski insisted that no one ride his horses without his permission. After having Anna replace the ‘No Trespassing’ sign on his private ‘wildlife reserve’, he insisted that no one touch the sword other than him. After he put a pair of thick mittens over his gloves, he

held it like it was a gift from Heaven, yet looked at it as if it was a deadly virus concocted by the devil's best germ warfare researchers.

The blade on that double edged sword felt hot and cold to Boris. As real as any hologram that could be converted into a three dimensional object, or made to be perceived as such by all of the senses. Also what seemed as real were the tales Rhonda was muttering about on the sled when pulled back to the cabin. Tales about some mythical and some contemporary characters who spoke through the wind, somehow. Particularly when the wind came from the direction of the porthole.

As for what happened to Rhonda after catapulting into the porthole, armed with hallucinogens, or perhaps without being protected with the rest of the chemicals that were supposed to go into the stew, that was a mixed bag as well. Did she bring back angels or demons from the 'other side', or, had she become the former or the latter? In any case, when Rhonda came to full consciousness, she seemed to have a new light in her eyes, and a new color in the irises of such. And a REAL aura that even Boris could see around her temples, displaying colors that changed each time he tried to define them.

"So, what do you make of all of this?" he asked the once-mousy producer and publisher who made her living telling other people's heroic stories who he had only a day ago considered a Mark, assistant or another notch on his very experienced penile 'gun'.
"What do you want from all of this?"

"The question is what Anna, whose real name is Irena, thinks she can DO with all of this," Rhonda replied, in an accent which was purely Ukranian, without a trace of America diction or rhythm.

By the terrified look in Anna's eyes, Rhonda was right.

"And what she told her bosses on the phone call she made last night," the one time publisher, now clairvoyant, or perhaps the light sleeper with an intense ability to overhear conversations around her, continued. "And as for who those bosses are---"

"---inferiors, to me, and any other woman who stands up to them!" Anna interjected.
"And as for Irena, she's---"

"---Dead, I know," Rhonda said.

"Dead in this dimension or the other one?" Boris found himself proposing, while still one irrational thought away from being sent to the Beyond by Anna in THIS realm.

"Dead in both dimensions, in the ways that matter, anyway," the young American woman said as an old Russian grandmother. "Deader if she doesn't put that sword back in its sheath, and try to work with the rest of us instead of against us, Irena Tanya Kostnin."

“And if what I want, and need, to do with whatever is on the other side of the porthole is different than you do?” the still-armed and dangerous Anna inquired, having been address by her real name for the first time in decades.

Rhonda, or whoever she was channeling, or becoming, stared into space, then into the realm behind her eyes, then broke into a smile. Then, a laugh that echoed around the room. A laugh that was-all knowing, somehow. And all trusting, somehow. Which ended with a sigh, then the bearer of such pulling herself out of bed. Rhonda blessed Anna, in the manner of the Old Believer Christian mystics who fought against the Emporess Catherine, then gave Boris a Buddhist blessing in something that sounded like Sanskrit. Or Hindi. Or, Boris allowed himself to consider then envision, Ancient Summarian, the tongue used by the humans who were most favored by ETs.

CHAPTER 12

There wasn't a whole lot about the Dimension beyond the various portholes the Professor had set up that Anna really knew. But from what she could glean from what Vladimir had said, and didn't, say to her about it, this alternative reality was one in which exerting only 107 percent effort made things happen. In contrast, making a Vision, Mandate or Desire in the one she was living in required 177 percent effort. "Such prevents lazy people or those who don't embrace struggle less accomplished there, future Doctor Anna," Professor Vlad had said, on more than one occasion. "I suppose, and hope, that it isn't the meek who inherit the earth, but workaholic masochists like us, eventually," the final word on the matter the last time he shared his opinions on the Intentions of the other dimension rather than how to get there, delivered with a hopeful and welcoming smile. But that was then, and this was now.

The current 'now' assigned Anna to assisting the Professor build new machinery from old parts in the small barn adjacent to the cabin. Her questions about the 'hows' regarding the portholes and the various ways they could be constructed went unanswered. "Hand me this," "give me that", "hold that wrench steady" and "counter clockwise not clockwise" were the extent of his conversation, interrupted by yet another scream of pain when he tried to use the hand he had nearly destroyed when exerting his frustration on the walls with his fist as day earlier.

"Maybe we could go to the other dimension and get you to a real doc who knows how to fix that limb, instead of letting that drunken ex-horse doctor down the road sew up your wounds," Anna felt like saying to Vladimir, but didn't. Instead, she commented on the nature of what was on 'the other side', a place the Professor was determined to maintain contact with after Rhonda's unapproved ride on Bolshoy Veter and accidental ingestion of stew containing chemicals 1 to 7, without 8 to 10, had caused 'structural damage' to the machinery. Anna of course did not admit to daring Rhonda to taste the stew that she had only smelt. But, in Anna's mind, everyone around her was a lab rat in an experiment which she had to control if she was to complete her Vision, and Mission. And God, Buddha and Third Brain knows that if she neglected that Mission now, the consequences would be disastrous.

Yet, Anna still had some common ground with her Mark, and tool, the Professor. She got him to grunt in phrases about Creative Souls in the past who may have been portholed to other place. Those recognized in their lifetime included Albert Einstein and George Fredrick Handel. Then there were the posthumous heroes whose real recognition and worth were achieved after their passing, such as Tesla and JS Bach, whose innovations were for the most part seen only by their own eyes during their lifetime. So much like Professor at present. "But maybe there's a Purpose for you not getting recognized for you brilliance now," she said as he poured out another bucket of sweat from his brow while forcing round pegs to fit into square holes. "In a world where Artists are not paid for their work here, or not overpaid like they are in America, which would make for more Passion rather than profit driven Art, Vlad?" she asked him.

“Less talking, more work, Ms. Fedoroff,” he grumbled back.

Anna knew that she had crossed the line, or maybe the Professor had crossed over something else instead? She could not tell if he was being absorbed in the work, or possessed by it. Or possessed by something else. The wind, even to ‘hard facts, no fantasies’ Anna, seemed to carry with it voices to it. Voices that she could not discern. Like talk radio that’s on a high enough volume to not ignore, but so low and muffled that you can’t make out what it is saying, or meaning. White Noise, from the dead, according to the reports from Secret Files in the Kremlin, written by scientists who were found hanging by the neck in their own labs, shot on the streets by hooligans in the wee hours of the morning, or in straight jackets in mental hospitals run by doctors who only know how to sedate the pain of madness, rather than assess its significance and value.

The wind increased in intensity, and texture, and, finally was broken by a knock on the door. A knock the Professor ignored, and told to ‘go away’, in the manner of White Noise. But upon looking in this Messenger’s direction, Anna noted that it was A REAL knock from a REAL messenger. He had a REAL body, and a REAL package that contained REAL food deliverable to ‘Professor Vladimir Kinski et al’. “Smells good,” Anna said to the Special Delivery driver as she sniffed the package of baklava that had been partially opened. “And how did it taste?” she sneered.

“I didn’t sample it,” the beer belly’d stubble-faced delivery man who wore his uniform with as little pride as possible claimed as Anna opened the package, opening up the wrapper and giving it a close whiff.

“And a good thing you didn’t!” she said to him. “Because if you did, you would probably need to get your stomach pumped and blood detoxed.”

“Detoxed from what, theoretically?” the delivery man asked.

“Ask her,” Anna replied, pointing to the sender’s name. That name being none other than Natasha Dmitrovitch, Professor Kinski’s trusted common law ‘wife’ and gal Friday. “Or maybe I will,” she continued. “After I...”

Before Anna could figure out what to do with the mouth watering baklava containing hemlock or some other variety of that ingestible poison, the person it was sent to, the delivery man was long gone. As she knew that it was her time to be gone to deal with the issue, somewhere else, without letting Professor Kinski, or Vladimir, or the other ‘et als’ there whose lives she just saved where she was going, or why.

“So, did Vladimir believe you when you said you’re visiting your sick Aunt in Odessa?” Natasha asked Anna from a soft-cushioned chair pushed under a hard oak table.

“He seemed to,” Anna replied, as she sat down in front of the special guest brought in to the special wine cellar by special agents answering to only special bosses. “As we both

know, he believes what he wants to more than what he has to, Natasha. It is alright with you if I call you Natasha.”

“You’re the one who has the key to these bracelets, ‘Anna’,” Natasha noted, calmly, as she shook her wrists, rattling the chains on the handcuffs comfortably shackled around them. “And the one who invited me to a private wine tasting at this private bistro with no published address, ‘Future Doctor Kostnin’,” she continued, looking at the barrels in the windowless room. “But I warn you. I never drink on an empty stomach. A rule I have, Irena.”

“Like after not a single call, e mail or phone call in three weeks, sending your beloved Vladimir his favorite dessert?” Anna said, slamming the toxin-infused baklava on the table.

“Which he would eat only a small amount of, as he’d share 90% of it with his assistants,” the comeback.

“Assistants which would very much include me. Whose favorite food is baklava, which you would only have known if you---“

“---did my job, to serve my bosses, like you’re doing yours to undermine yours, Comrade Inspector----”

“---Anna! Comrade Inspector Anna Fedoroff!” Anna screamed into the prisoner who remained calm, collected and confident. “Irena Tanya Kostnin is dead!”

“Or maybe Irena is deposited on the other side of the porthole? After you thought you buried her in that grave you used to fake your death, two fake deaths ago. According to my sources and speculations.” Natasha leaned back, treated herself to a breath of fresh air. “Who is writing an interesting novel, and perhaps a sellable filmed opera now. And now that she has a profit oriented marketer, maybe Mogul Moron Boris can make intelligent and caring music fashionable. Who thinks that holograms are free, and don’t have to be paid for their services”

Natasha sang the libretto to the novel converted into music composed by Rhonda after her ride through the porthole. How she knew about the after effects on Rhonda and Boris at the cabin was definitely on Anna’s ‘have to know’ A list. But above that A list was another question.

“Who are you working for?” Anna asked Natasha.

Natasha answered with more of Rhonda’s new opera, which indeed felt like a work of Genius. Something that came from a place a Beethovenian source beyond both pleasure and pain. A Work of Bliss, and depth that had to ability to transform the world, somehow. Even if put to a disco beat. A beat which Natasha sang into Anna’s face as she was thinking it, until Anna slapped Natasha across the face. Then withdrew a dagger

from her purse, inserting it half an inch from her third eye. “I put this into your brain if you don’t tell me RIGHT NOW, who you are working for.”

“The good guys who are trying to keep the world safe from creatures like your bosses,” Natasha replied, in English. In a very American accent which seemed natural to her demeanor. “And demonesses like you who are so good at faking love while knowing nothing about what it really is.”

Anna recalled the expression from her Brooklyn contacts. “I can’t see what any city is really about until I see the garbage.” It made sense that Natasha, most probably a CIA operative from the beginning, was more motivated by jealousy of a woman who stole her man rather than hatred for a Ruskie spook who was trying to keep a porthole to a powerful dimension accessible only to former Soviets. Or present Soviets, like Anna, who yearned for the good old days when Das Capital, the Communist Manifesto and the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Jesus were the bible for her beloved Motherland rather than Art of the Deal.

But for the moment, Anna was left with one decision. What to do about Natasha, or to her. While she was still confineable, that is. At least in this dimension. And considering where to dispose of the baklava that tastes so sweet to the tongue, yet was so deadly to the body, mind and, depending on how quickly it was eaten, spirit.

CHAPTER 13

Natasha Dmitrovitch's suicidal jump off the Clocktower at the University provided dramatic images for the newspapers, television and the Film Studies student whose routine 'film flowers and ordinary people doing ordinary things' assignment made him rethink about the real power of the camera. The note attached to the barely recognizable body said that Natasha wanted 'to make time stop so it good souls could catch up with bad ones'. No autopsy was done on the mangled and mutilated splattered on the pavement, at the order of the Police as well as the request of Professor Kinski, the only beneficiary listed on her life insurance policy and her handwritten Will, the latter having been written during a period when everyone in the University said she was of solidly sound body and excessively sane mind.

Vladimir Kinski requested, then ordered, then demanded that the remains be picked up by private courier for a private ceremony. Boris drove the body that had housed Natasha's soul back to Kinski's cabin in the woods without delay, or fanfare. He offered to pay for the gas, as well as the cost of any funeral Kinski wanted to hold for the hard working 'worker bee' woman who he had carried, tolerated and now discovered that he really loved. Maybe even as much as Anna, who never left his side after she returned to him, maintaining an open ear, a gentle caress, and comforting words that were more truthful than false, somehow knowing when each was required. Rhonda provided the soul inspiring and thought provoking music for the ceremony held at the circle of rocks which had, according to Kinski's best and most beloved sources, had been a private place for Aboriginal medicine men, and women. A medicine wheel he forbid everyone, even himself, from entering without 'protection'.

Like other scientists, Kinski had no hard evidence as to what was on the other side of the life death line. His investigations into parallel universes and alternative dimensions never considered what happened at the time of dying. Converting matter into energy was merely a technical which involved the impersonal disciplines of physics and chemistry. Preparing the body for transport into and reconstitution in parallel universes was a matter of biology, and the right mixture of neurotransmitters floating around in the cranial vault. "But, I wonder," Kinski said to Anna at the end of the ceremony sending Natasha's Soul to the afterlife, and her flaming body into ethers by a simple fire rather than heroic spontaneous combustion. "I can still feel Natasha in this universe. Does that mean she is also dead, or on the way to being dead in the last one I visited?" he asked, recalling only foggy details of the dream that seemed to be all too real the night before. "But, today is a golden opportunity," he continued, to Anna, Rhonda, Boris then himself. The self that was maybe on the other side of the medicine wheel, or the other portholes he had built around it, which he stared into, considering which options would be most feasible rather than merely safe. He approached the most recently constructed above ground 'tunnel' equi-distant from three of the largest medicine wheels with bold, yet carefully implanted steps into the soggy electrically charged ground. "Yes, a Golden Opportunity to..."

“A Golden Opportunity to access even more of the Creative Insights that Beethoven had when his deaf ears heard nothing in this realm, and an Infinity of Life in the other one?” Rhonda inquired as she edged her way to Kinski’s position, one step away from entering the zone he had blocked two and four legged creatures from crossing into. “And become more of what I am becoming now!!!?” the once mousy, procedural and cautious producer/publisher exclaimed with more enthusiasm, bravado and probably Insight than Kinski had seen in ANY of his students, or colleagues, even Anna.

“A chance to create whatever images are in our head, and make them materialize,” Boris boldly proclaimed. “For the good of humanity here, of course,” he continued, showing his best ‘social responsibility’ face. “If we think good thoughts, good things happen to everyone. And no one, very much including me, has be an asshole so he can pay his rent, feed his belly, or...”

“...get laid?” Anna interjected, noting the way Boris was eyeing Rhonda’s enlarged breasts and somehow hot rather than standard issue child bearing hips. “What’s on the other side of this is more than a quick fix transform yourself into being a talented and popular Artist, that is unsustainable in the long run,” she warned Rhonda. “Or a manager of reality, or people, who can begin to experiment with being an effective good guy instead of a self-sabatoging asshole, and idiot,” Anna blasted into Boris’ face, burning the smile out of his lips, and eyes. “Or to see if people we loved, for the wrong reasons, or the right ones, are still alive somewhere else after they are dead here, Professor Kinski,” she continued, hoping that form of address was appropriate.

Kinski let the wind speak next. Using the trees as its translator it said something to him. Something that he had to accept as the truth so that he could endure the lies, and hopeful speculations, that permeated the realm he was still stuck in. “Yes, Natasha,” he said to the wind as it made its third round in the birch trees, bending them to the point of nearly breaking their trunks. “Yes, I know what I have to do now, my...whatever,” he said to the spirit of the woman who he never understood, perhaps because he was so focused on his own gifts and Callings that he never really tried to. “This time, you get to have your name over the laboratory door,” he continued as he stepped across the porthole, listening to what the devise was telling him rather than the other way about.

In the illuminated blur that happened next, Kinski could hear the birch trees reestablish their original position, and see the Silence that overtook the windless meadow. His body became nothing, as he felt his Mind becoming...everything. All he could perceive of the realm he had left by way of sound waves was Anna’s voice saying “he forgot to take his notebook!”. Then Rhonda adding “and the camera on the computer phone I gave him”. Then “the contract he made me sign saying that I get all the money from whatever happens, and everyone else gets everything else,” from Boris.

CHAPTER 14

Rhonda did everything she could to keep her production company in the dark as to where she was hiding out so she could figure out how to make an earth shattering epic rather than merely an audience pleasing flick. But she knew that life imitates Art in the 21 Century more than any of the others. “Every time I try to get out you pull me back in!” she ranted far more expressively and authentically than Al Pacino ever did from the porch of the absent Professor’s cabin to her co-producers on the project when they moved the circus to the Professor’s wilderness laboratory. “Why the fuck are you, like, here?” she continued to the unwelcomed visitors whose knowledge of filmmaking was restricted to the applause meter.

“Because we’re on contract to do so, Ms. Petrovski,” Ivan Petitsia, attaché to the Russian Film Commission, informed Rhonda with a courtly bow.

“And we have to meet the completion deadlines dictated to us by our distributors,” Swiss banker Josef Ponath added.

“And the pay for play window to use the actors YOU approved is about to close in six weeks,” Director Lance Wentworth reminded her. “And, as you know, from the extensive negotiations YOU did, the right actors don’t just materialize out of thin air.”

“No,” Rhonda said as the last of the trailers pulled into the wilderness hideout they somehow found out about by voice, e mail or psychic projection. “The best actors are reconstituted with the right algorithm, synchronous wave frequencies and carefully calculated matter interconversion co-efficients.”

“That makes no sense at all, Rhonda,” bearlike autocrat Petitsia said to the small framed Rhonda, as a protective big brother.

“Maybe in YOUR universe,” Rhonda shot back, as a four digit IQ sister to a two digit IQ sibling. “Or ours,” she continued, referring to Boris as he schlepped up the steps to the cabin pointing to cables, wires and mini Tesla coils he had re-constructed in the medicine wheel covered meadow, giving her a thumbs up.

Behind Boris was a three dimensional representation of Rhonda’s great-great Cossack Revolutionary Uncle, the way SHE envisioned him, read by Professor Kinski’s dream recording machine. A very lifelike representation which fooled all of the uninitiated visitors. Accurate down to how many knots inhabited the three dimensional hologram’s overgrown mustache which still had wild berries in them as he loped the very real-world horse in the long grassed field, wielding his sword in a battle with his electronically synthesized (or perhaps re-incarnated) Imperial Army adversary. As for the dialog the two mounted opponents were rehearsing regarding the reality of the Pugachev Revolt of 1776, the most ironic and potentially liberating peasant revolution in Russian history, Rhonda got an approval for the script she was now writing in her head, with notes as to how her good story could be made better.

“I know, my good friend,” she said to Bolshoy Veter, the real horse who chose to story edit this Vision rather than be in it. “I can hear, feel and understand exactly what you mean,” she continued regarding what she read in the horse’s eyes, and mind. In a language that she could now understand, due to the new half of her she had accepted, and given the reins of control. With that, she halted the battle between the two historical adversaries and made suggestions regarding the dialog the two holograms were engaged in. The re-write was played out for Rhonda, who was pleased with what she saw. Very pleased.

“Historically interesting, but not consistent with Putshkin’s account of the revolt, or the Russian Federation’s contemporary agenda,” Petitsia declared, in Putinesce officialese.

“And we’ll have to send this interpretation of the story to the distributors, to see if it fits their demographic,” Ponath informed Rhonda, cautiously.

“And the dialog, and manner of delivery, very uncool, and confusing,” Wentworth pontificated. He then thumbed through the script Rhonda had written. “This collection of ideas and ideals, said with respect and for your benefit, is esoteric, disorganized and un-interpretable. I can’t in good conscience direct it.”

“Which means that you should follow your conscience, ‘Lord Wentworth’,” Rhonda shot back, feeling her body mass being even lighter than it was when the circus arrived at the Professor’s compound, and losing weight by the minute as the fire in her brain escalated into an even more expressive Promethian volcano. “Collect your check for time served from Mister Ponath.”

“Who may not be able to guarantee that the check will clear, my dear Rhonda,” Ponath said. “And without the money from the distributors, investors and studios, well...”

“...We’ll be able to make the kind of movie the world needs rather than what it wants!” Rhonda blasted back, possessed and inspired by something, or someone, inside of her who she now felt completely dedicated to. “And if you gentlemen want to accomplish anything more at the time of your dying than leaving behind a large fortune of money to overpay for your funeral, or keep your already spoiled offspring in a lifestyle where they are dying of comfort, diseased by riches and toxified by privilege, you will join me, Bolshoy Vetar, and my new producer, friend and Comrade-lover Boris in this endeavor,” she continued, allowing Boris to hug her around her ever thinning waist, and pat her ass.

“And your Sister Comrade?” Petetsia said, directing his finger and voice to Anna, cooking in the kitchen. Her smile at tasting the latest stew turned into a frown as the outer margins of Rhonda’s lips turned joyously upward.

“Our objectives are, thus far, still synergistic,” Rhonda replied regarding the dialog she was having with Anna’s soul, most of it un-interpretable by Kinski’s newest ‘gal Friday’s’ mind. “Yes, synergistic objectives.”

“That means we have ‘common visions,’” Boris explained. “And get along with each other very well.”

“You’ll still need names to make this movie sell,” Wentworth advised.

“And money to get the names,” Ponath offered.

“And a script which is written by a great writer,” Petetsia suggested.

“Which we already have, if we need him,” Boris interjected, handing the Film Commissioner a copy of Revolutionary Blues. “A metaphysical historical drama written by Leachim Sitolop,” he boasted. “Who is achieving much popularity, in the West and here. With the champagne drinking suits and the beer drinking slob.”

“Yes, indeed,” Petetsia said with a G8 power grin, pocketing the book as if he was putting the writer in his pocket at well.

“Who was discovered by Comrade Rhonda!” Boris continued, showing off his new boss at work, and servant girl in the bedroom.

“Yes,” Ponath conceded. “Due to recent factors in the marketplace that none of my literary colleagues understand.”

“But have to accept, as you can’t argue with numbers,” Boris said. “Particularly profitable ones, right, Lance?” he continued, turning to Wentworth.

“Whatever,” the deposed elitist director slurred out of his deflated mouth, after which he turned around and stormed his way to his Jaguar. He rammed on the accelerator, trying to accidentally run into the hologram actors and real horses, only to have the latter jump over the hood, leaving manure on the windshield. The Jag hit a ditch, leaving its driver to make his exit at a walk, which landed him in a puddle of mud.

The crew, which had lived in fear of Wentworth since being hired (or assigned), now laughed at him. As did Petetsia, discretely of course, as he went to his limo and directed the entourage to vacate the premises. Ponath walked to his car. “If you aim for the stars, be sure to bring a parachute with you,” he said to Rhonda, with his back turned to her, in English. “Ones who have the SAME agenda as you do,” he continued, referring to Boris. Then pointing to Anna.

Rhonda felt liberated with her victory against the suits, as a rebel this time and not one of them. Boris approached her, pulling out his cell phone. “So, this Lecham Sitolop. I read his book, Revolutionary Blues. Brilliant writer, well ahead of his or other people’s times. Do you have his number so I, no WE, can offer him a deal of a lifetime?”

“Or a deathtime,” Anna offered as she walked by, showing Rhonda the latest news from Yahoo, Google and Russian TV. “He was found dead.”

“How?” Rhonda asked, her jaw dropped.

“‘Suicide’” Boris replied with a disbelieving eye-roll. “After a car crash where his body vanished into thin air. ‘Right’.”

“But dead, none the less,” Anna calmly asserted.

“When?” Boris asked, grabbing hold of the Anna’s phone.

“Around the time when you, Comrade Rhonda, or whatever you are now, decided to go for that joy ride on Boshoy Veter,” Anna blasted into Rhonda’s terrified oculars, and guilt-invaded soul. A soul that still knew that there was no turning back now, to wherever she was accelerating into.

CHAPTER 15

“Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it,” Boris recalled as he woke up in the cabin bed next to Rhonda. She was finally asleep after having awakened every shakra in the Carnie Con man’s presumably carnally experienced body, and mind. The Afgan Curse, were inherited from his father, who had done his duty in the Soviet Army to make the world safe from the Talaban in Kabul back in the 70s. Boris Dad had started off his marriage as a dream babe in all the ways that mattered, and didn’t matter. Then there was the warning that Boris’ broke in pocket and bitter in heart Dad gave to son on his deathbed. “Be careful that you don’t marry your mother, like all the other men in this family did. She gives you cookies, milk and candy then turns them into sour mash that gives you the runs, the barfs and constipation, all at the same time. And as for women, they all gather together someplace we men never know about to plan, and plot, for us who bear penis’ to ‘accidently’ fall in love with the most vicious demoness in Eden.”

The accounts of Boris’ ‘chance’ meeting with Rhonda followed the pattern that his father’s history with his biological Mom as he recalled the particulars. Boris’ chance finding of Rhonda’s suitcase at the airport. Rhonda being rich in pocket and under-experienced in real life, seeking someone who was colorfully lucrative in Vision and vitality. Her conversion from nerdy producer to ‘on fire’ artist after her ride through the porthole on the proud cut gelding who she claimed was smarter than any man, or women, on two legs. Her saying ‘yes’ to every request Boris made of her with regard to his cut of the profits from the movie she was now obsessed with making. Her celebrating every day of shooting with a lustful nooner with Boris in her trailer, and a nightcap after watching the dailies with him energized in ways he had never known possible.

But that energy came with a price, including having to hang around and trust someone who claimed, and seemed to believe, that ‘the only real rest is in motion itself.’ Indeed, Rhonda never even rested when she was asleep. Normally women had a smile of delight on their face when slumbering after being serviced by Boris. But Rhonda seemed to be engaged in something other than delight. While still ‘asleep’, Rhonda rambled on in several languages that Boris recognized, and some that he had never heard, in different voices. The myriad of characters inside her seemed to be talking about very important matters, and seemed to come up with solutions that evoked laughter, Bliss and the kind of fulfillment Boris has only observed on people who accomplished something earth shattering.

“Oh, if I could only make happen what you’re seeing in your head,” Boris whispered to himself. “But...maybe I can,” he continued in a whisper that still had not awakened the good looking American woman who had turned into a breathtaking Atlantian goddess in his eyes, no matter what light he looked at her in. And there was good reason for it, Boris considered, choosing to believe explanations from the ‘inferior being’ side of the porthole rather than imagining the operations by who or whatever was on the other side. Rhonda had been eating three times more food than anyone else on compound converted into a movie set, and was losing more of her body weight ever hour, all in the right places. Her plain auburn hair had turned flashy gold, the color of her eyes changing hue

each time another burst of fluorescence emanated from them. But, as Boris knew all too well from his once idealistic turned broke cynical father, 'he who has the money in any universe makes the rules'. And as Boris also knew, misfits who had technology the villagers needed or knew how to keep the mass of heavily armed normal citizens entertained were misfits who were kept alive, and if they played their cards right, comfortable as well. It was the cross section of special technology and ability to entertain that Boris connected to now.

"Felini's most popular and money making movies were the ones he dreamed first," Boris recalled from the courses in University he sat in on while trying to pick up hot looking babes, and take them out to dinner and a hotel room afterwards on money he pick-pocketed from their Professors and their dumbshit, born-to-the-Manor boyfriends. "And if Felini had this," Boris thought to himself, eyeing the latest version of the helmet which allowed others to see what the wearer was dreaming. One that he had improved with critical application of the still-absent Professor Kinski's notes, examined while Anna was elsewhere of course, diverted by Rhonda or otherwise 'chance' circumstance.

"Rhonda, or whoever you are in there, my beloved angel, or manipulative demon," Boris said regarding the helmet as he hooked up the readings to his hand held computer, which was connected to the secluded field outside the cabin window. "It's a cold morning and you are in need of a hat. Which I..."

"Will keep to yourself!" he heard, from Anna. "Like the details about how great a lover you think you are," she continued, pointing the business end of Professor Kinski's 19th century single shot pistol into Boris' naked back.

"And what about her, and 'them' inside her?" Boris asked, pointing to Rhonda's still slumbering body. "Don't you want to know what or who is possessing her? Her ability to know what we were, and are, all about? Her so good at being so good at everything we suck at?"

"But have to get better at, yes, I know," Anna replied, laying down the 19th century weapon which had been adapted to project bolus' of laser rays that dismembered entire bodies of their molecular structure rather than merely pushing pieces of metal into small portions of such. "To get better at together," she continued, with an inviting and loving smile.

"And what about her?" Boris said regarding Rhonda, who went deeper into the slumber sweat-producing dream. "She told me she loved me last night. And I told her I loved her too."

"Both of which are lies, told to yourselves and each other," Anna sneered. "And that is the truth."

“From someone who made her living lying to governments, generals and your own bosses,” Boris replied. “And probably even God. Who according to your Socialist bosses, and you, is also a lie.”

“And your point?” Anna said having endured something she had heard from so many others, no doubt.

“I trust Rhonda, or whoever is inside of her, more than I trust you, and there is nothing that you can say that will change my mind!” He blast-whispered into Anna’s inviting smile.

“Except maybe this?” Anna replied, sharing a special video on her phone with Boris. “As you can see, Rhonda is dreaming with closed eyes, and writing with her left hand, something the normally right handed clone and cunt never could do. This is true?”

“Yeah,” Boris conceded.

“And she’s calling out your name in her sleep. With a wide smile on her face.”

“Yeah, very true,” Boris said, with a proud grin, about to send his father a ‘all women are not like my mother was’ message of his own that night through the porthole, or the ethers in his sleep. ‘Yes, she’s calling out my name.’

“And writing this about it,” Anna related, zooming in on the picture of Boris scribbled down by Rhonda. “Where she is chopping off your penis, balls, cutting out your eyes, and finally, while she is laughing about it with satisfaction...”

“...Chopping of my head,”

“Which maybe you should start using to think instead of merely as a floor for that mane of babe-magnet hair you futilely think you’ll keep when you get older?” Anna offered.

Boris put his hand through his hair, feeling a bald spot emerging. Or maybe imagining it. But he didn’t image what Anna put in front of him, on real paper, written with a real pen, to be collected in the real world.

“All of it is yours,” Anna said of the check that Boris saw and smelled as both legal and real. “If you work with me.”

“You who wants to be Queen of the world?” Boris inquired.

“A Queen who rules one side of the porthole, a King managing, on his own terms, the other side? A perfect match for complimentary realities.”

“And which side do I get to be King of?” Boris pressed.

“Both of them, in the end,” Anna promised. With that, she kissed Boris, on the lips, then stroked his cheek, and departed with a warm glow that felt like...Trust, and even Love. Love which he now felt missing when he turned around and looked at the raving beauty he had made love to all night. A beauty who now looked now to not only be plain in the cold light of day, but ugly. Her perky nose seemed distorted. Her supermodel super thin body seemed like a sac of skin overlying a skeleton with daggers sticking out of it. Her once glowing eyes seemed like black holes. Holes which seemed to want to pull Boris into them and spit him out.

“Yeah, Dad, you’re right,” Boris whispered to himself as he threw on his pants, shirt then shoes, being sure to not take them off for anyone else unless he was sure who, or what, he was investing his feelings with. “Yes, love in an illusion and marketing tool that disappears as soon as you become good at using it,” he said as he waved goodbye to Anna from the goat-mowed wild-grass lawn in front of the cabin. “But maybe not everywhere,” the seemingly very worldly Con man said as he observed his eye catching the porthole on the Eastern horizon, illuminated by the rising sun. Then disappearing behind a shadow.

CHAPTER 16

The plan made logical sense, and was in keeping with the Socialist Ideal of ‘each gives according to their abilities and takes according to their needs’. Boris was a born mechanic. He could fix anything from broken chain saws to burnt out electrical circuits as a kid, hot wire any car in his youth, disable any burglar alarm system as an adolescent, and build state beyond the Art hologram machines with spare parts stolen from junk yards as an adult Carnie dude. Once armed with scientific knowledge from Professor Kinski’s theoretical physics notes, translated into Engineeringese by Anna, he could build or repair anything that could take one to the world beyond what the eyes could see and the fingers could feel.

“Yes, you are a Cochrane, raise to the third power,” Anna said to Boris as he made the rounds repairing the main porthole in the main meadow after a fierce wind delivered by Nature, or perhaps forces from the other side of them, turned it into twisted metal and sparkling wires.

“I’m no one’s cock!” Boris screamed back from behind a face covered with soot and DW40-drenched fingers clenched in a fist.

“I said a Cochrane,” the scientifically-astute but mechanically-challenged 60 year old spook who, on a good day, could figure out how to change a light bulb replied. “The mechanical whiz who could make anything that Thomas Edison dreamed up in his head materialize in the real world.”

“Or haunt the real world,” Boris replied, after which he looked up at the clouds. His eyes seemed to become lost in them, then were possessed by the encroaching grey clouds which came in from three sides at once. Something which scientifically seemed impossible, unless Boris was trying to concoct a weather-making machine he could use to make rain where it was needed, or keep it from falling from the sky if he wanted to create forest fires in rich neighborhoods that dissed him in his sorted past. Or unless something else was afoot. Either way, Anna knew that to enter the porthole to the ‘other side’ so she could become empowered, clairvoyant, creative and therefore powerful, she needed protection. The consequences of not doing scuh was all too audible, and visual, on the porch of the cabin.

“I should have let Rhonda do herself in last night, but couldn’t. At least this time,” Boris said regarding his once trusted bookworm, then beloved artist, then potential executioner. “But if you say we still need her alive, Anna, Irene, or whoever you really are, or want to be,” he continued as the heavily-drugged and restrained Rhonda blabbered on in tongues that no one understood, and everyone seemed to be afraid of. Everyone including even the holograms Boris created, which now seemed very real, even to him now. “Do you think that she’s saveable?”

“Savable from us, or herself?” Anna inquired, feeling more pity than anger for the woman she accidentally sent over to the other side by daring her to eat Vladimir’s special

stew before all of the ingredients were put into it. “Or savable from whoever is keeping Professor Kinski prisoner on the other side of the porthole.”

“Or inviting him to stay?” Boris proposed.

Anna went through all of the possibilities in her mind as to what was on the other side of the door the Professor went through, hopefully, with protection. Protection which involved cooking Vladimir’s ‘journeying stew’ with ingredients 1 through 10, inserting them according to the recipe and timing he entrusted only to Anna. Or so she hoped, and prayed, as Boris provided another kind of protection.

“Here, take it,” the still-Carnie Con man said of the crucifix he had always hidden under his shirt as he whipped it off his neck and placed it into Anna’s hand. “It was my grandmother’s. Her holding onto it bought her a holiday stay in a Gulag, but she said it kept her from losing her soul on her journeys through Siberia, and, according to the look on her face when she died, the sojourn through the demonic ethers on the way to the White Light. And in the event that whatever is on the other side of this porthole isn’t another dimension, but THE other dimension...”

Anna was taken aback by why Boris now sounded so literary, and learned. Perhaps both were from his reading books by Mystical Christian saints, or the Tibetan book of the dead, between boinks under the sheets with Nuns questioning their vows or hippie dippie Carnie groupies who thought they knew all of the answers. But one thing was certain. Anna could not go back to being the underappreciated, overused and ultimately betrayed undercover government operative she had been born, bred and trained to be. Who she would share the throne with was a matter of speculation. But if armed with psychic and creative abilities that SHE could control rather than be controlled by, she would not be screwed again. Neither would anyone else of her gender, if she had anything to say about it.

After ingesting a private dinner of ‘journeyer’s stew’ as outlined in the Professor’s notes, absorbing Vladimir’s favorite version of Beethoven’s 9th symphony, engrossing herself in deep meditation, then doing an intense two hour stream of consciousness writing about everything she cared about, Anna was ready. As was Boris, and the equipment he had set up at in the middle of the brown-grassed, weed-infested meadow field occupied by no non-botanical life forms except perhaps the ghosts lingering around the medicine wheels.

Anna followed Professor Vlad’s footsteps till they ended, then felt an electric wall in front of her fingers. With the aid of the right frequency generated by Boris’ Tesla coils, and a grunt of defiance appended by a determined push, Anna fell into a mudhole which blinded her eyes. Upon opening them, she found herself exactly where she fell. But without Boris, the ad hoc electrical equipment, and anything brown or burnt.

Anna found herself in the central square of a village, each structure and inhabitant seeming to be from a different time in history, and diverse culture. A multi-cultural theme park in which multiple languages were not only spoken, but understood, and sung. In the background of the discourse between these seemingly cultured, healthy and well fed citizens was laughter. And none of it directed at anybody. Smiles abounded, most particularly on Russian inhabitants, and without the smell of vodka on their breaths or the presence of other alcoholic spirits about. The weather was perfect, somehow adjusted to those who wanted to wear fur coats and those who chose to stroll around town barefoot in togas.

Anna's skin felt, for the first time in a long while, not challenged by heat nor cold. The pain her arms, shoulders and feet felt when trudging to the porthole door and bashing into it was gone. As was the muck that was on her face as she stroked her cheeks and chin, feeling the absence of sweat, bruises or wrinkles.

But there was one sensation that Anna did feel, and felt to be of significance. When reaching down to throw a stray ball back to a group of children playing a game of baseball in which no one was keeping score, Anna noticed that she was doing it with her right, rather than left hand. The change in handedness was reminiscent of what happened to, and for, Rhonda when she was transformed into a scientific whiz, artistic genius, psychic clairvoyant, hot lover and masterful people manipulator. "So this is a place where all you have to do to have it is to dream it," Anna said regarding the whole situation, feeling empowered in ways that no drug nor accomplishment in the 'real' world on her side of the porthole every gave her. "And where you win every fight you take on."

"Or don't have to fight," the about-to-be-certified Wizardess heard from an ominously familiar voice that sounded like her own, but with a wide, cheerful, childlike lilt Anna was never able to imitate, even when her life depended on it. "Where you are a prisoner of your own complacency." continued the Greeter, who was clad in an outfit identical to Anna's jet black jeans, jacket and boots except that they were all bright white. "And me," the alternative image of Anna continued, with a truly happy smile that matched her golden angelic halo. "Unless you can grab this 'pebble' out of my hand," she smirked in an act out from an Old Kung Fu episode Anna had seen when doing undercover work in Chicago. A game that Anna always won with her real life mother, aunts and uncles when she was an adult strapped inside the body of a small girl.

Anna reached for the 'pebble phone' which hummed, glowed and vibrated in tempo with Beethovenian music she was hearing, then composing in her own head. But before Anna's firm and determined recently-empowered right hand could grab hold of device that, in her world, looked like a mechanical roach toy, Alternative Anna disappeared in cloud of luminescent dust, which smelled like Canadian maple syrup, Siberian ginseng and shit. Anna's OWN shit, which materialized into the last person she expected to see in any universe.

“Yes, it’s me, as you knew me in the Universe where the ‘you’ you think you still are called home, Irene,” Natasha said to Anna. She was clad in the prison jumpsuit she had been tortured in, and then force-fed mind altering drugs, the scars and slashes from such very evident. “And, if you ask me if I take it personally that you arranged for my ‘suicide’, and funeral, well...”. Natasha extended her electrically blistered arm out to Anna’s.

Anna pulled herself back, turned around, and pushed her legs into a terror-fueled run to the porthole through which she had entered so confidently a few minutes, as measured by ‘standard earth’ time that is. Just as she was about to bash back through to the ‘safe’ side of the line, her legs were pulled backwards, forcing her into running backwards, landing her in a chair, at a dining table in a meadow displaying the most pleasant, bucolic and comfortable expression of Springtime.

Serving Anna was none other than herself, aided by a horde of happy, singing children who all were a spitting image of herself. The gustatory delights were Anna’s favorites, from French Onion soup, to chicory salad, to bacon and cheese perogies, to a special desert that she acquired special a taste for later in life. “Baklava,” Anna noted to Natasha. “Which you tried to kill me, and Vladimir, with, back home in my dimension.”

“Which was not his dimension now, and never will be, but...has to be, once again,” Natasha said as she sat at the table, next to Professor Kinski. He was younger than he was in any of the manifestations Anna had known or imagined him in. Though his hair and beard were still white, they adorned a body that was vital, young and musical. He played a violin with the skill of Maestro Itzak Perlman and the joyful enthusiasm of a blissfully drunk Cossack. Next to him, singing with the notes coming out of the fiddle and the magic in his eyes, was someone who Anna recognized by instinct rather than logical inference. “The musical artist who got away, or who he pushed away in his youth,” Anna said. “I believe her name was Julia. Or in this reverse universe, maybe Ailuj, Virgil, or Ligril?”

“You are not Dante, and this is not hell,” Natasha replied, having picked up on Anna’s adopting the metaphor of Dante’s Inferno. “But if both of us don’t work together, the welfare of this universe, yours and others who you and Professor Kinski will thankfully, never know about, will be---”

“---Fucked?” Anna said, feeling intense hunger pains in her belly, and the lightheadedness of rapidly-dropping blood sugar. “Like I may be if I eat this food,” she continued, smelling the baklava.

“If you don’t eat, you will die,” Natasha replied.

“And if I don’t eat this baklava? That still smells of hemlock?”

“You won’t become Socrates, who voluntarily drank a hemlock milkshake after the Athenian City Council sentenced him to death. A death that immortalized him.”

“Or sent him here?” Anna replied, looking around her for anyone in a well worn robe putting a mirror into the face of unsuspecting citizens who are living their lives passively. As for the latter, there were many of them mulling about in the village. Most of them very contented with their new lot, having been deprived of the important element to human evolution and vitality. “A universe containing everything except---“

“---Challenge,” Natasha said, reading Anna’s mind. “That magical balance between terror and boredom. That is the missing from this ‘Paradise’ that...me and my kind helped create. Which will destroy us all unless---“

“---You maybe tell me who ‘your kind’ is? Messiahs who can raise from the dead? Tricksters who know how to put false bodies in place of yours after you fake your death with heart but not brain killing medications? Or....”

Natasha morphed into every kind of extra terrestrial Anna had seen on the tube in America, as well as top secret files in the Kremlin.

“So, you’re reading my mind again, or my mind is playing tricks on me again,” Anna replied to the ever-morphing and very real ‘hologram’ in front of her eyes, who her fellow diners seemed to ignore it. “But either way, I suppose I’ll work with you. As long as you do ONE thing for me!”

“Which is what?” Natasha asked as she morphed back into herself, as Anna knew her on the other side of the veil anyway.

“That we do nothing that hurts him anymore,” Natasha said regarding Professor Vlad. “Who we’re both, I assume, sworn to protect as well as to use.”

As for who was being sworn to, Anna left that unexplained from her end. And gave up trying to figure out what bosses Natasha was working for, or trying to dethrone. However there was one thing Anna needed to know about Vladimir.

“Is he happy here?” she inquired.

“We think so. And appreciated as well,” Natasha replied.

“And Creative,” Anna noted regarding the musical magic emanating from the man who had wished above all things that he could Channel Artistic Life rather than merely study its mechanisms of action. “And Creatively accomplished.”

“ Only here, and to Julia. None of what Maestro Vlad does here affects what happens where you come from, or anywhere else except here.” Natasha’s tears of caring for the old and now young Professor went still unnoticed by him, or Julia, or anyone except Anna for that matter. “Because as we both know---“

“---Heaven watches, and earth works,” the actively anti-religious Anna interjected, reading either Natasha’s mind, the third brain between them or, perhaps the Spirit that created them both and expected them to fix what was wrong in creation.

As for what had to be fixed, a plane flew into view above, as if out of a cloud. It dropped a parachute which fell directly in front of Anna. Attached to it, newspapers. Some were dated in the recent past, some from the day Anna left behind before entering the porthole, the others, post-dated. The news, particularly from the latter---all bad, depending of course from which side of the portholes, you were reading them.

CHAPTER 17

“You were not supposed to see that,” Julia said to Vladimir as he read yet again three newspaper articles on the front page that accidentally blew his way when composing another symphony for his beloved, and perhaps himself, on the porch of his climatically controlled Creativity Cottage. “And besides, those floods, plagues and wars haven’t happened yet. And even if they do---”

“---A lot of people will suffer,” Vladimir replied as he turned the page. “Including the people who published this information, saying that it is the last truthful relating of the news they’re able to get out onto the streets.”

“Streets occupied by people who need to suffer, so they can learn to build better cities, and lives,” Julia related. “And will learn faster because of what YOU built for them there.”

“Or for ‘us’ here, whatever we are or have become?” Vladimir shot back as he looked again at the village in the dimension he had once called ‘the Realm of Light and Enlightenment,’ It was a term he had translated into Sumarian and Ancient Greek for his esoteric publications, and until now, believed to be the truth in any language. Grabbing the next newspaper Julia was about to toss into the fireplace, or tear up for asswipe, he read the wave of biological, political and climatic disasters that had happened in his absence in the earthly ‘reality’ he had endured and despised for nearly seven decades of his present incarnation.

“There are some things we can’t change, and some things that, for the greater good, are necessary,” Julia said as she nuzzled next to Vladimir, messaging his sweaty chest, then kissing his shivering cheeks.

But the body sensation that Vladimir felt and saw now was south of Julia’s hands, and well north of his usually activatable genitalia. “I’ve gotten fat,” he noted with an angry and shameful growl. “I’ve become dead mass, and less energy, and less---”

“---Tired and grateful!” Julia blasted into his face as she grabbed hold of his rock hard shoulders. “Thanks to YOU, the porthole to New Possibilities for your old world can become a reality. A Renaissance bigger and better than the one that happened when we used DiVinci’s portholes to transport ideas, ideals and, when we could, people across to the lower plane where ‘idiots and assholes still think they are the highest form of human consciousness’.”

Vlad felt gotten by his own words, the source of which could have been what he had gotten from the ‘other side’ while he was a hard-working ‘earthling’ or maybe via message in the ethers sent from his current residence, home and perhaps real origin. But answering such issues would have to wait. There were two questions that had to be

answered, and this time, Vladimir would not settle for anything except the truth. The truth which held true in both, or rather, ALL dimensions.

“Where is Anna and Natasha?” Vladimir demanded to know, gently pushing Julia away. “I think I heard them at lunch today. While I was losing my sorrows and maybe myself in whatever came out of this!” he continued as he lifted up his violin, seeing reflections of human victims in it from the ‘lower planes’. “And I could see those two wondrously welcoming Walkuries in my visit to the Huya Aniya during the nap I had afterwards. And when waking up during the transition time between dreaming and----”

“I thought that you only dreamt about me,” Julia sighed with downturned eyes and a red face that rapidly become drenched with tears.

“And I do, my dear, dear Julia!” Vladimir reflexely assured the independent woman who had now become a vulnerable child. He hugged away any doubts she had of his love, and sincerity. In answer to every question from her quivering lips, the resurrected Old Professor assured the young gypsy artist that he would never leave her, and was always with her, and would never stop being who she wanted him to be. It was the first time Vladimir had lied to any woman regarding issues of the heart, knowingly anyway. Ironically, it was to one who had tried to open up his heart on the other side of the porthole when he was a youth.

Vladimir sang Julia to sleep, then rose up from the comfortable couch his enlarged ass had been sitting on. “Hold onto this until I can get my ass into gear and figure out how to save both of our universes, and us,” he whispered to the dream mate he had loved, and now pitied. He gently kissed her cheek, wrote a note to explain his absence, and made his way to the porthole.

The route through the brush outside the village felt harder on his feet than it ever had before. With each step forward, Vlad felt his feet being pulled into the muck. When he pulled them out, the soles of his shoes wore down, causing his soles to blister then bleed. But, as he realized more intensely than ever ‘no pain, no gain’, It was the primary maxim that he would incorporate into his mental and moral calculations as to what to do about, or with the porthole. Indeed, he felt like Prometheus, whose gift of Fire to humanity fell, by accident, to the first arsonist rather than the first group of cave people who needed the warmth of a campfire to keep their newborn geniuses-to-be from freezing to death. As for who was that arsonist, and who would be carriers for the New Enlightenment, that was something he had to figure out himself. And this time, without being directed, inspired or controlled by anyone else.

CHAPTER 18

Rhonda somehow woke up from the nightmare of helplessness that had possessed her, her soul watching the battle between her various 'other' selves. Whether it was the medication Boris had given her to awaken to who she used to be, or something she did in some other universe, it didn't matter. What mattered now was that Rhonda's vision of the movie that would change the world was in full movement now. She had somehow secured funding from the richest people in the world she used to merely administrate in. As for actors to play out the battles between diametrically different principalities, she had the best of the best. Which one was a hologram, which was someone from 'normal earth', and who had infiltrated from the other side, such didn't matter. What did matter was that it would portray the anatomy of good and evil, allowing whoever deserved the victory to have it.

As for the participants, rehearsing for the finale in which heroes and villains from all periods met in a single improvised confrontation. They featured an ancestral uncle who was on the Enlightened side of the Pugachev rebellion in 1774, whose counterpart was fighting for re-establishment of Czarina Katherine's reign of oppression. Her Ukrainian aunt in 1931, who died of starvation, had a fat bitch twin who was not only Stalin's chief enforcer of the Holocaust that decimated a third of the Ukraine's population in a single year, but was his favorite lover in the sac. Another blood relative brilliantly fought off Nazi invaders in 1941, encountering his brother who defected to the Germans. "The theme is that everyone fights themselves, and everyone is both an angel and a demon," she explained to her guest on this, the final day of shooting before the whole package would go to post production. Post production that would be fast-forwarded to the distributors thanks to Boris and his buds in the porno industry who, had learned how to bridge any image to any other to make any story they wanted to, in record time, and with maximal visual appeal. "Yes, we are all capable of being many things," Rhonda related to her guest as she passed him a jug of chemically-fortified spirits.

"And doing many things?" Professor Kinski replied, passing on the power drink that had converted Rhonda from being a wizardess in training to a goddess who answered to no one, not even God. "Like changing the time-space continuum so that the laws of morality and karma are inverted in the political arena. The universe needs healing, so you call in a vicious and idiotic mortician rather than a skilled doctor."

"It wasn't me who arranged for Donald Trump to become President of the United States," she smirked. "Or maybe it was," Rhonda found herself saying, from the other part of herself which rotated 180 degrees within her 'real self' with a musical regularity, all of it a dance to a tune which lingered in her alternately swelled and agonizing head.

"And it isn't you who is about to make him the official ruler of thirty countries on three continents, which his cronies have weakened with ground wars, diseased with plagues and made homeless by 'natural' disasters sent out by weather making machines," Kinski grunted, as he tried once again to bash through the electric field Rhonda had put around him since he had re-entered the dimension where the portholes, in this century anyway,

had been constructed. “What will you say to the 98% of humanity who will become slaves in so many ways, at the mercy of the 2 % who will be the new masters? What compensation will you give THEM for playing in your game!!!”

“I’d say that they should ask him,” Rhonda smirked, pointing to a replica of Kinski on the battlefield. Comandant Kinski was proudly wearing an SS uniform and a gleeful grin, shaving the long locks off of shackled hysterical female prisoners. Professor Kinski who recognized the portrayal as one of his darkest fetishes and/or perversions, which he put into a very private diary to be assessed only by a trusted shrink. “I could have made you enjoy cutting off their hands, and feet, but we’re saving that for the final scene, Vlad. And if you are wondering those women your double is degrading really are Anna, Natasha and Julia, well, I can make that be so.”

“And for you to not make it so?” real life Kinski asked Rhonda. “What do you want? What do you really want?”

“Power and retribution,” Rhonda’s soul self observed herself growling from one side of her brain, not sure if it was right, or left. “And to be a necessary evil in the cause of good,” came from somewhere else. “Whatever ‘good’ really is,” emanated from a third place, and perspective.

“‘Good’ and ‘compassion’ are the ultimate result of advanced intelligence,” the deposed Professor replied from inside the invisible electrified cell walls around him. “As a person, or creature, of advanced intelligence, you should know that. What goes around, comes around. We are good to others because we want good things to happen to and for us.”

“Not if you’re a masochist in the ‘normal’ realm,” Rhonda’s soul observed coming from the mostly heart and little brain side of her now multiply-possessed soul, her mouth emanating a self-effacing chuckle. “A realm that I used to...hmmm.”

“Want to help?”

“Revolutionize,” Rhonda’s soul observed coming out of her mouth. “And transform. As---”

“---God? Who---”

“---WHICH. WHICH is beyond all attributes!” Rhonda screamed back at Kinski. “Which is beyond male or female, young or old, happy or sad, disco or rock, and, yes, good or evil”

“And fear?” Kinski replied. “As well as what you have to say versus what I have to say, and what you have to do versus what I have to do, which I can’t do if you keep me locked up like this.”

“In an electric field of your own design, Professor Vlad,” Rhonda retorted. “Or maybe his.” She to Nazi Vladimir, about to chop off the head of none other than a real horse, Bolshoy Vetar . “Which I can transform you into, unless---“

Something in Rhonda halted the merry-go-round from allowing the demon in her to speak, or act. Maybe it was the memory of falling in love with Vladimir’s most prized horse, which had become her best friend the moment she laid eyes on him. Maybe it was something the horse was telling her through his big, brown eyes in a language her soul could feel but the various minds trying to occupy it could not understand. Or maybe it was the drugged dart that had been shot into her by one of the actors. Said performer rushed up to a speechless, and rapidly becoming breathless Rhonda, assessing her vitals.

“Shit!” screeched Boris, clad in a blue business suit with a white shirt and red tie, topped off with a Donny-doo of gelled orange orangitang hair. “I think I gave her too much,” Rhonda could hear from the place she was at, as she envisioned a dark then black in front of her eyes, then a vibrating tunnel of light pulsating in the middle of it. “We have to get her to a hospital, fast,” she heard from Boris while losing consciousness of her earthly body. “Or someplace better than that,” she heard from Professor Vlad as she felt his presence over her. “Whatever you are in there, Rhonda, don’t die on us!”

Rhonda’s soul decided to not wander off into the ethers. Maybe it was fear of the unknown, or retribution for being an instrument of so much evil that was about to further destroy and enslave the lower species of earthling humanity. Or maybe it was because she really did want to ride Bolshoy Vetar to the other side of the tunnel rather than to take the trip alone.

CHAPTER 19

The windowless room was equipped with the best medical equipment available, from the 'lower earthling' side of the porthole anyway. The sign on the door that once proudly displayed Professor Kinki's name was relabeled 'Janitorial Supplies'. The hospital bed, and everything around it, and on it, had been moved in from the surplus assets department without anyone noticing. "Or so you say, Professor Vlad," Boris said to Kinski as he heard, yet again, footsteps outside the door, passing then stopping. "I thought you said the University turns into a ghost town during reading break.

"It is," Vlad replied as he hooked up electrodes to Rhonda's breathing, yet still not conscious head, taking note of any eyeball rotations, blinking, and pupillary oscillations as well as vitals below her thankfully not still pale neck. "Unless it's students coming by to negotiate about my method of assessment on the necessary yet dis-pleasant experience of inquiring from them what they have incorporated into their own memory and personal retrievable data systems."

"You mean bitching about how you graded their exams?!" Boris shot back. "By the way you're 'discoursing', it seems that this is just another day at the fucking lab bench and this human n value in front of you is just another goddamn lab rat, who you don't give a shit, or rather, a bolus of detritus about!"

"He does care! Probably more than any of us do, including me," Natasha blasted out at Boris. "Which is why he's speaking clinicaleze. It's his way of...hmmm...coping with everything that's about to happen here, and in more than just one alternative universe."

"And has happened for real, in this one," Anna growled back, stroking her fingers over her hairless head. "I would appreciate an explanation as to why 'fake' Professor Kinki, so you tell me, and assured me, shaved me bald with a sadistic grin on his face, for real, NatashIT!."

"I don't know," the still hair-bearing Natasha said.

"Aren't you advanced beings or whatever you are supposed to know everything?" Anna shot back. "Or can make anything just materialize."

"Your hair will grow back, Anna," Boris assured her, stepping into help Professor Vlad set up the rest of the equipment. "In time."

"Which you and your ET protector, or handler, can maybe accelerate, for me, as partial compensation for what you put me through?" Anna grunted. She accidentally caught a glance of herself in a mirror, seeing nothing but an old, hairless hag on the other side of it, then turned away, only to see a reflection of herself in the medical machinery she has helped Vladimir build as a black haired beauty. "While you, Boris, were supposed to protect me from things like this?" Anna then turned to a dormant mini-linear accelerator which she had left in very operational condition. "I demand that you turn back time here,

please, Vladimir,” she said, oscillating between being a demanding bitch and a trusting lover, the subtext of her voice not matching the words that came out of her mouth..

“Some things not even aspiring Queen-Philosophers of two universes can do,” Vladimir replied. “Or should be able to do, thank God.”

“Or him!” Anna directed an accusing stare at Boris.

“I told him what he needed to know, just that,” Boris replied. “Really. I’m trying to tell the truth here, after a life full of lies.”

“Once a liar, always a liar,” the retort from the bald bitch.

Boris considered the accusation, wondering if he indeed had lied so much in his life that he never knew if he was lying. Something that his ‘honest-Abe’ turned Lying-Larry, by necessity, father had warned him about. Virtue for its own sake was new to Boris, and it made him feel vulnerable. And dumb. And dependent. Dumb, vulnerable and dependent enough to care about Rhonda more than he ever cared about himself, or even his father. Despite the fact that she had insulted his Creative potential as an Artist on her way to becoming an Expressive Genius in the service of a Vision beyond the understanding of mere earthling mortals. And that as her dream epic became a reality, she had arranged for Boris to take all the financial risks while she took all the credit. And that she nearly got him eviscerated, lobotomized and gelded in ‘make believe’ movie scenes and rehearsals with holograms that Boris had created for her, some of which were possessed by real souls from the other side of the porthole that he kept open, for her.

But that was then, and this was now. A precarious ‘now’ in which only God, or perhaps the gods called in from several other universes, knew what was happening at the Professor’s wilderness retreat, and the world around it. A ‘now’ in which Rhonda started to talk in tongues again, blinking her eyes, and dreaming things that were only transmitted to the monitors Professor Vlad had hooked up to her head. Images portraying destruction of property, people and entire species. Manifestations of hell on earth, and alternative earths, that Boris recognized as the images from not only Orthodox Christianity he was raised with, but Hindu, Islamic and even Bhuddist beliefs that he had used in his hologram machines when designing Horror Shows.

“Rhonda’s just dreaming this, right?” Natasha asked Vladimir.

“And diverting those dreams to those monitors keeps them here, within these walls, and not into the world outside, right?” Anna pressed. “She can handle the demons who are possessing her, right? All of this is just looking at things imagined, and dug up from reading too many well written fictitious accounts of the underworld when she was a book editor, rather than horrors to come.”

Anna and Natasha, then Boris, looked to Vlad for an answer. Finally, he gave it. “Whatever is in Rhonda’s head, acquired from going through the porthole at the wrong time without adequate pharmacological and spiritual protection, will stay in her head.”

Anna and Natasha breathed a sigh of relieve, hugging each other as Comrades. And freinds.

“To the best of my assessment anyway,” Vladimir continued.

Anna and Natasha held on to each other like sisters, each trying to conquer their own fear by disabling the terror overtaking the other.

“You picked a hell of a time to be the humble doctor,” Boris whispered to Vladimir’s ears as the still-on-duty Professor Doctor shone a light into Rhonda’s blinking eyes. “Aren’t doctors supposed to assure their patients that everything is going to be better? Guaranteeing that taking a pill works makes it work 38 percent of the time, even when it is a sugar pill.”

“Ah yes, the placebo effect, which is very real in your hands and mine,” Vladimir said with an all-is-well Professorial voice and an assuring smile.

Reality bit the Professor in the ass when the penlight went out, then turned red hot, forcing him to drop the light on the floor. All of such was orchestrated, as Vladimir saw it anyway, by Rhonda’s opening her eyes wide, and staring into Vlad’s ocular portholes. Then into Boris’.

“So, what do you want?” Boris asked the Rhonda he first met as a Mark, the demon he feared, and the woman he had fallen in love with. “What do you really want, and need? Maybe I can help you?” he pressed as Rhonda’s body acquired enough strength to break open the first layer of restraints, about to burst open the rest.

Rhonda’s legs kicked Boris to the floor, in roll that pushed him against the wall. When he awoke from the hit against his head, he saw Anna and Natasha restraining Rhonda, somehow. And Professor Kinki, with a burnt right hand, injecting something into the IV line which was, by some miracle beyond angels and gods, still intact.

Rhonda fell into a deep sleep, her facial expression showing nothing except complete exhaustion. The monitor screen went blank, then provided whoever dared to look at it a view of the ‘reality’ of the room. Mundane images of the real world.

Anna crossed herself, thanking the God she had competed with or denied her entire life as a model old guard Soviet citizen. Natasha delivered appreciation to the Deity in a prayer that Boris didn’t recognize as anything familiar, or earthly. Professor Vlad wrapped his burnt hand in bandage and stroked his bruised chin. By the look in his eyes, and the way he was looking at the glitches that broke up the images of ‘reality’ on the monitor, he was gravely concerned. That kind of non-verbal concern Boris recognized from the doctors

when they were reviewing the last set of biopsies and blood work during his father's last and final visit to the hospital.

"So, what can I do?" Boris asked Vladimir. "Didn't you say that Nature never gives you a problem without a solution?"

After a pensive pause, Professor Vlad finally replied. "Yes, I said that, but..." He looked at, then into Boris. "It's highly experimental, but---"

"---It will work because it has to work, right?" Boris replied, feeling fed by the third brain between him and the Professor, or perhaps reconnecting to his deceased father during a rare moment when he was allowed to co-habitat the body of a still living human.

Vladimir explained the details to Boris, then allowed Anna and Natasha to provide their scientific assessments, and personal concerns. They provided a few helpful comments regarding the former, concern-impregnated silent regarding the latter.

"It's up to you, Boris. You are the only one who is qualified to do it." Vladimir finally said.

"And if it works, you'll write me up in the newspapers? Or make a based on real events movie about me?" the once self-destructive Con Man who could not think beyond his next meal, lay or cash pay off inquired. "Rhonda Petrovski ancestors were all heroes, mine were crooks or losers. It would be nice if the Ivanowitch name was attached to SOMEONE in history who did something right, and effective."

Boris read a clear 'not possible' from Natasha's eyes, then Anna's very worldly ocular portholes, then an 'I'll see what I can do,' from Kinski, which he hid from his two female Crusaders.

"So, fact imitates fiction? Those predictable sci-fi episodes about keeping the devil occupied in Purgatory so he can't find the elevator up to earth?" Boris surmised. "You send me into the corridor where Rhonda's soul is? I do battle with, kill, tie up or de-possess somehow the entities that are trying to break through to 'good' universes so they remain trapped in limbo, with me? But before I do this, I want to know one thing."

"You'll be with Rhonda, the real Rhonda, and she'll be with you," Vladimir assured Boris with a firm laying of his burnt hand on his shaking shoulder.

"Where?" Boris wanted to ask, but didn't. "Will we ever be able to come back to THIS dimension where I know we can have hot sex, great booze and set up my own Carnie Circus where I actually MAKE more money than I lose and go home to a woman who isn't cheating on me or trying to clean out my wallet?" he thought to himself, but did not say. But out of the mouth of the high school drop-out, who did most of his reading was out of necessity to keep himself from going cookoo while in lock up, came something

else. “Maybe I can be Charlie O’Brien, and depossess the devil in the Huya Aniya, like in Revolutionary Blues?” he said as he looked at Rhonda’s tired, but still alive eyes.

“That is possibility,” Vladimir offered, stroking his chin.

“Probability,” Natasha added with a smile, a tinge of something ‘extra-terrestrial’ in her diction.

Anna didn’t provide her take on the odds, but merely nodded yes, then hugged Boris. “You won’t be forgotten,” she assured him. “It was my fault that Rhonda went through the porthole before it or she was ready. Ask her forgiveness of me for that,” the hard-edged once and therefore never ex- KGB agent said with the tenderness of Ghandi. “But tell her that I still want to settle with her for this haircut she gave me,” she growled. “WHEN you both return of course,” the Mother Theresa appendum.

Natasha blessed Boris with a bow, and a sprinkle of invisible dust from her fingers, which now seemed to be elongated. Boris felt a punch, then warmth coming from the space just above the depression of his nose. “Perhaps the third eye does seem more than the two on either side of it,” he thought to himself.

Professor Kinski sat Boris on a stool in a corner of the room where wires occupied most of the wall space, then adjusted his the band around the helmet. “Thank you, and best of luck, son,” were his parting words.

“Thanks, Dad,” Boris replied as he saw, and felt, another presence in Professor Vlad’s eyes. After which he closed his own, fading into a place where, as the Old Star Trek episodes promised, ‘where no man has gone before’. At least men like Boris, anyway.

CHAPTER 20

“So, this is a very interesting ‘report’, Comrade Anna Elena Fedoroff,” said the fit and trim gentleman in the hipster black leather jacket and three hundred dollar shirt under it from on the other side of the table at the New Odessa restaurant in Brighton Beach. He looked over the notebook in front of him, turning the pages slowly, then back up at the woman who dared to give it to him. “And what did you do to your hair? It was your most effective negotiating tool. With me anyway,” he continued with a reminiscent smile.

“No good deed goes unpunished,” Anna provided as explanation for the quarter inch stubble covering her very exposed head. “You above everyone else should know that, Sergei.”

“Your next unauthorized or experimental headshave may be below the scalp, if I submit this report to my superior, and yours,” the well dressed gentlemen warned the commonly clad Anna. “And when did you get the courage to call me by my first name, in public? And to address me in the informal address of you rather than the formal one? And here?”

The ring on Comrade, and former lover, Sergei’s finger said it all. As did the way he waved to a Longgg Islannttee blonde Barbie babe half his age with two matching youngsters on the balcony, at a birthday party in their honor.

“You know, I had better and higher expectations of you, Anna,” Sergei noted.

“As did I of YOU,” Anna replied with a bow, addressing him in the formal term for that word which, in English, does not discern between prince and pauper. “Your wife is very....hmm.”

“Young? And attractive?” Sergei replied.

“Like I used to be, I know,” Anna said. “And like you used to be, without that rug on your head?”

The follically-challenged, and aging, Sergei didn’t take kindly to being found out as wearing a piece. But this meeting was about business, not past pleasures, or picking up on past passions. He again looked at the document in the envelope Anna had inserted into the notebook.

“You know, according to my best sources, you were going to give this pink slip to me, and all of your superiors after you found out how to go through a portholes, and change this universe from the other one with superpower from such,” he said. “And now you come back here wanting to quit. To join the commoners. Like them!” he sneared, pointing Anna’s attention to an aging ‘bus woman’ struggling to carry a cart of dishes from tables where the only appreciation the neuvo riche diners gave was a tip, wink and pat on the ass to the young waitresses who has pampered them,. “Is that all you want to

become after all the training we put into you. And all the hard work you did. A servant.”

“She’s doing something noble,” Anna said. “And there is mastery in servitude,” she continued, recognizing something familiar about the overworked underpaid and underappreciated hag.

“You know her?” Sergei surmised.

“No, but maybe one day I may want to become her,” Anna replied, exchanging a smile with none other than Natasha.

“Wipe that expression of ignorance off our face and explain this ‘report’!” Sergei barked, throwing it down in front of Anna’s smiling face. “Or should I say fairy tale?”

“I’d say a novel, and accompanying screenplay, based on fact,” Anna replied. “Change people’s hearts and imaginations, and you change their minds and activities. I think Marx or Lenin said that, somewhere.”

“Yes, indeed,” Sergei grumbled back as he read the manuscript which bore as the authors ‘everyone and no one’. But it was the dedication in the sci-fi novel and script written in Russian which would have a difficult time being translated authoritatively into English that puzzled, and angered, Sergei. “Dedicated to the many living in many universes, and the few living between them?” he read. “And which are you?” he pressed with his cold, determined and once loving eyes.

“I don’t know yet,” Anna replied, feeling herself transformed somehow. Freed from the treadmill assigned to her by bosses on top. And the shackles that come with being the boss of everyone else. And pitying those who were not blessed with her new gift of uncertainty. “But I do know that the world needs the humanistic fiction in that book, before it can, or should, get the technology behind it.”

“Real technology?” Sergei inquired, seeing through Anna’s lie. “Technology that should be ours, not theirs, Comrade.”

“Which will, I hope, and pray, become available to humanity once there is no us or them, Comrade.” With that, Anna put the overpriced and over-rated food on her plate into the second hand PBS totebag she had acquired at the Salvation Army shop, rose up from the table, and kissed her former lover, and once-envisioned husband, a fond goodbye. “I’ll be seeing you, in all the old familiar faces,” she sung as she strolled out the door. The final song in Doctor Stranglove, when the bomb of all bombs finally blew up in the midst of a reactivated Cold War. An event that, for the moment, would remain in the realm of fiction. In the earthly dimension where the Kubrick classic was played as both warning and inspiration for the inhabitants of perhaps the most colorful, heartfelt, and potentially creative and destructive humanoids. And, as Anna now knew but couldn’t yet announce in-discriminately, other universes that depended on the inferior earthlings to keep them

alive. In a universe where, no matter what dimension you were working from, 'heaven watches, and earth works.'