

Chapter 5

“The torment of precautions often exceeds the dangers to be avoided. It is sometimes better to abandon one’s self to destiny.”

—Napoleon Bonaparte

Aizkorri-Aratz Natural Park

Basque Region, Spain

The earthy aroma of wet straw hung heavily in the damp morning air as Dr. Markander Downing aimlessly roamed the country outside of Arrasate. Oblivious to everything except the five feet or so of gravel road directly in front of him, he could only shake his head at the bizarre set of circumstances that had brought him here. An abrupt movement of his head served as a stern reminder of the perils of too much drinking.

“I’m truly screwed.” He informed the world, or at least the listening portion—mainly him. He had been brought here to Spain, well not brought, he reminded himself, compelled. It was an important distinction. That compelling force forced him to rethink his core beliefs. How I’m I to reconcile this new . . . what, reality, existential intrusion? Without destroying my fundamental philosophy on science. Are the material parts of the universe still important, or are they simply in a temporary state to support linear time? Are they compatible? Is my physical existence just some mereological illusionary flux?

He considered the irony, the parallels to Shelly’s Frankenstein, some evident, some not so much. Beginning his promising career in biotech, his first big project at the University of Washington was developing a procedure to extend cellular life. His last was developing human cloning procedures for Corvus, a task that had consumed him for nearly ten years. Only the cloning

research had been successful where he could reorder the growth process. It was now possible to grow a human to a biological age of twenty in only eighteen months.

Like the fabled doctor from Shelly's book, he'd reorganized pieces of creation, creating a new model, a new type of human, not born of the womb, not nurtured from a mother's love. An abomination. He was no longer convinced his efforts were for the good of humanity. Indeed, not all children are born of love; not all children are nurtured in it.

Thinking back on his early childhood, something of which until recently had been entirely blotted out, was not so pleasant an experience. Especially last night when he had nightmares of his biological mother, who'd Alpha jumped into a clone fully possessed with spirits, was lying naked on a couch beckoning him to join her. In an attempt to play his conscience as a third-party moderator, his internal conversation shifted to a vocal one. "Come and receive your reward." She huskily spoke. Revolted by this, he bolted out of bed, soaking wet at three this morning, wandering the countryside ever since.

"Shelly's monster demanded from its creator fulfillment; no, that's not accurate, not creator, it's molder, it's . . . potter. Yes, the very hand that misshaped it upon the potter's wheel. It demanded from the potter fulfillment. Something the potter could not do—not within his power—no more than I could breathe spirit into the corporal vessel *I* misshaped.

"The Creator's design is still in there, the fundamental aspects of physical/spirit connection no one has the power to alter. Somehow that connection in these clones extends out to other spirits. By what mechanism is an entity drawn to the clone body when the Alpha dies? That specific clone?

"Do these clones prove Descartes's Theory of Mind? Is the union of material and spirit in one vessel combined but not bound? Comingled not unified, two ontologically separate entities.

We all witnessed the Asker-clones essence—spirit, soul, whatever—leave the clone’s body, yet the clone remained alive. So, what is this essence, from whence does it come and go?”

He recalled the incident with the Novak clone, the first clone to gain sentience, or awareness, from a Jump. Beyond any doubt, that spirit was from the Alpha—was the Alpha. So, what about the clone prejump? It was a separate thing; thinking, observing, and exercising will. What about that? Left to its own life experiences, would the clone develop awareness or understanding, or would it just react out of necessity?

“Before the jump, the clone reacted in its environment, had responses, liked things, disliked things, but was clearly unaware of its condition. So, what was different when the spirit of the baker entered it? What happened when the spirit left it? Did it possess a spirit? Did the Novak-clone resort to its prior decision matrix before the jump, or did it begin a new decision tree?”

He had been over these issues many times before the clone jump. It was an old argument about causation—cause and effect. Potential proof of free will, or free agency as Father Daniel couched it, is any action that alters a causality chain. Snatch a leaf in the wind. What causes rational thinking to act irrationally or impulsively? Contradistinctively, reasonable action can only be described in terms of irrationality—it requires choice, and choice is a selection of available options in which opinion rates as good or bad. Decision alters causation. On that one, he stopped to take in his surroundings.

People often describe nature in terms of beauty. It simply is. I see vastly complicated, highly ordered electro-chemical arrangements—I choose not to like or dislike them.

Almost as though on cue, a twig fell directly in front of him from a branch above. He picked it up and examined it, immediately placing his observations into their appropriate cell type and function categories.

“This structure is comprised of two primary zones,” He began the process. “The vascular cambium or artery system, its inner tubular conduit responsible for transporting growth factors and sugars suspended in an aqueous solution. Next, the bark—which is actually dead cambium cells—has been pushed outward from the phloem, the growing inner bark, as it expands. The entire system *reacts* to the environment, temperature, humidity, air pressure . . . *ad fin*. Like the aqueous solution that feeds it, it reacts. No mechanical pumps or physical mechanisms propel the hormones and sugars to needed areas. Their movement depends on their surroundings’ chemical makeup, all existing in a sustaining environment; they are encased within a network of local causality. They make no decisions, hold no memory of past occurrences to gauge their next choice, they possess no judgment. These reactions are, by definition, of necessity. He looked up at the tree.

“This causality is intrinsic. Its reality depends on the soil with its own universe of microecology consisting of countless constitutional parts, let alone the macro systems of gravity, air composition, thermodynamics, photon packets of sunlight, etc. Would free will exist without these stable systems of necessity, or is it conditional? Without the bio-structure, the body would certainly not exist, but as to the will? Does spirit need a stable vessel to express will?

“Conditional rationality,” he had to laugh. “Amid all this teeming causality, a human comes along and decides that this tree blocks a beautiful view of the valley and cuts it down. Now, if all events are caused, what was the catalyst, the aesthetic? An internal perception, guided by the arborization of other latent opinions? Decisions certainly are, and unless actualized. Is opinion rooted in perception or causality?” He continued walking.

“For that to be an act of free will, it must be internal to the person, or agent, and not determined by the external events of local causality.” He replayed an argument of Descartes. “Does that mean spirit action is independent of local causality? To a high degree, it must. The newly

felled tree would alter the chain of local causality in the immediate ecosystem. If that tree fell on the person who cut it? What of their entanglement? How many other microsystems are changed? Do they factor into choice? Indeed, the biosystem must be affected to some degree. He laughed, again speaking aloud. “Tracing out the conditional hypotheticals is useless as they consistently resolve into ignorance. We don’t know enough about the systems involved to predict all the possible permutations of events that compete within the system. Without prediction, no plausible hypothesis can be made.”

“Now, say the tree-cutting is observed by another human, one who internally perceives it as an evil, then a new causality chain must unfold. Or maybe not. The presence of the chain saw may be a mitigating factor, dependent, of course, on the level of credible threat recognition by the observer.” He pondered, self-amused by his own ramblings.

He needed to stop dancing around the real issue at hand—spiritual causality. Is it intrinsic or conditional?

“We experience spiritual causality. The relationship to the linear material world requires it, or at least it’s a governing function. Time in the material world is relative to the speed of events occurring within the local causal environment, so what does that say about free will happening in linear time? Are the clone spirits bound by time?

“My interaction with this spiritual . . . arena is what brought me here to these Basque mountains of Spain. A direct commission by a self-titled Messenger of God spirit manifested in the Novak clone. One of five distinct spirit personalities that had entered it. When they took the Novak clone’s SOC, they were ontologically separate, unique in every way, even down to the change in eye color. All for what, for me to witness the exorcism of the Asker-clone? Nobody else is using that term, but that’s what it was. Just two days ago, an entity calling itself the Scarecrow

was driven out of a clone along with the host entity Asker by calling on the Christ of the Judean tradition.”

He shook his head carefully. Now oblivious to the surroundings, time seemed to flow around him. I don't get it. Why was I told to come here? Is this a destiny thing? And if so, what about free will then? Is the causality of events that brought me here intrinsic? Even if Mark's right and I was lured to Croatia, there is still a prescience of events. Of that, there is little doubt. Why my direct involvement, then? Is my decision to come here a reasonable condition necessary to create a new causality chain that will fundamentally *change* me?

He looked up at a different tree.

“Is there a purpose steering you?”

The answer was not hung on the tree.

He was, of course, familiar with the saying that God “works in mysterious ways,” but it never occurred to him that it might actually be true. For that to be accurate, first, there had to be some god to begin with, and second, *that* God needed to give a shit.

For ten years, I spent my life in Croatia. A different man in a different time. Was that destiny or misapplied will? Can any willful action be viewed as misapplied? I guess it depends on its fruit. Truly, I don't know if I was the potter or the one being shaped.

The sound of someone running towards him brought him out of his revelry.

“Hey, Father Daniel, out for a morning jog?” Markander called out as Daniel rounded the wooded corner.

* * *

Father Daniel slowed to a stop. It was evident from Dr. Markander's expression that he did not expect to run into anybody or have someone run into him. "Hey, Doctor, what brings you out in the dew of morning?"

"Couldn't sleep. Thought I'd clear my head; too much cider yesterday." Markander strode toward Daniel, offering a hand in friendship.

"Anything I can help you with?" Daniel could see trouble in Markander's eyes.

"Maybe . . ." Markander smiled, looking over his shoulder at a ruined hay shed slouching in the field. "Hardly the place for confessions." The comment fell awkwardly.

"You don't strike me as the confessing type, but I'm game if you would like a friend's ear."

"Sorry, Father, I didn't . . ."

Daniel reached out, playfully slapping Markander's shoulder, "Let's drop the Father thing, eh? My parish is a long way off."

"Sure, please call me Markander. That doctor thing was another lifetime ago."

Daniel heard the finality in the statement. He's coming to terms, and that's encouraging. From what he's been through, it's impressive he can still cope.

Last night, after the meeting in the woods, Walter had approached Daniel with questions about their calling to Arraste by an Angel of God. It was an opportunity for Daniel to understand his role in this . . . what, Task? Mission? Prophecy? Daniel wasn't sure. He heard Markander's claim that they were from Philadelphia only two days ago. Two weeks earlier, the clone the doctor had secreted out of the Croatia labs was inhabited by a messenger from God. This messenger, Raphael, had instructed them to seek me here in Arrasate two weeks ago. Two weeks ago, I was in Rome. It's all too . . . surreal. Daniel returned his attention to Markander, but before he could speak, Markander took the initiative.

“I have a few questions for you.”

Daniel nodded politely. “Sure, but if you don’t mind, can we have a brisk walk while we talk?” They started at a slow pace, which Daniel increased until he was sure the pace was comfortable for Markander.

“I heard about the attack on you at your Church and how you were forced to defend yourself.” Markander opened, “When we were in the cave, Mark alluded that the clone you killed was not the original clone but one of the copies.”

“Yes, that’s right.” Having come to grips with the situation, Daniel could talk freely about the killing. “From the pictures of the corpses, the tuned muscular state of the clone was obvious. We didn’t really make the connection until you told us they were tank-grown at an accelerated rate—then all the pieces fit.”

“So, there can be no mistake that the clone in the cave was from a second soul transfer.”

“None. Why?”

“It’s just fantastic. I speculated that it could occur, but to find out that it actually did leaves some interesting possibilities to be examined.”

“Such as?” Knowing this was no silly lab experiment, Daniel was getting a little pissed at the excited look on the doctor. These creatures had proven to be deadly.

“Well, think about it. If the soul jumps can continue over an extended amount of time, and there is no degradation in the cellular material available for cloning and . . . well, at any rate.” He let the implications hang, “From my research, the size of the telomere cap does not truncate like in other cloning procedures.”

Daniel jogged at an easy lope, which Markander matched effortlessly.

“Forgive me, Markander; I have no clue what that means.” He increased his pace.

“No, my apologies Fath . . . Daniel,” Markander also sped up. “A telomere cap is a protective section at the end of a DNA strand that shortens during mitosis, excuse me, during DNA replication or copying. The process is necessary for precise cellular growth. Each time it is copied, these caps lose some genetic material, becoming shorter until the DNA can no longer duplicate. Then by apoptosis . . . uh, by a complicated genetically programmed process for cellular death, the cell dies in such a manner that its components are readily reabsorbed; this is how cells age. Although the clones are biologically developed in the tanks to their early twenties. Their telomere caps are only two to three years old.”

“Why is it different?”

“I think it’s something to do with the regulating enzyme, but I’m not sure—it’s something I need to check out.” He looked over at Daniel, “Why do you ask?”

“Only that the personalities in the clones were remarkably different. From what you told me, your baker clone had a benevolent group of spirits, and apparently, one possessing a gift of divination. In the Asker-clone, these spirits behaved *quite* differently, even to the point of malevolence.

“You said the spirit not only directed you here, but it also helped you.” Daniel again increased the pace. “Do I have that right, doctor?”

Markander matched the now full-on pace. “True,” He tried not to sound winded, “It could also project power over another human’s actions; actually control them.”

Daniel suddenly stopped jogging. “What do you mean by that?”

Markander shot past him, having to stop and turn around. “I mean that it told this woman, whom it called a witch, that judgment was upon her and for her to be silent; she was suddenly struck mute.”

“Really?” Daniel’s attention focused. This was potentially bad news.

Surprised with how comfortable he felt saying this to him, he began to relate the entire incident in Philly. For the next five minutes, Markander told the story. He was happy to have a task he could focus on, so he took off with a long stride. Now it was Daniel who had to catch up.

“. . . then after taking the clone into this back room, she begins some litany calling for “spirits from the Kingdom to arise” or some such thing. That’s when Ralf commanded her to be silent using this weird voice that was more in my head than ears. He then instructs me to meet you guys here, naming you, the town, and your spelunking suits in detail. After telling me I have a choice to drink from some cup, he announces that he’s taking Novak the baker with him, and just like that, the clone switched off like a light. When time resumed, the clone’s a blank, and Connor acts like he just sat down, retaining no knowledge of prior events in the room.”

“So, that’s when the Angel first appeared?”

“No, that’s when Ralf first told me he was an Angel.”

“And you would believe this to be true?”

“Wouldn’t you? I mean, consider the events. Time did stop, or at least it seemed to, and he had power over the witch and, well . . . I don’t know; I was hoping you did. But two weeks ago, it did say you’d be here and . . . well, here you are.”

Daniels’s shrug was involuntary. “I don’t know what we are dealing with, truly. I know that when the Asker-clone met me the first time, the spirits in control called themselves Legion. Something a possessed man said to the Christ when he asked the spirit’s name.”

“Yes, you mentioned that in the cave. What does it mean?”

“It means that many unclean spirits were infesting him. It occurred to me yesterday that these spirits in the Asker-clone had a firmer grip on the second transferred clone, like the one in

the cave. I was wondering if each time a jump occurs, do more unclean spirits enter, or just stronger ones, more powerful ones.”

Markander considered this. “Unclean? Meaning demonic.”

“Yes. And if true, the more jumps . . .” Daniel shrugged again.

“The more spirits get into the game, as it were—I get it.”

“Yes, not a pretty picture.”

“In the case of the Novak, the a . . . baker clone, there were quite a few spirits also present. One of them killed four men to save me. Would a demon do this?”

“I’m not the person to ask this; I have no idea. I would think you would have to consider the intent behind their actions. As to how you would go about accomplishing that? No clue. Although demonic spirits by nature are confuters of truth, so if some truth did occur, like the prophecy the spirit Raphael made . . .”

Markander understood where the logic behind this was leading to. Truth is the proof. The fruit of a potter’s action? They finished the run without further discourse, both staying inquisitive within the boundaries of their own imaginations.

The next day, Markander and Walter discussed Christianity and the Kingdom of God with Daniel. Markander was keenly interested in Satan’s nature and his history. This session was not the free-form discussion they had the day before. Daniel answered the many questions most new seekers of God are prone to ask. After a while of dialectic interrogative, Daniel grew to appreciate the keen mind of Markander.

That evening, the dinner served by Andre’s son was excellent. However, the conversation was topical as each man had thoughts elsewhere. After a light digestif of apple brandy, everyone

was tired and hit the hay unusually early. Markander and Walter retired to their cots in the attic bedroom.

“I think we were led here by the spirit to witness the reality of the clones and that other spirits are inhabiting them,” Walter poised with some sagacity.

Markander, thinking along the same lines, did not respond. The attic was dark, save the pale glow of a half-moon streaming in from the small gable-end window.

“It is apparent we needed to witness this before we could accept the message of the Gospel.” Walter offered after a brief lull. In a shadowed corner, only his bandaged arm stood out.

“Do you understand it?” Markander spoke, surprised at the tentativeness in his own voice.

Markander saw pain on Walter’s face as he sat forward. The chair creaked loudly in the quiet space. Moments passed. “I get the premise, I think I always have, but now . . .” Walter leaned his chair back into the shadows. “I guess there is some urgency. Do you believe?”

“I believe my free will has taken a heavy blow.”

“Yeah,” Walter laughed, “I hadn’t thought of it like that. Personally, I feel thankful for the nudge.”

“I realize that before this, I never considered the idea of a spiritual guiding hand.” Markander looked out the window at nothing. “That would appear to be a false assumption.” He leaned forward. “Hey, remember when we were in that wack-jobs office in Philly?”

“How could I forget? It’s what got us here.”

“Right.” He smiled, looking down at his shoes. “Well, anyway. Raphael said my mother tried to give me over to the Accuser of Man, but the Holy One intervened—my mother was a self-proclaimed Wiccan witch.”

“So you’ve said.” Walter’s chair creaked again. He looked keenly alert.

“I don’t know how you do it, Walter. You’ve only had my word about these . . . otherworldly events, and yet you persist in believing them at face value.”

“I guess you could say I have faith in it.”

“Well, faith in me at least or my depiction of the events.”

“Spoken like a true scientist.”

“I guess. Perhaps our nature fits the occupation instead of the other way around.”

“Perhaps. But I don’t think that’s why I believe you. I believe what you just told me because it fits. For some reason, you have been involved with God, whether you like it or not, and that got me thinking about my involvement. I guess it’s about time I got into the real game—that’s why I’m here.”

“Makes sense.”

“You asked Daniel who the Accuser was, and he told you it was in the Book of Job; he told you that it was Satan. I don’t know of these things or what role Satan plays in all this, but I do know what I felt in the cave with the Asker-clone. I could sense the malice in it. Its evil was real, I could feel it, and that terrified me.”

“Yeah,” Markander gasped, “me too.”

“I don’t think I should continue on this quest, Markander. I think it’s time for me to go back to my family, see to them, see to their and my spiritual needs and growth. I know now that I have a lot to learn.”

“I completely understand and am most grateful to you—you’ve been a big help.” Markander wanted to say more, but he could not. Silence again filled the room; it was more palpable, weighing.

“What will you do now, I feel compelled to ask.” Walter stood up to unroll his sleeping bag by the window.

“I don’t know. I thought I should continue on with these men to Rome, but I don’t think I will be of any help.” Markander helped his one-armed friend unroll the bedding

“Because of the whole Corvus thing the detective told you about? We did just get attacked.”

“No . . . well, maybe that’s a part of it. Look, I’m no coward, and if a fight’s coming, I need to know where I stand.” Markander walked to the other side of the room where his bedding was.

“Stand with God?”

“Yes, that’s certainly a part of it. I didn’t understand Raphael’s ‘cup full and my choice to drink from it’ statement.” He stopped what he was doing, looking over to Walter, “I do now. The cup full is the fruition of events; the drinking represents a commitment.”

“So maybe your free will hasn’t been—what did you say?”

“My free will has taken a heavy blow.” He laughed, looking down at the floor, “Okay, I guess that was a bit dramatic.”

“I don’t think so.” Walter climbed into his sleeping bag, “Look, you spent ten years in the Balkans developing human clones, a monumental task previously considered impossible.”

“Yeah, but most of the hard work was accomplished by my grandfather and his team of scientists that . . .”

“Even so,” Walter cut him short, “My point is that your *will* sustained you through all of the BS, problems, self-doubts, and failures. You still possess that will. You believed in what you were doing, which carried you through.”

“I guess that’s right . . . to a degree.” Markander knew he needed to sort this out. “I know I’m of little use right now.”

“Then come back with me, and when you are ready, you can rejoin the fray if so inclined.”

“Yeah, I gotta whole different fray to deal with in my stepfather Connor.”

“You just leave him up to me. I feel his world is about to get a lot more interesting.”

Once decided, they felt it best to leave for America as soon as possible. After Mark had given them his contact information in Chicago and an awkward farewell with some silent back pounding, the two men started for home. Daniel and Mark stayed behind at Andre’s

.

“Did you get through to Arazola?” Mark asked, entering through the kitchen door. He had been scouting the town.

“Yes, I talked with his assistant Carmela.”

“Oh yeah,” He winked, “That cute little Latino chick.”

“Yes,” Daniel smiled at his friend, “It seems Arazola joined Father Stempora on his trip back to America. They must have gone right after we left them.”

“What for?” Mark was busy pulling down the shades.

“In light of our last meeting, I guess he wanted to check out the current status of spiritual activity in America. She spoke of a Parish Counseling Network that had data on such things.”

“Did she say when he would get back?”

“She thought by the end of the week, that gives us about four days to chill. I’d like to return to my residence and grab some clothes.”

“Are you nuts? Those Corvus guys just tried to kidnap you—twice.”

“Yeah, but they failed—twice. The police are in on it now, so the residence would be safe with the added protection of the authorities.”

“My friend, you are *sooo* insulated from reality. Those guys care little for the authorities, and given a chance, they would kill them, me, and anyone else in their way. They would snatch you in an instant, and I won’t give them that chance.”

“I don’t know why they would care. The Scarecrow is no more, sent back to wherever in Hell it came from.”

“You don’t know that. Remember, Dr. Markander told us to think of the clones like spiritually empty vessels waiting to be filled. Besides, your place has obviously been under constant surveillance by those assholes.”

“I guess that’s true. Well then . . . we can stay here for a few days; Andre will keep us safe. He knows everybody around.”

“And that’s exactly why we can’t stay here. One slip-up and the shit-storm dumps here, burying everybody in its wake.”

“Do you always have to be so colorful?”

“Hey, I’m not the one with the white collar.”

“Then, your recommendation is to get out of town, head for Rome now.”

“Yes, but not V-City. We’ll find a spider hole and hang for a couple. I don’t know about you, but I could use the rest.”

“Don’t you need to check in with Interpol?”

“I can’t risk it. If I were in Corvus’s shoes, I would be monitoring communications, find out where I’m at because where ever I am . . .”

“So am I. Okay, we’ll leave tonight. What about scouts at the airport?”

“I can arrange for a private boarding. I’ll just tell ‘em I’m transporting you as my prisoner.”

Mark smiled mischievously.

“Good luck trying to cuff me . . . old man,” Daniel smirked.

After enduring an uncomfortable ride to the airport concealed in the back of Andre’s pick-up, they took off for Rome without incident. On the plane ride in, an exhausted Detective Mark slept contentedly.

Daniel was lost in thought, considering the ramifications of the latest events. I have no idea why they want to capture me; I know if God allows it, it will be to His purpose. There is no evil spirit after me; they hold no power over me. This must be the workings of men. Men who seek autonomy find glory in their deeds and are quick to jealousy—men who are hostile to God.

He thought about the last few day’s events and his change in attitude about killing clones. These men who have returned to the flesh in another body, I will know whether they are good or not by the fruit of their actions. I have been drawn into this fight, and it is a fight I willingly enter. I have battled to understand the Lord; see his ways. The path to Him always reveals itself when I do not make my own. I must remember that the Spirit of God is always with me, the great gift I did not earn nor deserve. The Holy Spirit speaks God’s truth; it is my will that I listen, and by listening, there is no fear.

And with that, he closed his eyes, prepared for whatever may come next.