

The first Expandiverse novel

Save the Future!



Dan
Abelow

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The First Expandiverse Novel

(Chapters 1-5 / July 2012)

By Dan Abelow

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Table of Contents

Independents (*Chapters 1-5 / July 2012*)

About the Author

Dan Abelow is an American inventor, technology consultant and author who has degrees from Harvard and the Wharton School.

As an inventor Dan Abelow's previous patents are licensed by over 400 corporations. His new patent pending invention, the *Expandiverse*, is the first fully realized digital reality / digital world that can stand next to our physical world.

As a technology consultant Dan is an expert who has helped leading worldwide corporations create and deliver large advances in websites, products, services and enterprise systems.

As an author, Dan has ghostwritten or written five published books, two of which have been million-copy bestsellers. He is currently writing two novels set in the *Expandiverse*, the first patent pending digital reality / digital

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world.



Photo by Joseph Cristina

Independents

Chapter 1

It is 2036, 7:16 AM, Wednesday, New York City

Darkness gripped the subway tunnel, locking it in permanent night. A continuous rumble vibrated from its floor and walls. A cracked voice stabbed drunkenly at the gloom, its garbled song rising then turning to a mutter as the singer stumbled through puddles along his wobbly path down the track. Occasionally, his cries taunted the scurrying rats. Unafraid, they chattered back at him.

The sodden song masked an expanding rumble until a bright light reflected off the damp wall of a bend in the tunnel. The drunk threw up his arm to block his eyes, forgetting the open pint in his hand. The last of the warm liquid splashed him, soaking the old shirt that hung across his chest. Cursing, he leaned back precariously to throw the

bottle down the track but a blinding spotlight stopped him. Frozen like a startled animal in a car's headlights he watched the subway train careen down the track at him. The dark mass behind its light filled the tunnel with a jolting and screeching wail. The approaching thunder grew into an unbearable shriek that came at him from every direction. He turned to run and saw his shadow flattened into an inhuman shape on the track. Fear overwhelmed him and he flung himself to the side of the track, his scream drowned by the roar of the train. Flickering lights strobed from rectangular windows, crowning the darkness with an unearthly halo. Twisting away, the drunk found himself blocked by the filth caked tunnel wall. He turned and lifted nearly sightless eyes from the drumming wheels, searching for his tormentor. The bored faces of morning commuters flashed by, the subway's speed stretching their combined appearance into massive cans of packed gargoyles. A few seemed to look where he crouched, as if his fear summoned their predatory instincts, while a fine rain of stinking mud splattered everywhere on him.

Stan Braxton never looked up from the mobile teleportal he was skimming. He stood in the center of the train's third car, separated from the exit door by a young athletic man

scanning his own mobile portal, identifying and valuing Braxton, then looking him over. It was obvious why. The contrast between their economic conditions couldn't have been more extreme. The young man's gaze was alert and his face striking, but his jeans and sneakers were soiled, his stained zippered jacket freshly torn, and he reeked of hours of strenuous activity. His only sign of nervousness was the way he touched his navy blue knit hat, making sure it was pulled all the way down, completely covering his hair.

Behind his expensive tailored suit and a face devoid of expression Braxton was thoughtful. He was little concerned with anything but feeling the subway's intensity, how it helped focus him for the biggest moment of his life. As his alertness grew he skimmed new information presented on the mobile portal in his hand — new analyses his team had created during last night's emergency meeting.

The only visible sign that he was aware of anything was an almost imperceptible shift in his balance when the train lurched or someone was about to bump him. And when he had to reach for support, his hand usually found an open place without his eyes looking.

Braxton had expected the next day's sale of EternaSteel's European rights to finally launch a world-wide wealth

revolution — during the next century massive wealth would filter in, a few industries at a time, transforming them and humanity's living standards.

Who said you can't change the world? he used to think. Until last night, that is, when everything fell apart. Rick Harel, the company's security director, had come to Braxton's apartment after obtaining the European buyer's secret plans. Dietrich Fiorr, the head of Fiorr, AG, intended to launch an immediate wealth revolution throughout Europe, turning that continent into a global superpower within a decade, with himself as its head.

Braxton had immediately FOCUSED IN his team in an emergency meeting and had them spend the night analyzing Fiorr's plan. Now he had to decide if they should cancel the sale to Fiorr to stop his plan, or go through with it.

It was while he was trying to understand his team's new information that the young man's attack began.

A chill of apprehension came over Braxton, a sensation of immediate danger. For a moment, so deep was his concentration, he associated it with his thoughts. Then, as the clattering, crowded subway train began to slow while approaching the next station, he felt one hand grab the lapel of his jacket and twist it roughly while another grabbed and

pulled his mobile teleportal.

"Gimme your portal, asshole," a harsh voice whispered.

Braxton looked at the athletic young man whose hand seized his lapel. The soiled clothes belied his attractive face. As he had done thousands of times on the Aikido practice mat Braxton instantly relaxed and centered within his warrior identity, Stinger. Around them he sensed commuters turning toward them.

"My portal stays with me, friend." Braxton's words cut through the squealing of the train's brakes like a fallen plate in a busy restaurant. An elderly woman began pushing people out of her way in an effort to escape them. Her panic snowballed into an open space around the train's door. A couple of mobile portals had already turned toward them, obviously broadcasting the confrontation.

The attacker's eyes tightened. For a second he looked like he was going to spit in Braxton's face. Then he slipped his left hand in and out of his jacket pocket. The opening click of a switchblade was partially muffled by the train's screeching brakes, but was clear enough to trigger Braxton's Stinger instincts. His right hand shot forward, chopping his attacker's forearm just above the knife. In the same motion his other arm rocketed the hard edge of his rectangular portal

at the man's throat.

In close combat it was unthinkable for Braxton to miss. With the portal having to travel about six inches it was even more unthinkable that he should miss at all. But the young man abruptly rolled his head back and to the right and Braxton's portal struck the twisting shoulder a glancing blow.

Effortlessly the young man kept bending away until his hands reached the still closed door of the subway car. Moving quickly he dropped the knife, placed both hands against the train door, pulled in his legs and pushed off, kicking at Braxton with both feet, launching like a vicious spear.

The beauty of this metamorphosis took Braxton by surprise. The man had taken the momentum of Braxton's attack and transformed it into an almost floating, though potentially deadly, onslaught.

Braxton remained stationary until the last instant. There followed a split second of familiarity as the two bodies seemed to blend into one whirlpool of motion. Suddenly the attacker was flying through the air back toward the now open subway door with little apparent effort, holding Braxton's portal in one hand while Braxton's hand held the

attacker's hat. Braxton, thinking the threat was over, finished the throw in a relaxed pose. The man turned his body sharply as he flew through the air, kicking backwards, the heel of his sneaker catching the side of Braxton's head.

Impressed by the physical grace and control, but outraged because of the unexpected success of the attack, Braxton was torn between chasing the man and letting him go. His fist tightened on the attacker's navy wool hat, and he shook it at the figure who was getting up from the subway station platform.

"I'll see you again!" Braxton yelled just before the subway doors closed. As the train lurched into motion the attacker stepped up to the window, smiling and showing off Braxton's portal. Short, wavy blond hair spilled from its former hiding place under the hat, surrounding the face of what was now clearly a proud young woman. She laughed as she raised Braxton's portal and waved goodbye with her other hand. A jaw-dropping look of amazement passed across Braxton's face as he gave a slight nod. He was sure she was someone famous, but the train pulled out before he could place her.

Just then Braxton felt a hand on his shoulder. An elderly man with gentle eyes offered him his seat. Braxton thanked

him but remained standing. He brushed down his suit then felt his head and decided the bruise wasn't serious. He could imagine Tatsuo Torana, his Aikido master, criticizing him, pointing out the lack of perfection in his fighting movements. His suit jacket would prove the old man right, since it was stained and wrinkled by the fight. He ignored it, put the navy cap in a pocket and took out a second, smaller mobile portal as if to resume his apparent reading. The people around him were quickly returning to normal, pretending nothing had happened. The frantic old woman who fled in haste fidgeted by a pole farther down the subway car. Other commuters once again crowded close against him, some turning their portals toward him to identify him, others to confirm transmission of the fight to a crimes-in-progress digital reality. A businessman shouldered brusquely past and stood up against the door, as if Braxton would never again stand between him and his destination.

Is it possible that New Yorkers don't really know what's going on around them, he wondered. *No, they knew,* he realized. They're so used to applying filters and digital boundaries, immunity is easy. All it takes is a simple setting.

* * *

* * *

Mike Mahoney, a fan of Braxton when he had been UCLA's quarterback, fell back in his chair when the crimes-in-progress digital reality flashed an alert. He FOCUSED IN the subway fight. He remembered growing up spending Saturday afternoons with his family and friends watching Braxton turn impossible situations into game winning plays.

He immediately caught up on what Braxton had done since leaving college, fell back in his chair again, then FOCUSED IN his father who was having breakfast, and his brother who was commuting to work. "Remember Stan Braxton, that UCLA quarterback who kept coming up with big plays?"

"Yeah, Stinger," said his father, Shane Mahoney. "Who could forget those incredible games."

"Well, this morning he was mugged on the New York subway. Watch this" he said, replaying the subway fight.

"Oooh, nice moves, both of them," said his brother Conor.

"You know what he's doing now? Have your heard about that EternaSteel, the stuff that never wears out?" Mike asked. "He did that."

"Woah," Shane exclaimed. "Bet he'll turn that into a big

play, too.”

“I was thinking the same thing. You think his company’s public?” Mike wondered.

“Just found it,” Conor said. “It’s Chemi Corp, stock symbol CHEM. I’m buying 100 shares right now.”

“Someone just set up a Braxton filter,” Shane said. “I attached us to it. We’ll get an alert when he does something in public.”

“I’ll do more than that,” Mike said before unfocusing his father and brother. “He’ll probably use a private identity to avoid the filter, so I’ll start a biometric alert. It’ll spot him if he goes out in a private identity.”

Mike used Braxton’s public directory entry to find his home address and used his address to map accessible remote teleportals on the block where Braxton lived. The closest remote teleportal had a clear view of the front door of Braxton’s building, with remote control for a small fee. Mike set it and two other nearby teleportals to recognize Braxton’s biometrics — his gender, height and weight. He added face recognition images from Braxton’s public profile, then left for work.

Alert ready, set...

Chapter 2

When Braxton turned on his backup mobile portal its sensors recognized him and loaded his continuous digital reality, but Carla Hanson already had a focused connection, waiting for him to appear. Carla was in her early thirties, an honors graduate of the London School of Economics, and Braxton's devoted second in command for the last four years.

“The crimes-in-progress digital reality instantly identified and profiled you, and blasted an alert to everyone in your shared spaces,” she said. “Your fight was cool. Now you’re viral — they’re calling you the subway warriors.”

“So what?” Braxton shrugged. “Been in the news before.”

“This isn’t like that,” Carla said. “Some think this is part of your TruthSeeking. Others saw the business stories about the sale to Fiorr and wonder who you really are. One of your

old football fans gave you a wide open Braxton filter, so now you're marked digitally everywhere. Anyone can auto-follow you on every remote teleportal and retrieve everything public about you. You're no longer like everyone else."

"Stop worrying," Braxton said. "I'll disappear as soon as there's a bigger story. Should take about a minute."

"You're too careless," Carla said. "You fought as Stinger, your warrior secret identity. Stinger might be outed."

"Probably not, but it's just a TruthSeeker identity anyway," Braxton said.

"Protect it," Carla said. "Seeking lets you find your best, true self and should stay private while you evolve."

"Privacy is overrated," Braxton replied.

"Hmm, are you thinking of outing your Stinger identity?" Carla asked.

"Have Preato figure it out. Would it give us a card to play against Fiorr?"

"God help us," Carla laughed, "a Stinger archetype for others to emulate in their TruthSeeking."

"Listen," Braxton interrupted. "Right now I need you to hang out the spare business suit I keep in my bottom filing

cabinet drawer. I need to clean up when I get there.”

“On it,” Carla said, knowing where Braxton kept outfits that matched his multiple identities.

Braxton unfocused their connection and set his portal to a private identity, taking him and his device offline from others. He checked the subway train’s location. Two stops to go.

He used teleportal remote control to take control of his stolen mobile portal. As he expected, the instant his stolen portal had sensed an unauthorized user it switched to protection mode. Now Braxton had the stolen portal transmit its automatically acquired images, identities and profile of the thief.

Braxton gasped as the information and pictures flicked by. She was Angela Pierce, the American Olympic gymnast who won the silver medal almost a decade before. A year later she and her coach had been expelled from the sport when they were discovered in a consensual sexual relationship. Since then she’d finished a new media degree at Berkeley, created multiple public identities, and built a large niche following in the anti-hero archetype of TruthSeeker, while earning a living endorsing products from companies that pursued badass publicity, like condoms and rebellious

clothing. Braxton had even followed a few of her exploits when he created Stinger, his private warrior identity.

Her real-time stats were startling. She'd already broadcast their fight to her followers and in minutes had over a million views — one of the people broadcasting next to their fight had put it up. He FOCUSED IN her advertising rates and saw she'd already made over \$10,000 from their fight, and that was climbing quickly.

Wicked smart, he thought. Angela's unconventional attitudes and ability to succeed could fit his team. *If it still exists after Fiorr's plan begins.*

He turned on the stolen mobile portal's sensors and screen, saw Angela was sitting on a bench waiting, and saw her react as the stolen portal focused a connection with him. "Do you want to be called Angela, Angie or asshole?" he asked.

"Cocky prick," she smirked, smiling. "I'll make you beg for your portal back."

"I'll just take it back," Braxton retorted.

"I like that," she said smiling. "Midnight tonight. The same subway platform where I got off the train."

"Ooh, a date to go dancing," Braxton said, his fighting instincts aroused.

Angie smiled. “You didn’t look like this much fun,” she said. Her voice turned hard. “It’s a really nice one. Be there or I’ll smash it.” She reached down and switched off the portal.

Braxton used remote control to set the stolen portal back to protection mode — it auto-tracked itself and stealthily recorded Angela when there were good views of her with sound.

* * *

Braxton exited the subway one stop early so he could walk the final blocks and have a chance to think. He looked up as he reached the sidewalk, his breath always taken away by his first view of the New World Center cloudscraper, a massive building. When a low, heavy storm rolls across the harbor the New World Center stands in its path like a force of nature. Its architects succeeded in making an utterly dramatic statement: in one unstoppable thrust they vaulted above the former World Trade Center and relegated New York's famous skyline to the past, hurtling upward toward a far higher future.

But they were too late, Braxton thought. The New World

Center was a last gasp of grandeur from physical reality. Startlingly retro in appearance, the New World Center's towering turrets echoed the old prosperity of New York. But while it was being built new digital realities had emerged, expanded and extended beyond what the physical world could achieve. Each new teleportal device could empower someone to live worldwide in multiple shared spaces and digital realities — even to create and broadcast new digital realities — enabling each person to multiply their identities, interactions and impacts far beyond the one physical place and local relationships where their physical body was located.

Though both realities co-existed, the most powerful was obvious. Real-time metrics showed where people chose to be present most of the time, where more income was earned, where most entertainment was enjoyed, where advances were quickly identified then delivered to planetary audiences, where large numbers surged to new levels of achievement. The physical world's greatest building paled in comparison. Physical reality was still there, both impressive and exciting, enjoyed for all types of direct experiences, but the emergence of an Expandiverse had turned the physical world into one choice among many, the smaller part of most

people's time and attention.

But in life, which is far from a fairy tale, even the most selfish dreams can come true, Braxton thought. The New World Center's ambition to return New York to the top of the world reached at a new starting point this morning.

* * *

Carla Hanson was walking out to the receptionist as Braxton entered the Special Projects Division of Chemi Corporation on the 207th floor of New World Center.

"Used your new Braxton filter to follow you into and through the building on its remote teleports, you lucky celebrity," she said sarcastically as he entered.

"Ahh, back to the good old days of being a star," Braxton said.

"But without the star power, so keep it quiet," Carla said while they walked briskly back to Braxton's office. "There's a buzz saw waiting for you. Harel's been showing management Fiorr's secret plans, and they're coming to see you. They're deciding whether to postpone tomorrow's sale to Fiorr, and that upset the staff. After years of work and last night's analysis, they want to keep their big bonuses from

tomorrow's sale."

They walked down a burgundy carpeted hall, exited at a narrow side hallway, opened a door and crossed a larger more industrial looking hall to Braxton's office. He closed the door behind them. "I get it and agree," he said, thinking of his own \$40 million bonus. "Now where's my spare suit while I figure this out?"

Carla realized that she'd ignored Braxton's bruise and the stains on his jacket from his fight. She stepped close and realized how bad they were, and looked concerned. "Are you hurt?" she asked.

"It's nothing," he said, smiling. He slipped off his jacket quickly, opened his pants, sat and started to slip them off over his shoes. Carla got on her knees to help. In spite of the seriousness of the moment she flashed him a mischievous grin.

"Wish we had time and a relationship," he said, shrugging helplessly. "Things are happening too quickly. Hand me the pants. Hurry."

Braxton watched Carla get his suit. She was tall and full breasted with shoulder length brown hair. *She looks amazing in high heels and a thong*, he thought, remembering the one time they double dated for a TruthSeeker sexual Quest

together. That had been the only time they crossed that line, but they hadn't made love with each other, and they'd never gone on another sexual Quest because of their work together.

He regretted but understood their decision. They had been totally honest about what they wanted that night, and about to become intensely devoted to each other's pleasure — and learned from that Quest, just not the growth they were supposed to achieve.

Instead of walking back she tossed him his pants so she could stand back and watch him dress. Braxton slipped into his pants with a grin, then took his jacket and pulled it on. "Assemble the staff in the planning room. If all goes well, I'll be there soon and tomorrow's sale will still be on."

"They're ready to summarize Fiorr's plans, then they'll develop a response," Carla said.

"Not fast enough," Braxton said. "You have to keep driving them. Our time and options are limited."

"No worries," Carla replied. "They worked all night and won't take their first break until after the sale goes through tomorrow."

It would be a tightrope. First he would have to convince the company's senior executives to close the sale to Fiorr. To do that Strom, Marshal and Teeger would judge his plan to

handle the situation, which was impossible because he didn't know what to do until his team had planned it.

Then he had to get his team to figure out one goal and reach it quickly. That could be difficult, too. These were the most notorious but brilliant scientists and professionals he had been able to find, men and women who had fought for their beliefs until they lost some of the world's best corporate and academic positions. Because they were uncompromising they respected each other, which was a rare experience for most of them, but they could only be relied on to be independent and unpredictable, especially while a rapidly changing crisis exploded around them.

Chapter 3

When Carla left Braxton put both hands against a floor-to-ceiling window and leaned forward, facing the tops of Manhattan's skyscrapers far below. The city could barely be heard. A police helicopter, flying low, was distant enough to be miniscule. He didn't see any of it. He was thinking about how they wound up with this difficult choice.

It had started with such a simple insight. In his last year of college at UCLA, the day before he was to quarterback the biggest game of his life, an assignment steered him to a newly invented catalyst, called EternaSteel. This catalyst could be added to certain polymers while they are being manufactured and formed into products. EternaSteel made polymers into a new class of lattice-like substances that were thousands of times stronger than steel and impervious to corrosion and wear. Not even the chemical's inventor, Dr.

Leonard Strom, knew how long these new materials would last in continuous use.

The world, of course, immediately rejected Strom's EternaSteel in horror. It was labeled an environmental and economic disaster except for a few isolated uses. Some politicians echoed environmentalists who called for it to be outlawed as a non-recyclable menace to the world's ecosystems, something that should be forbidden in mass manufacturing. The fact that EternaSteel was patented and Strom's Chemi Corp owned the patents caused huge opposition from raw materials industries and many manufacturers of products who didn't want their short lifecycle products made obsolete while Strom collected royalties from replacing them. These reactions had nearly bankrupted Strom, until Braxton contacted him and he let Braxton try to turn his despised invention into a new redefinition of the world's economies and how they produced wealth.

As each step had taken him closer to success, Braxton remembered the excitement, the energy, the power he felt as he assembled a team of intransigent thought leaders who reveled in rejecting conventional thinking. They had turned opposition into amazement by creating new ways for one

industry at a time to use EternaSteel and grow its prosperity to new levels. Then Vuscato appeared, championing Fiorr and holding him out as their new savior. Fiorr would use EternaSteel throughout Europe, a major region of the world, while making everyone at Chemi Corp immediately wealthy.

It had looked like the successful launch of a new wealth-based age — until Harel turned up last night with Fiorr's real plans. His team's overnight analyses, part of which he read during his morning subway trip before Angie's attack, were clear.

Fiorr had reinterpreted their new wealth revolution, leaping ahead of them by as much as a whole century. Instead of the one-product-at-a-time solution they expected Fiorr to sell, he out-invented them.

Fiorr was about to launch his own digital reality and governance that would rapidly deliver a branded wealth-based economy throughout Europe, one he would own and control. Fiorr would maximize the invention's value to himself, not to society. He would turn Europe into a global superpower by making its people a wealth-based agreement. He would rapidly raise their standard of living in return for them indenturing themselves to his new digital governance, perhaps for a generation or more. His wealth transition might

lock down 800 million Europeans and take control of many European industries. Instead of opening up their futures he would own and govern an entire digital reality and economy where his “members” included many of the world’s most valuable, educated and culturally creative citizens.

Like others on his team, Braxton had expected an EternaSteel world to become dominant eventually. But he had expected that to take up to a century and be a gradual evolution, not the immediate transformation Fiorr was attempting.

Frustrated and impatient, Braxton turned away from the window. His closed office seemed to imprison him, his role and huge bonus forcing him to follow through with Fiorr’s plan, making his skin crawl because he already felt as locked in as Europe would soon be. He decided to get out of his office and see the company’s senior executives.

He opened the door and was stopped by the entrance of Chemi Corporation's leading figures who were arriving to meet with him.

Usually the four men about to enter looked like a quartet of senior executives, but not this morning. Dr. Leonard Strom, the sympathetic inventor of EternaSteel; Brad Marshall, the pleasant looking but deceptive CEO; Tyrell

Teeger, the elderly investor who started his career as a CIA operative and turned out fabulously wealthy; and Rick Harel, the former Navy Seal commander who Teeger brought in as Security Director to stop the disappearance of secret company information.

Today they looked stressed, obviously reacting to Fiorr's secret plan. While dressed in expensive suits, they seemed less corporate, more disturbed. Marshall lead them in, grim expressions on all their faces. Even Strom, the brilliant inventor whose eyes usually twinkled, was troubled. Teeger, who had backed Strom financially from the beginning and was about to leap from being worth hundreds of millions to billions, was equally serious.

Marshall, the company's CEO, smiled at him but of all of them Braxton knew he was the most deceptive. He looked innocent, his warm and confident eyes illuminating a round face framed by short black hair. Behind his seemingly approachable warmth Braxton knew his mind was deep and dangerous. Where Harel might throw a hand grenade Marshall would sip brandy while his guest was elegantly served poisoned hors d'oeuvres.

Braxton matched Strom's and Teeger's expressions of concern. He sat behind his desk and leaned forward, clearing

his throat for their attention. He put a hint of annoyance in his voice as he probed to discover their thinking.

"Gentlemen, I have to confess that Harel's findings left me undecided about completing the sale to Fiorr. My staff wants to complete the deal. I'm not sure. I'm assuming this will be my decision, since I brought us to this point and found Vuscato who brought in Fiorr. I need — and value — your opinions. And we don't have time, so please be direct."

Teeger, the aging investor who had backed Strom for decades, glanced at Harel then spoke. "Are you saying that you might recommend that we terminate this sale and walk away from it?"

"Yes, sir. My first choice is to reschedule tomorrow's sale if we can do that without suspicion, so we can study Fiorr's plan. Since that may be impossible, we might have to complete the sale or back off entirely. What do *you* recommend we do?"

"It would be stupid to scrap this," Teeger said. "This is the financial success we've worked for, but Fiorr's plan can't be allowed."

"The contracts are finished and damn near impossible to change," Strom said. "The only thing they're missing is the signatures. That's why Fiorr will be here tomorrow

morning.”

Teeger's and Strom's spirits seemed to lighten as they spoke. Marshall, however, became more focused. He said, "Tell us how you and Vuscato really met."

There was something wrong in his attitude and question. Braxton started to ask a question but stopped. All of them had grown silent, waiting for his answer. Harel, especially, was totally absorbed with him, reading a silent lie detector in his every word and nuance. Marshall was equally focused.

Braxton settled back, accepted their seriousness, and began.

“A few months ago I was having a business lunch at L’Atelier at the Four Seasons with a sales woman who had sold us forecasting services. A waiter brought us an invitation to join a Mr. Vuscato and his companion for a drink after our meal.

"I accepted out of politeness. Vuscato, as we read often in the 2020’s, rose to the Presidency of his international labor union under questionable circumstances. Their former union boss died prematurely from what the doctors said was a heart attack. Then the three men most likely to succeed him were gunned down together after the funeral, at a secret meeting. Vuscato emerged from the upper echelon and

seized power, claiming to end the union's self-destruction. The FBI was sure it was an internal coup, but never found proof. Even after years of investigation they don't know if Vuscato was behind it or a lucky opportunist.

"When I arrived at Vuscato's table we chatted for a few minutes, until the woman with Vuscato went to the powder room with my companion. Vuscato said they would be a while, so we could talk. That's when he explained that he represented an interested buyer of the exclusive rights to Dr. Strom's EternaSteel formula for all of Europe, and proposed the deal that's very close to what we're scheduled to close tomorrow: a \$6 billion advance against a minimum purchase of \$3 billion of Dr. Strom's additive each year for the next ten years, plus a guarantee of at least \$5 billion per year in purchases for twenty years following that. We were to use most of their advance payment to construct several factories under Fiorr's co-management, to provide all the EternaSteel additive they will need. In addition, \$500 million was to be paid into secret off-shore bank accounts as private commissions. Vuscato and Fiorr would each receive \$100 million; the three of you \$75 million each; and \$15 million each to five other Chemi executives, including Harel and me, plus we were to pay at least \$2 million in visible

bonuses to each of 25 other key employees.”

Braxton paused. They all knew this story, and he had included the secret personal payments so any recording would have to be kept secret. Either Harel or Marshall had to be setting him up for something, hoping to throw him off balance. He had neither time nor patience. He would target Harel first, to surface their issue.

"Of course I was impressed with the offer," Braxton continued. "We all were, especially when we found out the customer was Fiorr AG, the Europe-wide holding company. It was like breathing rarefied air. As soon as we were interested, everything was prepared and presented. At least that's what you assured us after your investigation, Harel, so if there's anything wrong, what is it?"

A grimace flashed across Harel's face. "And if Chemi said no?" he said. "When were you planning the Fiorr backed management coup if we didn't go along with them?"

Braxton looked at the man coldly. "I can't be bought and I don't decide who owns and runs this company, so if that's at risk you need to talk to the largest shareholders — who are sitting here." Braxton smiled at them as that broke the ice and they all laughed.

"Besides, by receiving Fiorr's payments for Europe and

then bidding out the rights to the world's other countries, we project profits of several billion dollars per year,” Braxton said. “My share of that would be over \$10 million per year, more than I plan to spend during my lifetime. Why would I need to take over the company?”

"There are other, bigger payments,” Harel said. He opened the folder he had brought to Braxton’s apartment the night before, but this time he handed Braxton a document he hadn’t shown him before.

Titled “PLAN B” these lines near the top were highlighted yellow:

STEP 3: Once Mr. Braxton has been installed as Chief Executive of Chemi Corporation our activities will switch from Europe to a global scope.

Braxton faced Harel directly, challenging him. "I suppose you're going to tell me this came from Fiorr's files."

“Yes,” Harel said. "It came from Fiorr’s Lake Champlain mansion, which is where we traced all our missing files and documents." Harel replied. “Vuscato’s been a guest there repeatedly, starting about a year ago. During that time the

place has been turned into a miniature armed camp. We recovered this electronically from the chateau's data center, along with the two other documents you were given last night."

Braxton leaned back and rubbed his chin. "I'm sure you have a complete report on what I've supposedly done wrong. I want a copy of it. Now."

Harel laughed, "If Marshall had wanted you to know about this, you would have been told last night with the two documents he told me to give you."

"I've had enough," Strom interrupted. The scientist and Chairman of Chemi's Board cast an irritated, bristling gaze on Harel and Marshall. "I've worked with this man for years and he's telling the truth. He created our invention's success. No one controls him, certainly not Vuscato or Fiorr."

Teeger, the aging millionaire investor and former CIA operative, agreed. "If he was owned, he'd be insisting that we go through with the deal."

Harel held up the copy of PLAN B. "That, sirs, speaks louder than you."

While they argued Braxton took out a sheet of company stationery and wrote a one sentence letter of resignation, dating it a week later. He pushed it across his desk until it

was in front of Strom. "That's a post-dated letter of resignation, addressed to you" he said, speaking to Strom. "If you decide I'm guilty of Harel's charges, then next week you'll be rid of me. If you decide I'm innocent you can shred it. Given the fact that we're about to make the most important decision this company will ever face, I suggest that you hold on to this while we turn our attention to what's important."

There was a surprisingly rapid agreement. Marshall quickly reached over, took the letter, skimmed it and put it in his pocket. He appeared to relax considerably. "Mr. Harel, if you'll excuse us," he said, "we have another item to decide."

Harel rose but stopped by the door. "Brax," he said, smiling, "We're going to have fun together."

Braxton simply looked at him with his game face. "Let's do it," he said.

As Harel closed the door Marshall spoke first. "I have grave doubts about signing the deal with Fiorr. His lightning raids on the stock of public companies are legendary. I'm sure he's setting us up for a takeover."

"I disagree," Braxton countered. "We're private and the majority of our stock is in a few hands. If we fight Fiorr tooth and nail we could slow him down for years. He needs a

reliable supply of EternaSteel and he has to have it right away. He's got more important things to do than screw up the source of the additive that makes his plans possible, and he'll soon have bigger battles to fight than us."

"Harel convinced us that no matter what happens with Fiorr, we're going to be under attack soon and we'll need allies — big ones — and we have to find them quickly," Strom said. "Signing with Fiorr puts us on the map as a world player, and Harel thinks at least one government will want to control us directly."

"They'll have a hard time," Teeger said, "Fiorr's deal has made all of us instantly very rich, plus it set a world price for the EternaSteel catalyst that's twice what we've charged so far."

"We face a bigger risk," Braxton suggested, trying for closure. "Coming this close to signing our first major deal and then backing away could give other large purchasers cold feet."

After that Braxton let the three of them talk him into closing the sale to Fiorr the next day. Though he didn't say it, Braxton was trapped. With his letter of resignation in Marshal's pocket he had only one week to clear his name.

As he lead the three executives to the planning room to

hear his team's analysis he felt more troubled than ever. He had reached the edge of a cliff and didn't want to feel that last, firm push.

Chapter 4

Carla had set an automatic recognition alert in a hallway teleportal outside Braxton's office. It signaled her when Braxton left. By the time Braxton and Chemi's senior executives arrived in the planning room, Carla and the team were ready and waiting.

"Is the sale going forward or not?" Carla asked as Braxton and the executives entered.

"Of course the sale is on," Braxton said as he entered, smiling and giving her a thumbs up. The team visibly relaxed with a light scattering of applause, some of it slow and somewhat sarcastic, which made Braxton chuckle.

Just another day in digital paradise, Braxton thought as they sat at the tabletop teleportal closest to the front of the planning room. This teleportal's conference table-like surface was set to a woodgrain finish so it looked like a

wood table, hiding its digital worlds. Surrounding them, all four walls were covered by wall-size teleportals and the tops of all the tables were table-top teleportals. All these devices were controlled directly by those physically there or controlled remotely by those in other locations.

Most of Braxton's team had flown from their homes around the world into New York for the sale and were physically there. Today the planning room appeared double-wide with one of the side wall teleportals designed to look like an extension of the planning room. The full body images of those attending digitally were focused in that side wall's teleportal, making it look like one large meeting room with everyone there.

Carla stood and raised her voice slightly to address everyone in the room and elsewhere. "We have one day to prepare before tomorrow's sale, then Fiorr will start transforming Europe."

"It's worse than that," Braxton interrupted, standing.

Carla laughed softly, shaking her head and sitting down.

"I've already handed in my resignation," Braxton said. "A few minutes ago I was shown another document that Harel obtained from Fiorr. It said Fiorr was planning to have me replace Brad Marshall, our CEO."

Marshall smiled and nodded.

“So I wrote a resignation letter that’s post-dated for a week from now. If we don’t straighten this out in seven days I’ll be gone. But if I go, there’s a good chance Fiorr will want you all to resign or be fired.”

“This doesn’t make sense,” Carla said, surprised. “Last night Harel showed us a document that says we all have to leave. Were you just shown a different document that says you’ll run the company? They can’t both be true.”

Most of the team members swiveled and looked at Harel, who sat in the back. “That’s right, I retrieved two documents and they’re different,” Harel said. “How did I miss that?”

“I just saw both documents,” Braxton said. “Last night Harel gave us Fiorr’s main plan, while the one we weren’t shown is their backup plan. I think this is a setup, but to keep us from fighting each other I turned in a post-dated resignation. We now have one week to figure out Fiorr’s game and win it. So let’s get started.”

Braxton sat down. Carla stood, quieted the team and said, “All right, new direction. Our focus is what to do next.” She glanced at Braxton, who nodded agreement.

“To figure this out there’s a few things you need to know,” she said, addressing Braxton and Chemi’s senior

executives. "First, we just finished going through our analyses of Fiorr's plan. They're recorded in this room's records. I'll make them resources in the team's shared space. We won't repeat them now but all of Chemi's senior executives should access them ASAP.

"Right now, we'll give you the key points. First, who is Fiorr? What are his motives and goals?" She pointed to Preato and sat down.

Preato stood next to his seat and used the table-top teleportal next to him to control the wall teleportal at the front of the room. He was a neuroscientist and Jungian psychiatrist, his speech and mental focus altered by personally living in multiple identities with different archetypes simultaneously co-existing in his consciousness.

He made the wall teleportal's display spin into a whirl that exploded into fragments and coalesced into a VIEW OF THE EARTH from a satellite's remote teleportal. He flipped a control and tiny lights showed instantly accessible remote teleports all over the Earth, many of them broadcasting constructed digital realities. The continents and oceans lit up with millions of tiny lights.

"Europe's spent two centuries sliding. It's fallen from hundreds of years of world dominance. Now its reached

mediocrity,” Preato said, his disjointed speech reflecting his vigorous self-expansion into multiple identities. “Fiorr’s father started chasing a dream. He wanted Europe to lead the world again. But the father failed. He became Chancellor of Germany, then tried to drive Europe to greatness. But popular elections of opposing governments doomed him. Too much hard work for most people. Sacrifices. Decades of competing fiercely. They wanted comfortable lives. But that caused Europe to slide farther. The older Fiorr was crushed. Retired from politics. Barely seen in public after that.”

“So his son, Deitrich Fiorr, found Strom’s invention,” Carla said.

“For the son this is deep. Personal,” Preato continued. “Young Fiorr cannot handle his father’s failure. He’s driven, obsessed.”

While he spoke Preato activated an automated transition in the wall-sized view of the Earth from space. The transition started ZOOMING THE VIEW closer. As the Earth grew rapidly the North East Coast of the United States grew large.

“With his father’s wealth and connections he built a Europe-wide holding company that raided and collected leading companies in many industries. He named this

company after himself — Fiorr, AG. It's culture is obedience to him. His corporation is an autocracy. He rules it."

The VIEW DROPPED THROUGH THE CLOUDS, plummeting toward the large vertical slash of Lake Champlain between upper New York State and Vermont, then auto-switched to an unexpected remote teleportal that was close to their destination. Their wall-size VIEW was from a speedboat racing across Lake Champlain, broadcasting from its remote teleportal as it passed a large French chateau. Preato turned their VIEW TOWARD THE CHATEAU and ZOOMED IN ALL THE WAY.

"Here's an example that makes Fiorr proud. It's his mansion on Lake Champlain in Vermont, a French chateau he had transported there," he said. "You're looking at a reality replacement that's being constructed flawlessly in real time. The mansion's teleportals are intercepting and rebroadcasting this passing speedboat's teleportal broadcast. This is Fiorr's chateau — but its armaments, guards and defenses are invisibly edited out.

"Here's the key to Fiorr. Profits are not his goal. He's chasing destiny. Living in a historic bubble created by his imagination. Like his chateau. He's king. He's law. He's overcoming his father's failure. Making Europe the world's

leader. Again. In spite of itself.

“This is why he needs to get rid of us. We’re independent. None of us will ever do what he tells us. We don’t belong in his world.”

He sat down.

“Wow,” Braxton said, standing and taking the floor. “Who wants to fight Fiorr? Raise your hand if what Preato told us makes you feel like fighting Fiorr.”

Braxton had an over-the-top team who instinctively fought for their beliefs. Nearly everyone’s hand moved, some raised, some only slightly.

“Then I can guarantee you’ll lose,” Braxton said. “You’re right that Fiorr has issues. But so does everyone here,” he said, laughing.

He could see disappointment. “If we start a fight with Fiorr we’ll prove two things. We’re disruptive, and he’s right about needing to get rid of us. Instead, let’s accept that he’s as crazy as we are, but he controls one of the world’s biggest companies. And he’s paying us so he gets to decide. Since he needs Chemi for EternaSteel we need to figure out how to use that, not how to fight him.”

He sat down and turned to Carla. “What’s next?”

“Just the future of the world’s economy and

governments,” Carla said. “Ladros and Thorpe figured out what Fiorr’s up to.”

“Basil Thorpe and I did a crash job on Fiorr’s plan,” Ladros said as he walked to the front. “It’s so far ahead of us it was hard to catch up.”

Braxton had always thought of Ladros, who was Greek with a British accent, as an Athenian philosopher who had been transported 2,400 years out of his time. His high forehead, long gray hair and penetrating stare emphasized his decisive words and lent force to his equally emphatic motions. This morning, however, he was tired with his voice subdued, his skin pale and dark circles under his eyes.

Ladros turned to the wall teleportal at the front. “Let’s start with our consumption-based economy.” He FOCUSED A PRESELECTED REMOTE TELEPORTAL that was located in a big box store in a suburb of London. On the teleportal their VIEW was from the store’s ceiling. They looked down at the sights and sounds of lines of shoppers going through automated checkout registers, pushing shopping carts with boxes of products.

“We’re in a store near London, but it could be any busy store in the world,” he said.

Ladros MOVED THE VIEW IN CLOSER, right down to

the the shoppers. The background sounds — voices and electronic payment beeps — grew louder, closer.

“We never suspected that Fiorr’s goal is to make this economy obsolete within a decade,” he continued. “After tomorrow’s technology sale Fiorr will start shifting this to a wealth-based economy.

“Of course Fiorr wants a system that locks people in, but considering people are already locked down by today’s consumption economy, he’s really offering them a new kind of lockdown, but it will be at a much higher standard of living” he said.

Ladros held the view while activating a DATA FILTER.

“This is a standard retailer’s data filter that identifies each shopper and values them — the identification system grabs their mobile connection IDs and confirms each identity with their face recognition images in their public profiles,” he said. “The display uses a green-red spectrum — the best customers are rimmed dark green while those rimmed dark red are the least valuable, with shades in between so it’s obvious to retail salespeople where they should focus their attention.”

He ADDED AN OVERLAY so the retailer’s data filter retrieved accessible personal data. Next to each identified

shopper his or her net worth floated. “These net worths come from credit reporting services,” he added, “just like any retailer uses. Over the last two decades the middle class has grown and Europe has about six hundred million people in its middle class. The net worths in this store are good numbers. They reflect the high side of what today’s worldwide mass consumption economy produces.

“Those net worths are high enough for Fiorr to achieve a swift takeover of Europe’s consumption economy,” Ladros said. “To see how, our next stop is consumption’s end point,” he said, sliding the store’s live image to the left half of the wall teleportal.

On the right half Ladros **FOCUSED A RESOURCE** that showed a world map. Large and colorful curved arrows pulsed as they flowed from Europe and North America to South East Asia, especially India and China. A large number of cities were marked with remote teleportal locations.

Ladros **SELECTED AND FOCUSED** a remote teleportal in India that showed a full view of a sizable hill of landfill. He **EXPANDED IT TO FILL THE RIGHT HALF** of the teleportal wall. Even though it was night in India the landfill was lit by large portable spotlights. Bulldozers added high tech garbage as it was received from around the world.

Indian trash pickers climbed over the new additions, gathering everything valuable.

“We’re in Sher Shah, India,” he said, “where lots of electronics trash ends up. Today, consumption turns into garbage which is shipped around the world so it can be used as a resource to make new products for consumption. It’s a tight circle as billions of people enter the middle class, which causes some resources to grow scarce and expensive. That’s why we mine old electronics, for resources.”

He ZOOMED THE VIEW IN CLOSER, until suddenly, directly in full screen was a weathered, aged man, starkly lit by the mobile spotlights, his brown hands picking up and turning over some of the same type of discarded, used up products that were being bought in the store near London. He MOVED THE VIEW IN to enlarge the man’s hands. As he spoke they watched his fingers struggle as they broke off part of a discarded device and put it in a large, tattered bag hanging from his shoulder.

“Starting tomorrow Fiorr will use Dr. Strom’s invention to push the world from this consumption-based economy into a universal wealth-based one. Let’s dive into Fiorr’s new world,” he said.

He emptied the front wall teleportal with a swipe and

displayed the latest confidential quarterly report from Strom's labs, a shared space that set out rows of live IPTR — identities, places, tools and resources — all of which were live, moving, immediately focusable.

"We took a shortcut," he said. "We couldn't create Fiorr's world for you but we could take our latest report and adapt it to show our interpretation of Fiorr's plan — the one Harel gave us last night."

He turned to Dr. Strom, EternaSteel's inventor, who sat in front. "Your quarterly lab report shows stress tests. Your big question is how many uses it will take before EternaSteel products fail, and that's what this report answers. But Fiorr doesn't care about what you've been measuring."

He swiped his hand and the wall-size report was re-titled with a headline that stretched across the wall. Ladros read it aloud:

*208 years of simulated use, the equivalent of 5.2
generations.*

*Eurostyle's appearance after two centuries: Nearly new.
Expected lifetime of an EternaSteel human environment:
An unknown number of generations.*

* * *

“We think Fiorr converts the number of stress tests into human lifespans. He looks at a human generation as forty years long, so he sees each EternaSteel product and service as outliving its purchaser by a long time. To Fiorr, he will put in place a human environment that is likely to last a minimum of two centuries in normal use — at least five generations.”

As he spoke Ladros eyes started sparkling, his voice deepened, his adrenaline kicked in and his body language grew more forceful.

“In addition, it’s a big deal that the EternaSteel test products still look nearly new. So we think Fiorr projects that a nearly new looking EternaSteel world will last centuries.”

Ladros paused and held both hands up to the wall teleportal. “Today’s products are disposable. They have to be bought again and again. Fiorr’s EternaSteel products will be passed down through the generations as inherited wealth.

“Fiorr’s not selling Dr. Strom’s advance in durability,” Ladros continued. “He’s launching a historic upward inflection for the human race, an immediate step into humanity’s eternal dream of universal prosperity for everyone.”

Marshall had had enough. “Fiorr’s just doing what we prepared for him, making purchased products so durable they’re permanently owned.”

“Yes, he’s changing what we expected — he will instantly make mass manufacturing and mass consumption obsolete,” Ladros replied, turning to face Marshall directly. “But what you just said is naive, completely unknowing. Listen to Thorpe. Fiorr’s goal is to be more powerful than Europe’s governments, as well as run its the economy.”

He turned to Basil Thorpe, a slight, elderly man who was too weak to travel, so he appeared to sit in the planning room’s digital extension in the wall teleportal at the side of the room though he was at home in Newcastle, Great Britain. “Tell them.”

Thorpe smiled, his inner strength shining through in spite of his physical frailty. He had started as a lifelong student of Gene Sharp’s decades-long codification of how to wage the nonviolent revolutions that caused the downfall of more than a twenty dictatorships — by ending the obedience that dictatorships depended on to stay in power.

Thorpe had expanded that into the essential next step, how to build societies that worked. He learned and taught that human needs are trans-border and not limited by what

each government's bureaucracies said they should be. People could use their own self-controlled governances to change what they didn't like into what they needed and wanted. Successful digital reality governances were self-governed. Each governance should focus on one human goal and derive its power from the people in it — their choices, activities, payments, and the results it delivered to them.

Where there had been only a couple of hundred governments before the Expandiverse, by 2036 there had grown tens of thousands of digital governances in fields like education, health, housing, food, water, the environment and many other human needs. People with digital identities learned that they held the power to achieve many things in the ways they wanted, that they were more effective than governments, that they could be more successful than mediocre civil-service bureaucracies, and they were collectively more powerful.

Today a family might belong to four or five different education governances that fit each person's needs: One artistic, one academic, one athletic, one career-focused in a specific industry, and all lifelong education instead of ending at age 18 or 24. Similarly, millions of people joined multiple governances that together gave them the bundle of services

they wanted — and were free to leave those governances whenever their needs changed. Because every governance needed to hold on to its members, and because everyone could instantly leave any of them, governances stayed responsive, completely unlike government bureaucracies who easily ignored the captive audiences they claimed to serve.

Digital governances were often repudiated and disliked by governments who did not want organizations that outperformed them and trans-border, so they were outside their control. Collectively, governances replaced human services that governments used to make people dependent on them, and would surge in membership whenever large numbers of people found an effective way to achieve a self-chosen goal. To Braxton, this quiet but quite amazing achievement made Basil Thorpe the only choice for his team's political strategist. To Thorpe, Braxton's goal of remaking the world through universal self-determination and prosperity made this team one of the best places he could try to make one final contribution during the few years he had left.

Thorpe used the mobile teleportal in his hand to wipe the entire front wall, FOCUSING A NEW RESOURCE, a map

of Europe with its countries' borders clearly marked, the names of each country prominent.

“Look at these countries, the nation states we live in,” Thorpe said, turning up the amplification of his voice until it was loud enough without his needing to strain it above the soft level he could maintain. “Only a handful of the world’s countries are 200 years old — most governments are very recent creations. Historically, the nation state only began recently and there’s no reason to expect it to remain especially now that we have many examples of successful digital governances. So Fiorr’s thinking is much bigger than nations, and much longer than most governments have been around. He’s doing more than replacing the consumption economy with a wealth-based one. He’s launching his own digital governance as the first continent-wide governance — we think it’s called Eurostyle.”

Thorpe paused to let the senior executives think about that. He could see from the blank looks he needed to explain it.

“Let’s do this step by step. First, if Fiorr followed the traditional growth path for a new business, he would have to sell every product to every customer individually. That’s slow, expensive and impossible to sell everyone right away.

“To get around that Fiorr is creating a new kind of digital governance to transition everyone into a wealth-based lifestyle. On the first day it’s launched, Eurostyle will use directories to automatically include everyone across Europe. Think of it. One new governance, Eurostyle, could have 800 million members on day one.

“Of course, anyone who wants out can probably leave immediately or at any time, without any questions.

“But for those who stay, Eurostyle will run the property and personal wealth records for its members. You’ll know your progress into a wealth-based lifestyle, and see your possessions that are now permanent assets you can pass down to your children. Best of all, it should be able to tell you how much more of your income you can spend every day on living better, and see how much less you’d have if you had to go back to a consumption economy.”

Ladros held up his hand, caught Thorpe’s attention and stopped him. “You’re tired, Basil. We worked the whole night. I’ll finish.”

Thorpe smiled at him gratefully and leaned back in his chair.

“We’re guessing,” Ladros said, “but we think everyone who stays in Eurostyle will rapidly receive one or more free

Eurostyle products. They'll live with them, experience something that never wears out, never breaks, never needs repair or replacement, and never costs them any money again."

While he talked Ladros FOCUSED large images of potential Eurostyle products on the wall teleportal behind him, overlaying the products with new ones until there was a collage of products across the wall. While they looked modern, they were the kinds of products typically made in low-wage countries.

"We don't like Fiorr's quick shift to a Eurostyle world because it freezes today's environment in its current format," Ladros said. "If Eurostyle had started a century ago, in the mid-1900's, a lot of today's world would still look like that one. A big benefit from short lifecycles is constant replacements with new designs — but Rajani will tell you how we expect Fiorr to keep technology current and evolving quickly."

"But the way the world looks is trivial compared to how we think Fiorr might make Europe a dominant world superpower," Ladros said. "If he focuses Eurostyle on products made overseas, replacing them with EternaSteel won't cost many European jobs.

“The result will be a huge attack on relatively powerless foreign manufacturing — to intentionally make that obsolete and put it out of business. He’ll convincingly prove that constantly replacing these consumable foreign products wastes expensive energy, uses excessive raw materials, causes unnecessary global shipping, and overfills garbage landfills. He’ll quickly show how all Europeans can receive many EternaSteel savings that will bring down their cost of living while rapidly increasing their inheritable assets and money available for daily spending, without damaging Europe’s economy — so Europeans will want to the switch from a consumption economy to a wealth-based economy where Eurostyle manages this transition for them.”

Ladros flicked his hand and wiped the products off the teleportal wall. He FOCUSED a resource that displayed a huge “Consumption” pie chart on its left, with small slices that floated slowly out of it one at a time. On its right it displayed a tiny pie chart that was labeled ‘Permanent Eurostyle Wealth.’ As each slice floated from the left to the right the Consumption pie chart grew smaller, and the right ‘Permanent Wealth’ pie chart grew larger.

“Eurostyle will probably use personal accounts to show each member how their continuous EternaSteel spending

turns their purchases from consumption into inheritable assets. Every day and month, as a person shifts some spending into Eurostyle Fiorr shows them their wealth accumulation.

“Since Fiorr AG owns banks and credit card processing systems, he will probably include automated member payments to his Eurostyle governance so everyone can systematically grow their assets simply by consumption switching, which he’ll probably call wealth building.

“While he grows stronger, he makes his competitors weaker by destroying one area of the consumption economy at a time. That shrinking pie on the left is all the companies in the consumption economy, including the economies of low-wage countries around the world. That growing pie on the right is Fiorr’s wholly owned Eurostyle economy. As he attacks each new product category, he kills those companies’ sales, market share and stock values.”

Ladros FOCUSED a resource that displayed an array of foreign corporate logos and blew them up in slow motion.

“This will have a staggering impact on China and other low-wage manufacturing economies around the world — their growth and prosperity depends on large global markets like Europe. Instead of being the world’s fastest growing

economies, they'll plummet — while services economies like Europe and the United States will continue growing.”

The blown up pieces of logos fell off the teleportal wall's bottom. The word “Eurostyle” appeared in the center as a small word. It slowly expanded until it filled the entire wall.

“Our guess: From nothing and no members, in a year or two Eurostyle will include nearly 800 million Europeans, billions worth of registered Eurostyle products that will be shown as wealth acquisition, and many mortally wounded competing companies and regions with falling sales and collapsed stock prices — ready for Fiorr to acquire the best of those companies at distress prices.

“In ten to twenty years Fiorr could own a rapidly expanding Eurostyle superpower, one that could still look new and work well 200 years from now. Since most countries are younger than that, this is a historic change that could be as big as the creation of modern nations has been over the last few centuries.”

Ladros paused thoughtfully, looking around the room. Most of them understood, some didn't.

“Fiorr will answer more questions when he's here tomorrow,” he said, “but here's the key point. Fiorr's Eurostyle members will be part of a wealthy new

superpower. Europeans who stay out of Eurostyle will be trapped in an obsolete consumption economy with weakened corporations, and beholden to weakened foreign economies, who have to charge higher prices because their markets are being systematically shrunk and their manufacturing scale decimated. Those companies, countries and people will turn into rodents on hamster wheels, locked into running behind forever.

“Power will shift. Within 10 years the future will be clear. Within 20 years Eurostyle will be ascendant. In 30 years it will be game over. Those inside Eurostyle will have the world’s highest living standards and be supported in ways we can’t imagine.

“But here’s the big shift. The children who enter school this year, in 2036, will retire in about 2095. By then, Eurostyle will have run most of Europe for half their lives, and their children will grow up knowing no other world.

“Just one generation from now Eurostyle will be their world. And Europe will again be on top.”

Chapter 5

“Nice job,” Carla said, standing and signaling Rajani Rao, their anthropologist, that she was up next. “Rajani found a slammer in the report Harel gave us last night. Fiorr buried it inside EternaSteel’s back-end processing systems. Eurostyle’s digital lockdown may be intensely personal, not just economic and political.”

As Rajani walked to the front she thought of the contrast between her appearance and their dreams. She looked like a short, traditionally dressed Indian house wife. Bright sari but easy to dismiss. Easy to ignore with a thoughtless rejection. There wasn’t a hint of her as the fierce defender of what is true and right — which she now knew Fiorr might bring into the world. Yet as she walked to the front she felt her inner identity grow into the woman who wouldn’t hesitate to call

down wrath on any who might dare oppose Fiorr's Eurostyle governance — what the world should become.

I will destroy your fantasy that you know what the future should be, she thought. In these few minutes in front of you I will change you, forever.

She took a deep breath. Centered herself. Felt the deep purpose of her life and the millions of people she could affect. "Let me show you the electronics system Fiorr had us add to all EternaSteel products," Rajani began.

She turned to the teleportal wall behind her and used her mobile teleportal's remote control to return Strom's quarterly lab report to it. She rapidly FOCUSED SEVERAL PLACES of its live shared space on the test products — refrigerators, furniture, small appliances, scaled down walls and roofs of model buildings, running engines — and zoomed in on their electronics displays. She moved their electronics so they overlapped each other and the wall was turned into a collage of changing small electronic screens. Each product's magnified display moved and changed constantly as it was repeatedly tested.

"We thought we were adding a simple property ID and ownership system to all EternaSteel products. Now every piece has its own small processor and display, from large

things like building walls through major appliances like refrigerators and furniture, down to small things like plates and silverware. Each of their main electronics, processing and storage were outside the devices.

“We thought this was simple because these are simple displays, powered by broadcast power so they can work forever. When a display receives an activation signal it broadcasts its ID, then displays whatever responses it receives. If a display can show video or audio, those are received and displayed. Breakable parts of the display are modular plug-ins, so they’re replaceable if needed. It’s almost too simple. We added it as an ID and property tracking system without recognizing what it really is.”

As she spoke she FOCUSED A TOOL, an electronic dashboard of the data that ran on the displays. “The back-end servers have every EternaSteel item’s ownership records instantly retrievable and displayable on each object’s screen. Our test simulates the ownership transfer of each object every three simulated months, so each test object has been sold many times so far. Every object can instantly display its current owner’s records, and its complete ownership history,” Rajani said.

“But in addition, at Fiorr’s request we attach a test file to

every EternaSteel item every two simulated weeks for 26 new files a year. Multiplied by 208 simulated years that's only about 5,000 retrievable attachments for each object so far." As she spoke she MOVED THE FOCUS to the bottom half of the dashboard.

"We thought these would be different kinds of owner's notes and records, but these also include audio, video, photo, text or other types of files. Because the EternaSteel items have simple interfaces these attached files are also input by different devices, like from a mobile teleportal. All the attached files are instantly accessible and displayable on each object, or by anything that can identify the object — again, like a mobile teleportal that recognizes the object through its ID or with its camera.

"We were stupid. We simply assumed that this makes EternaSteel products fit our visual world and stay connected to their owners. We thought this is how EternaSteel items will keep their technologies and data current, by externalizing that on upgradable systems. We thought that's good, because today's systems can't read CD's and old hard drives so everything that was stored on them has been lost."

She stopped and smiled at them, waiting for their complete attention.

“Last night we finally woke up. We figured out that Fiorr intends to attach our personal memories to the EternaSteel items in his Eurostyle governance, and he is about to change everything about the world’s culture and history.”

Now she waited for those who would think about that and reject its importance, then moved to destroy their knee-jerk reaction. “Look at how we’re connected in shared spaces and live together around the world. We live in the present. But this is a new technology that will connect us directly with the past and the future. Soon, Eurostyle will hold the world’s memories and deliver them over the years, and across generations. Eurostyle will make history come to life. Families, communities, societies — everyone will start living together across time.”

She hadn’t expected them to understand, and she could see they didn’t.

“How well do you know your parents personally? Did you know your mother and father individually when they were in elementary school? Would you like to watch them play with their friends after school? Would you like to see them sit down for a family dinner with their parents with their brothers and sisters, who are your aunts and uncles?

“What about knowing your parents personally when they

were teenagers? You've missed knowing your parents while they were growing up, before they met each other, then when they were together before you were born.

“What would you give to know what your parents were really like when they first started dating — and not with each other? In the first jobs they ever had when they were trying to figure out what to do with their life, what to become? Would you want to know what they were like when your parents first met, then when they fell in love with each other? What were their hopes and dreams for their lives, their dreams for you, at each of the stages of their lives?”

Better, she thought, looking around. Awareness is starting.

“Now go back to your grandparents. And before them to your great grandparents. You don't have a clue about the real people they were, what their lives were really like, who they were. What it was like for them to be children, young adults, to grow up and struggle and live their lives. What if you could see and hear what your grandparents and great-grandparents felt and experienced and hoped and achieved at many moments during their lives? What if you could see and know them and their families, their happy times, their struggles, their problems and successes?

“Now compare that to the many families whose devices can’t read their parents CD’s and hard drives so they’ve already been disconnected from the last generation.”

She could see the wondering in their eyes. “Memories are everything. You would be different today if you grew up deeply connected with your family across its generations. If Fiorr attaches our memories to these inherited EternaSteel products he changes how we remember, and he will change who we are individually and together.

“By connecting us across time, he changes what a human society is and what that means to every one of us.

“The three generations before you are just the beginning,” Rajani said. “In Fiorr’s Eurostyle, objects will gain deep and powerful meanings over the generations. Think about your children’s children’s children. Think of those who will be born about 2200, about 160 years from now. *If you join Eurostyle they’ll know you.* They’ll know what you did during your life, why you did it, what you believe, what you want from your life and how that worked out. From this generation forward your children and their children will be connected to you — if you’re part of Eurostyle.

“How will they know you? Through the Eurostyle

objects your family buys, passes down through the generations, and surrounds them every day. Fiorr will shift the meaning and value of products, houses and where we live from physical to emotional by attaching memories to them.

“Each door your children walk through, each object they see will contain memories, be able to evoke emotions and feelings in their hearts, and enrich the significance of their lives. Then they and their children will add more memories to each of those objects, making their environment richer and more captivating with each new generation.

“Consider one moment in one day. Even an ordinary breakfast’s plates and glasses can entertain them, open their hearts, connect them, touch them, give them a far richer and more deeply immersed way to experience every meal than we have ever known — they will live in a world that your memories are part of, where you will still be there with them, where the goals you’re fighting for today will be visible and can still give their lives meaning. They will know your stories as part of who they are, just as they’ll know your children and their stories. Each successive generation will live in a bigger world, having the chance to become people with a greater understanding of themselves and their

families than we have ever had the chance to experience.”

That was better. She could see them waking up to the permanently altered world Fiorr would provide.

“Your Eurostyle house, the Eurostyle objects in it, everything in your life won’t be just durable objects. That’s just function, and Fiorr’s version of EternaSteel will make functional objects obsolete. It won’t matter if an object’s design is old, because that will visibly say that it contains many deep meanings. Eurostyle objects will carry memories and that will give them real power. Eurostyle will become a time traveling vessel that carries all of its people. It will be a new kind of ship that sails through the centuries and carries a human family together.”

It was reaching them so she drove it home. “You’re the loser in this game. You’re missing out on knowing the generations that came before you. You grew up alone, separated from your real and full family. You never knew the time-traveling community and family that you’re just one part of. What a loss that is. Your full identity is incomplete. I’m so sad for you, for all of us. We’re each disconnected from our families who came before us.

“But soon, everyone who joins Fiorr’s Eurostyle will change themselves and their families forever,” she said. “For

generations to come their children, and their children's children, will grow up knowing their families personally. Today's people — you — will become your families' legendary founders. We will be the generation who made it possible for our families to be wealthy forever, to be connected across time, the founders who transformed the world for generations to come. Europeans will do this through all the Eurostyle objects they acquire. They'll do this through all the memories that they and their family members will add to those objects throughout their lives, through the coming generations."

She paused, then hit them with Fiorr's slammer. "The lockdown will be incredible. Overwhelming."

She raised her hands, palms up, slowly spreading them wide. "Your family's wealth, memories and deep connections will be yours if you are part of his Eurostyle governance. Life will be both fabulously different and much better for those people."

She dropped her hands to her sides. "If you leave Eurostyle and give up your EternaSteel property you will also lose your access to its stored memories — you will no longer have your family's stored memories — you will disconnect yourself and your family from your emotional

heritage. How many will be able to quit this, to leave Eurostyle?”

She paused while they absorbed the lockdown that was coming. “I’m guessing, but suppose you leave. I think they’ll save your memories for you, but to reconnect and regain them you’ll need to rejoin Eurostyle.”

She raised her hands again, spreading them outward then hugging herself. “It will be like returning to your family, being welcomed back home.

“Think of the power this will give Fiorr over 800 million Europeans,” Rajani said. “Fiorr will own an eternal platform that creates a deeper and more connected human culture than we’ve ever had before. It will be good culture, maybe a great one, certainly one of the best places and times to live in all of human history. It’s a culture most people will want and need. But its lockdown will be intensely personal, and it could last for generations, perhaps centuries.”

She brought her her hands to her face and closed her eyes, she felt it so deeply. When she opened her eyes they were wet.

She picked up a mobile teleportal and selected a pre-set control. It changed the wall behind her. The shared spaces morphed, each product’s electronic display transitioning into

a person or a family, some of the moving videos and pictures that Fiorr had provided to store as samples for their testing.

Now she stood in front of a wall-size teleportal whose shared spaces were people living their lives at family gatherings, kids playing sports, recorded teens talking to you, the videos and pictures of moments of life. The audio jumbled together the sounds of many lives until she touched a switch and muted it all.

“We and our children, for generations to come, will live in a much bigger, more meaningful culture that conquers time and connects us with our families across the generations. Fiorr will give us a time-defeating world with powerful personal connections, a larger consciousness and a deeper sense of belonging and becoming. We will live with those who came before us in ways we’ve never known, and it will change everyone.

“But Fiorr will use these primal connections to harness us, to yoke us to his governance, to make us willing members of Eurostyle because it will hold our memories, it will give us our larger families, and it will claim our souls because it owns and controls how we know and remember who we are.

“Our children will use these Eurostyle memories to learn

about us and to become bigger and better people than we could ever hope to be. Their children will be born into Eurostyle families and they will grow up knowing their families for generations, knowing themselves as members of Eurostyle, knowing that Eurostyle is at the heart of their family, that each of them is a member of an enduring Eurostyle family and culture.”

Rajani selected another item and FOCUSED IT, taking up the whole wall. It showed a data center, racks of computers humming as they worked. “These are the back-end systems that have the ownership and memory records. They also have the technologies that drive each Eurostyle item’s displays and features. As Fiorr requested, we’ve replaced these back-end systems twice with a completely new and different systems. We’ve already reported to Fiorr that these systems can be swapped out. He knows new technologies can be updated and merged smoothly into his Eurostyle world.”

Now she knew she had them. She took one more breath, centered herself again and pushed in Fiorr’s slammer until it exploded.

“Think of the voluntary lockdown that’s coming. Centuries of durability, wealthy lifestyles, simplified

ownership, and memories that connect us across generations — producing a dramatically expanded culture that's far superior to ours,” Rajani said. “Fiorr’s universal wealth means much more than money. He’s giving us our deepest and most enduring personal and family connections, more amazing and meaningful lives than we can even dream about today — but the price of that will be permanent ownership of Europeans by Eurostyle. In the next few years up to 800 million of the world’s best educated, most creative and successful people could make a personal choice that they and generations of their children will never want to break.”

* * *

Braxton held his feelings in check as he stood and walked to the front while Rajani sat down.

“You did well last night. Thanks to your analyses we know we’re selling out to an obsessed corporate leader who is smart enough to try and take control of Europe's economy, government and culture, wants to immediately capture everyone and everything, and in just one or two decades has a great shot at turning Europe into a dominant world superpower with him in control for generations to come. Do

I have this right?”

Looking around, he saw some smiles and laughs mixed with a few grimaces.

“Let me tell you how bad our situation really is. You have no idea,” Braxton said, pausing to take a breath. “First, once Fiorr starts succeeding, I think most Europeans will applaud his Eurostyle governance if it makes Europe the world’s leading region while making them the wealthiest people in the world. This is a man who has dreams and wants to lead Europe to achieve them, and as long as he delivers I think he’ll get what he wants.

“Second, I think we’re our biggest problem. We’re supposed to be the smart ones who figure out how to shift the economic system from consumption to wealth. We’re supposed to be the smart ones who help the culture evolve with more freedom. We’re supposed to be the smart ones who sell those who can make our plans real, and make ourselves rich at the same time. But Fiorr has something we don’t. He’s smart and he’s making us rich, but he’s taking over because he’s driven by his dreams while we’re driven by our plans for the world.

“Dreams win over plans. Visionary advances win over chemicals and the products they make.

“I think everything we've done so far — maybe even all of history to this moment — is just a warm-up. What if the real game is the vision of what humanity can become? What if real power comes from the dreams that can be offered and actually delivered? What if Fiorr is offering a better dream because we're offering a way to get wealth one product at a time one step at a time, while he's offering an entire future in one leap? So what if his price is that he's taking control. Which Europeans will reject his dream of making themselves and Europe the world's leader again?

“Do we offer anything that's better than Fiorr's vision?”

The room erupted with many of them trying to talk, others answering back. Braxton thought about quieting them but instead leaned back against the teleportal wall and let it go on.

It took them a while but they stopped, grew ready to listen. Braxton took a step forward, centered his weight over his heels, spoke from deep within himself.

“We have a dream, too. Our dream is the future humanity and societies have always wanted,” Braxton said. “What can finally come true is universal prosperity and freedom. How many generations of people have struggled their whole life, how many lived impossible lives while trying to become

more, how many have passed their unmet dreams to their children, just so we can reach this day, this moment, this chance to make all our dreams come true?

“Fiorr is different. He wants lockdown and permanent control. We think he will turn that into a future that we fear, a future that will make us flee, a future that’s not our universal dream.

“But starting tomorrow Fiorr will become the creator — not us. Fiorr will decide Europe’s future — not us. He will build in permanent lockdown — not freedom. That’s the chasm we have to get over — without failing. If Fiorr achieves lockdown, other regions of the world will copy his model — not ours. This next crossing, this passage will determine the fate of the world, the outcome of the rest of our lives, and who controls our children’s lives.

“That’s the real reason Fiorr has to get rid of us.

“But Fiorr won’t win, even if we’re fired,” Braxton declared. “Tomorrow morning we’ll learn Fiorr’s plans. We’ll start tomorrow afternoon. Let’s move the core team to the lakefront house and figure out what we’ll do next in a new secret shared space.

“It’s play time.”