

PRAISE FOR SATAN'S GAMBIT

“WOW! Satan’s Gambit, Book One, will take the reader on a journey that will make you spit nails and distrust anyone in a position of power and influence.”

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“Dr. Conti delivers a stunner of a novel. Replete with solid documented facts, it is punctuated with humor while educating and captivating the reader with whiplash strikes to the intellect, like a knife slicing through your neck and you don’t realize it until you turn your head and it rolls off.”

- Camille W.

“If this is fiction then only the names and maybe the abbey are. Excellent! Thought-provoking! Read it in one day; could not put it down. Answered two questions I’ve pondered for years. When are two and three coming out?”

- Roger V.

“Our country is heading into an epic storm of absolute destruction! Satan’s Gambit will provide you with a frightening glimpse of what is to come if we do not change course.”

- Sean W.

“Gene Conti has written a superb work on par with the likes of a William Forstchen novel, and completed with the action and military detail on par with that of the late Tom Clancy.

This book is filled with unique facts that can be verified by a simple search. The novel is filled with adventure and action. As you follow Father Ed and Dr. Lucci on their epic journey you feel as if you are right there with them. Once you come back to reality and turn on the news you realize that perhaps the author may just be a modern-day Nostradamus.”

- Craig P.

“This is spot on! It’s a compelling well-put-together novel, and I can’t wait to get Book Two. I have two friends that can’t wait to read it, and I’m buying copies for several family members and friends.”

- Ted L.

SATAN’S GAMBIT

BOOK ONE

Battle Lines Are Drawn

A Novel By

GENE CONTI, MD

SATAN’S GAMBIT

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DEDICATION

To the absolutely wonderful nurses I have worked with throughout the years in the emergency department. They truly have nerves of steel, hearts of gold and the patience of Job.

The women and men in the emergency department are the tip of the medical/nursing spear. They are the first to fight on the front lines and in the trenches. Do not be deceived. The emergency department of today is a war room of controlled (and at times not so controlled) chaos.

The entire medical system today is in free-fall. The meltdown

commenced a few years ago. These women and men are the glue who are trying to hold it together. Daily they are subjected to ridicule, harassment, and physical abuse; being cussed, punched, spit at; and have their lives threatened by the very people who they are trying to care for. This is not your “ER” of twenty years ago, or even ten years ago. There is not an emergency physician or other health care provider today who could even begin to function without their support and assistance. They are more than deserving of your honor and respect.

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PREFACE

We as a nation stand looking back on what has taken place over the past few decades. Many of us are confused as to what has happened to us, and why. This novel takes place just a few short years into the future and is an attempt to answer these very crucial

questions.

I believe things will get worse before they get better. However, in order for we as humanity to have a brighter future, and we will, we must understand what exactly has transpired. Only then can we correct our mistakes.

This new edition, hopefully, will allow you, the reader, to engage in the battle at some level to save our great nation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This novel could never have been written without positive constructive input and criticism from people whom I admire. There are several individuals who I would like to thank for their sage advice and comments: Ted Flynn, Colleen Flynn, Robert Keitzer, Dawn Bennett, R.N., Lucille Gross, R.N., Alanna LoGioco and, of course, my loving wife, Barbara. Also posthumously my parents, both of whom persisted in prayer for me to return to the straight and narrow way.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LAST DAY

The sun was shining through the classroom windows, providing warmth to the room; it was comforting and almost consoling

after yesterday's cold rain. I could hear the birds chirping and singing outside, which brightened my spirits. The classroom was a standard size room, not like the classic lecture halls with theaterstyle seating as portrayed in most movie settings.

I had begun packing my personal books, science texts, DVDs, and reams of lecture notes that I had used for the course throughout the past two semesters. The fossils and other props I had shown to the students during the class lectures would have to be carefully covered with bubble wrap before boxing.

The events of yesterday still had my mind roiling. In retrospect, I'm surprised I was able to teach two semesters before the powers that be finally had to crush me. It was just a matter of time. I should feel grateful that I was able to accomplish the little that I did.

Hopefully the kids got the message. The question is: did I impact them enough, enough for them to carry the torch?

The serenity of the classroom was suddenly broken when Maria, one of my students, rushed into the room. Exhausted and panting she is extremely agitated and stumbling over her words.

"Maria, calm down and breathe slowly; what has you so upset?"

"Someone has killed himself. Someone has killed himself."

Confused and crying - her head and eyes wandering about without focus or direction.

"Maria," I grabbed both her shoulders firmly, "look at me!

Organize your thoughts and tell me what has happened. Who has killed himself?”

“A few of us were inside the coffee shop when we heard some loud talking, almost screaming from someone outside on the patio.”

“The outside patio of the coffee shop?” I asked.

“Yes, Yes, and then we heard a loud gunshot.” As her breathing started to slow down, she looked and spoke directly to me. “There were a few students and faculty sitting outside on the patio and they began to scream . . . and . . . and everyone inside the coffee shop ran out to the patio.”

Maria started to become flustered again. I gripped her shoulders once more and calmly asked, “Maria, when you got out to the patio, what did you see?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?” I asked, repeating what she just told me.

“Well, some of the kids who were originally on the patio when the gunshot went off were still screaming when Father Flanagan ran up. He took charge rather quickly and began questioning those who were present.”

“What did they tell him?”

“That some guy was standing on that little wall on the edge of the patio ranting and raving about something; then he took a gun out and shot himself in the head.”

“And the body?”

“It must have fallen off the wall into that deep ravine below. Everyone ran to the wall, but couldn’t see anything, probably because of all the trees and bushes and stuff way down there. Father Flanagan found the gun on the patio next to the wall where it landed after the guy shot himself. Someone heard him say something about blood on the gun and that he was going to contact the police.”

CHAPTER TWO

BATTLE OF CHOSIN

It was just over a year ago that Father Ed Flanagan talked me into doing the teaching stint at his college. He felt that I really had something to offer the youth and pressed me to meet with the dean as soon as possible, so as to get me on the fall roster. Of course, Father Ed paved the way for my meeting with Dean Avery, which went as smooth as silk.

Father Ed Flanagan was quite a colorful character. He was widely well known and respected by a broad swath of people from diverse backgrounds. I came to know of Father Ed through his books and articles. It may have been through the writings on WND that I was first exposed to him. I was drawn to his style, which revealed his character. He was definitely not the PC type. He told it how it was. More of a kick butt and take names kind of personage.

The more I read his books, the more I wanted to meet him. My

wife, Emily, encouraged me to contact him. With some persistent prodding, I finally did. He was a bit cautious at first, but in short order we hit it off. We were two peas from the same pod. After that first luncheon at Clyde's, a well-appointed Washington restaurant, we both knew neither of us needed to put on airs. Early on we met frequently for coffee or beer at some local pub or bar and grill, in town, not far from Georgetown University. We would find a quiet corner and just talk for hours.

Father Ed wasn't always a Roman Catholic priest. His father was Irish and mother was Scottish. His accent and speech expressions are a mixture of both the Scottish burr and the Irish brogue with the requisite blarney thrown in occasionally for emphasis. When he was about fifteen years old he lied about his age and "snuck" into the marines. He went through basic training at Parris Island and then was immediately shipped to Korea as part of the 1st Marine Division.

Ed quickly saw action and was involved in the Battle of Chosin Reservoir in November to December of 1950. Temps dropped to minus thirty-five degrees Fahrenheit. Firing pins failed on their rifles. Blood plasma froze and was useless. The Navy Corsairs had no choice but to drop napalm on the Chinese hordes descending over and upon our marines, which ignited on our own troops as well.

Ed was near his commanding officer, Lt. Don Carlos Faith,

when shrapnel from a grenade injured them both. Ed watched as Lieutenant Faith died from a mortal wound. Ed himself would have bled to death if it weren't for the freezing temperatures, which stopped him from exsanguinating.

Ed was one of the "Chosin Few" as they were called. He survived after a splenectomy, and losing a small finger and a few toes that had developed frostbite and subsequent gangrene. They had to be amputated at a mobile army surgical hospital (M*A*S*H*) — without anesthesia.

There are no atheists in foxholes, as Corporal Flanagan soon learned, and that the utopian Marxist philosophy of communism can only be established with bullets and bayonets.

CHAPTER THREE

FALL OF SAIGON

The tall, skinny, kid that had entered the Marines was honorably discharged a few years later, and was now a tough-as-nails man with the physique to back it up. He bummed around for a while after returning to the states, taking all manner of odd jobs from working in a lumber mill to serving as a bouncer in a dance club. But something was gnawing at him.

Ed attended college at Georgetown University and majored in philosophy with a minor in political science. After graduation, he worked in Washington as an entry-level bureaucrat at one of the

alphabet agencies. Ed hated the mundane work, but loved meeting and networking with people. He made some good contacts higher up in the pecking order and saw how all the political intrigue of the Washington scene could be addicting. He developed some close friends he really trusted while trying to avoid the K Street boys, or ravenous human parasites as he called them.

Still something was yearning within him. His spirit was unsettled. One beautiful summer day he visited a Marine buddy who was undergoing some physical rehab at the National Rehabilitation Hospital off Irving Street. It was a great reunion. They laughed until they cried, exchanging old war stories, and then talked about family and work and things. Upon leaving the facility, that pesky feeling was bugging Ed again. He drove around McMillan Park and headed east on Irving Street, crossed over North Capitol Street, and began to head up Michigan Avenue when he spotted a beautiful building on his left. He double backed and pulled into the main parking area. The white marble structure glistened in the high noonday sun. It was the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. It reminded him somewhat of Hagia Sofia Mosque which he had seen while on one of his bureaucratic jaunts to Istanbul, Turkey for the agency. The Hagia Sophia was originally a massive cathedral, built in the sixth century, in the former city of Constantinople, which was converted to a mosque with the fall of Constantinople by the Muslim Ottoman Turks in 1453.

An indescribable gentle force was lulling him to go inside. Once inside the basilica, Ed looked around, was suddenly overwhelmed, and dropped to his knees. He knew what was wanted of him. It still took him another year to work through all his conflicting emotions and desires that were pulling him in a multitude of directions. Deep in his heart and soul, he knew what was his true calling.

Five years later he was ordained a priest lying prostrate before the Cardinal, a suppliant before God. He had attended the Theological College of the Catholic University of America, which was essentially on the same campus as the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception he had walked into several years earlier.

By the time Ed was ordained, the Viet Nam conflict was in full swing, and the new Father Ed wanted to be in the thick of it. He knew his Marines and others in the military, as well as the Vietnamese people, needed him—they needed God. He volunteered and was sent over as a chaplain with the Marines. Besides his pastoral care to the soldiers and civilians, he was helping establish orphanages and teaching the staff to raise chickens. The chicken business didn't always work out well as the starving urban civilians usually ate the chickens before there were enough eggs to repopulate the coops. It wasn't long before his buddies with the alphabet agencies got wind that Ed was in Nam, and he soon was roped into aiding "the cause" doing some covert work for the CIA.

Father Ed never trusted President Lyndon Johnson. He didn't

think the president was prosecuting the war as a battle to be won but as a prolonged protracted minimalist campaign to benefit the military-industrial complex that President Eisenhower had warned about in his farewell speech. Initially Father Ed was the good Boy Scout and thought he could make a difference. But the carnage around him and the senseless deaths of American lives as cannon fodder for the elite took its toll.

Father Ed was at the fall of Saigon on April 29, 1975, when the Air America helicopters evacuated CIA personnel from the rooftop of Gia Long Street in Saigon. From a clandestine location, he watched in silent outrage as American flags were ripped down, burnt, and trampled upon. It had been only a few months since he had discovered that the events in the Gulf of Tonkin, which originally brought us into the war, was a false flag op. The incident was provoked so that the president would have an excuse to start a war.

Father Ed refused to just leave the Vietnamese people to a grisly fate. North Korea resounded in his mind. He knew firsthand what awaited these poor people. Slavery and starvation were certain. A quick death would be a blessing. The USA had sold them out. The Viet Cong captured Saigon the next day.

Not exactly Jungle Jim, Father Ed had learned a lot about survival from the rural Vietnamese people over those years. For them it was routine daily life to live off the land. Instead of Father

Ed helping them, the Vietnamese who he could trust, were helping him. To harbor an American, and a priest at that, would mean torture and death for one's entire family. Word did get out that a CIA operative—Father Ed—was still at large.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ESCAPE

After losing their pursuers in the wilds of the Mekong Delta, Father Ed and several families, who had been targeted by the new Communist regime for aiding the Americans, made it to the tip of the Vietnamese peninsula. Three families each lost a member when they disturbed the domain of a brood of swamp snakes. The entire band was exhausted, dehydrated, and bloated from innumerable mosquito bites and the blood-sucking leeches that had attached to every exposed body part.

It was there that they received a blessing from heaven—a Mekong Delta Freighter. It was owned by one of the families' relatives, and he hated the Viet Cong. They had killed his youngest son for not giving over his meager fishing catch and other supplies that they demanded. Classic communist "share the wealth" mentality.

As they were loading the freighter, Father Ed noticed a case of number 10 cans in a cardboard box with American military labeling on it. Stenciled on the side was CHOC PUD. He asked the freighter captain what that was all about. He said that some of

the Navy swift-boat sailors gave it to him as a present. Told him it “fell off a truck.” The captain said it was really “good stuff.” They used it as bait to lure some of the small swamp animals into their cage traps. The animals loved it. With that Father Ed picked up the case and brought it aboard the freighter. He said, “The kids will love this stuff.”

All the families bordered the vessel with Father Ed. Should they attempt to cross the Gulf of Thailand they would risk getting caught by patrol boats or swamped by a sudden squall, as it was early in the monsoon season. The captain suggested they hug the west coast and follow it up to Bangkok. They would travel only at night and anchor and sleep during the day in small hidden alcoves. The vote was for going up the coast.

They seemed to avoid the patrol boats easily enough, but they were almost captured by a group of North Vietnamese Army Regulars while moored one day in a tiny fresh water bay by a river outlet in Cambodia. The women on board were washing clothes and some of the men and boys who weren't sleeping were fishing. The foot soldiers on the shore beckoned the vessel to come closer, probably with the intent of stealing the vessel's supplies and foodstuffs. Father Ed was sure the soldiers had absolutely no knowledge of the freighter's “real” cargo. They immediately pulled up anchor and high tailed it out of the bay under a fusillade of bullets. No one was hurt, but the freighter had a few holes that

needed to be plugged up.

Eventually they made it to Bangkok, Thailand. Father Ed went immediately to the American Embassy, pulled out all the stops and called in all his favors. He presented himself first as an American CIA operative and then as a Catholic chaplain in the Marines.

Father Ed could put on a stone face and a stare that would melt steel when he needed to. No shouting, just a strong presence and firm words to those low-life bureaucratic pukes at the embassy.

He had himself and all those families, who wished to go, on a flight back to the states in twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PRESIDENTS

He finished his tour of duty as chaplain stateside and was honorably discharged. He renewed his relationship with his alma mater, Georgetown University, and for the next several years taught as an assistant professor of theology and poly sci to the undergraduates.

One evening I was waiting for Father Ed, at the Tombs, a restaurant at the edge of the Georgetown campus, for one of our usual “blethers” as he called our chats. The Tombs, built in a Federal-style townhouse circa 1800s, was known for good food and as a great gathering place for students. While waiting I ran into one of Father Ed’s former students. We shared a brewski together as he

raved that it was the best two courses he had ever taken.

“Had I taken just theology or poly sci, the impact on me would not have been the same,” as he waved and gave a thumbs up to one of the basketball players—probably regarding the big win Georgetown had the night before against Syracuse. The Hoyas were on a winning streak.

The kid said that about 60 percent of Father Ed’s lecture notes were essentially the same for both classes. Very animated, he expressed, “I never realized how much theology and political science overlapped and dovetailed with each other.”

I knew from reading Father Ed’s books exactly what that kid was talking about: the fact that metaphysics and government are so intertwined. They are literally two halves of the same coin, which is why I had been “relieved,” at least partially, of my professorial teaching duties.

By the late 1980s, the Reagan administration had the county’s economy booming again. The media was still controlled by ABC, CBS, and NBC almost exclusively. They tagged it the “decade of greed.” Perhaps they should have called years of the prior administration of Jimmy Carter the “decade of want”? Mortgage rates under Carter had skyrocketed to the high double digits, and inflation was rampant.

Father Ed perceived President Carter to be wishy-washy and inept. The 1979 takeover of our embassy in Iran by the Muslim

extremists and the Ayatollah Khomeini was a travesty; and the disastrous failed rescue attempt in April of 1980 of our hostages by Carter humiliated the USA even more. The scenes of the twisted wreckage in the desert of a Delta Force helicopter and transport plane from Operation Eagle Claw, along with the deaths of eight servicemen, were splashed across the evening news. Carter's fate was sealed.

Father Ed said that we should have listened to our military leaders and squashed them like bugs immediately after the embassy takedown, instead of Carter's dilly-dallying for more than a year afterward.

At another blether, late one afternoon, after Father Ed had finished teaching for the day, we were having some java at the coffee shop across from the Georgetown University bookstore in the Leavey Center. The coffee shop had a checkered past, but was trying to really help the students. He educated me as to the time President Teddy Roosevelt went head to head with the Moroccan government in the early 1900s. A brigand Muslim terrorist had captured an American businessman, and Roosevelt was going to invade a sovereign country by sending in the Marines to rescue the American. Just the threat from Roosevelt made Morocco back down.

Hollywood made it into a movie called the Wind and the Lion with two attractive stars: Sean Connery and Candace Bergen. "The theatre-going public would rather pay to see Sean Connery as a

debonair sheikh and the beautiful Candace Bergen as a damsel in distress than someone playing the role of a fat, pudgy businessman, and another as a fanatical wild-eyed crazed Islamic kidnapper,” Ed declared as he downed the second cup of strong black coffee.

Then came the Clinton era. Father Ed had no use for either of the Clintons. Still maintaining his friendships with some close friends of the alphabet agencies, he and his buddies would occasionally bowl at Potomac Lanes at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling (JBAB), just across the Potomac from Reagan International, and have some pizza with beer to wash it down.

Sometimes they would bowl against the team from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) who were on the same base. “Those guys at DIA were smart as whips, but a little stiff, which may have affected their bowling skills, or lack thereof,” he commented to me between sips of his third java brew.

The group that he seemed to have the most fun with was the guys of the Secret Service. Serious dudes when they were guarding the President and First Family, but they really knew how to cut up in their off time. Their fleet of black Suburbans was also parked at JBAB. The array of antennas that splayed from the roofs of the SUVs gave it away that someone of importance was being transported on “the train,” as he said they called it, when they were all driving bumper to bumper at high rates of speed.

“Bill Clinton’s code name was ‘jumper’ because any time he

saw an attractive woman, he would want to ‘jump her’. Clinton knew the code name the Secret Service had given him and he liked it. Hillary was another matter. Hers was ‘broomstick,’ for obvious reasons,” Ed explained.

“A real life ‘cailleach’,” Father added. “She cussed like a trucker and could drink like a sailor. One never, but never addressed her. You didn’t speak unless she directly asked something of you. And the shorter the answer, the better. If you could respond with a “yes ma’am” or “no ma’am,” so much the better.”

“Cailleach?” I asked, wondering what that Gaelic term meant.

“A hag or witch - the code name ‘broomstick’ must have been someone’s stroke of genius,” as he struck a pose of the Wicked Witch of the West.

CHAPTER SIX

MR. PEN AND A PHONE

FBI Agent Gary Aldrich and Father Ed were close in those days. He was one of the first to blow the lid on the Clintons with his book Unlimited Access. On occasion, Gary invited Father Ed down to Blackwater in North Carolina. They would go with a few of the other agents during the summer months to hone their driving skills on the Blackwater track, and use the firing ranges and shoot houses to bone up on their marksmanship.

There were other facilities the FBI used locally in the Washington/

Maryland area, but Virginia Beach was only a stone's throw from Blackwater. The lure of the strip and nightclubs was the summer draw, especially for the single agents. Father said he would retire to Star of the Sea Catholic Church in Virginia Beach and stay at the rectory with the pastor, who was a good friend of his.

"Both Bush I and Bush II, and their families," Father said at another of our coffee klatches, "took the office of the President seriously and were respectful of it, and looked upon their temporary stay in the White House—the people's house—with the admiration and courtesy that the old edifice deserved. That doesn't mean they were without their faults," he added. "Bush II and Cheney have a lot to answer for regarding 9/11."

"The Obama's were another matter," Father voiced. "They truly believed they were royalty and pranced around the White House as if it was their personal domain, all while treating the staff as servants to be bossed around. Both Barack and Michelle looked down upon the American people, with contempt and derision."

"Take the 9/11 Commemorative Ceremony in 2011 when she leaned over toward Barack and asked, 'All this for a damned flag?' pales in comparison to her earlier 2008 statement of 'for the first time in my adult lifetime, I'm really proud of my country.'" Father Ed adamantly added, "Look at her facial expression as she said it. That look alone speaks volumes and should silence the Obama supporters," getting so angry and red-faced that he almost totally

spilled his coffee.

“Confirming her position as American Royalty, Michelle’s travel junkets spent the taxpayer’s money in a way that would have made Marie Antoinette feel like a penny-pincher. All while 43 million people were on food stamps and 95 million were out of work,” Father fumed as he dabbed up the coffee from the table with a napkin.

Mr. Pen and a Phone, is what Father Ed called Obama. “A community organizer is simply a modern connotation for rabble rouser; which is exactly what Obama was. An extremely amiable, smooth-talking liar, whose divide-and-conquer skills he had perfected in the Chicago gangsta political machine. He was iron fisted in his attempt to destroy Christian America and a milquetoast internationally, with all his bowing and sucking up to the Muslim leaders.”

By now, Iran, with Russian support, and Radical Islam had conquered most of the Middle East, save that one tiny island of democracy called Israel. The radicals had by now tortured, burned, beheaded, and crucified almost one in four Christians.

“The women and children who weren’t killed, were raped and then sold as slaves and prostitutes,” Father told me. “They’re getting smart now, timing their executions to sell—cash only, of course—the transplantable organs to middlemen for transport to the highest bidders and thereby increasing their liquidity to

purchase more arms and supplies. And our once-Christian country stands by silent.”

Regarding both houses of Congress, and both parties, Father Ed said he prayed for them daily. With few exceptions, he said, “they were eunuchs who had sold their souls to the highest bidder. The K street boys would fund their re-election campaigns in exchange for favorable tax breaks, and EPA and OSHA passes for their firms.”

“The politicians then promptly use their campaign war chests to pay for flashy ads offering their constituents more ‘free stuff’ than the other guy—who is a liar and a cheat—if the poor slobs would only re-elect them again for the umpteenth time. The ‘free stuff’ really came from the worker and small businessman who actually paid taxes.”

The tables had tilted many years ago in favor of crony capitalism, warfare, and welfare. There were now more people, illegals, and counterfeit corporations in bed with the government and on the dole, than there were people actually working and contributing to the experiment called America. Even the stock market was rigged. Free enterprise was dead. We had lost our moral compass. Truth and the Judeo-Christian definition of right and wrong had been ripped from the lexicon.

CHAPTER SEVEN

COMPLIANT WEASEL

At another session, Father and I were at Froggy Bottom Pub somewhat near the Georgetown campus (you really needed to drive there). He knew the owners well. The Buis were both refugees from Vietnam. Hoang's cousin was saved on Father Ed's escape years earlier on the fishing trawler up the west coast of Vietnam to Bangkok. He and Hoang chatted a bit while Hien, Hoang's wife, brought Father his usual pint of Guinness Extra Stout and bowed slightly, as she placed it on the table before him. I hated the stuff. He took a long slow draught and proceeded to enlighten me.

"Sweet Mother Mary," he started off, "thank God that hooligan and shamus of a President is behind us."

He was speaking of course of Obama.

"Since he's been out of office, everyone and his brother has been writing books on how they knew from the very beginning, before he was elected, what a fraud and numptie he really was. Why on God's green earth didn't they warn us while he was first running in '08?"

"And a 'numptie' is?" I queried, blowing the head off the draft beer I had ordered.

"An idiot," he shot back loudly, just as some guy with one too many under his belt bumped into our table giving Father Ed a dirty look.

I had beer coming out of my nose with Father's weak maladroit attempt to explain his faux pas to the plastered patron.

"Aye, that fella's blootered," he half whispered to me. "And

getting back to our numptie, it's not considered an ad hominem attack against someone, if you can back it up with evidence."

"Oh, kinda like a superstar ball player; it ain't bragging if you can really do it," I remarked as I stuffed some peanuts from a bowl on the table into my mouth.

He ignored my poor analogy and went on.

"Every President has had his share of wrongdoing. But Mr. Pen and a Phone, where does one start? The guy has a laundry list a mile long, and that's no exaggeration—the Fast and Furious scandal, the IRS scandal, the Benghazi scandal, the Bowe Bergdahl scandal with the Taliban Five scandal piggybacking it, the Associated Press scandal, the Solyndra scandal, the VA scandal, the Clinton e-mail scandal, and the Fort Hood scandal. Those are just some I can think of off the top of my head."

"Yeah, and no one prosecuted. Hey Father did you see 13 Hours? "

"I know Kris Paronto. We call him Tanto. If it weren't for his team of six private contractors who disobeyed orders, all those civilian CIA pencil pushers would have died. And they may have even been able to save our ambassador. All one need do is watch the clock on the screen which silently indicts both Hillary and Obama with each passing second."

"I remember, in less than thirty minutes the Pentagon knew, which meant both Hillary and Obama knew," I exclaimed, slamming

my beer mug onto the table. “What if one of those CIA personnel was your son, your wife, your brother?”

Father’s eyes were getting red and started to tear. “We lost three good men in Tyrone, Glen and Sean. Obama sent no help whatsoever—even after thirteen hours! He and Hillary expected the whole lot of them to die.” He wiped his eyes. “Marines don’t cry, the eyeballs however sometimes sweat a little,” he explained as he took another sip of his Guinness. “And the leftist media never pressed the issue with the public.”

“Forty or fifty years ago, the press would have wanted them both impeached,” I remarked. “And what’s with the new President?”

“The current POTUS has been selected, as usual, by the international elites. The American people think they have a choice; they don’t.”

“Any and all honest candidates are eliminated early on by lies, guile and subterfuge, using a compliant media. Recall how they destroyed Dr. Ben Carson, and others, several years ago in the 2016 elections. The candidate of both parties is vetted in advance by the powers that be—the Council on Foreign Relations, CFR for short, the Bilderbergers, the Trilateral Commission, etcetera. The Bilderbergers pretty much make the final two selections.”

“The election process itself is just a formality. The international elites usually watch and root with feigned admiration for the party who could rig the voter fraud in their candidate’s favor, whether by

sophisticated manipulation of the computerized electronic voting machines or just old fashioned stuffing of the ballot boxes with dead people's votes and/or voting multiple times at different precincts."

"It didn't make a wit worth of difference which of the two candidates the people elected. All U.S. Presidents are either a member of the CFR prior to election or must meet with them after being elected. If the newly elected President was to dispute their authority, they are read the riot act in no uncertain terms." He waved the waitress over and pointed to my empty mug for a refill. Father reminded me of the talk that Hillary gave at a CFR meeting, which can still be seen on YouTube where Hillary Clinton admits the CFR gives the orders. She thanked the CFR for helping guide U.S. policy.

"In the run up to the '08 elections, Obama and Hillary slipped away from the press on June 5th only to be hosted at a Bilderberger meeting. Hillary dropped out of the race two days later; but as you know, in 2016, they gave Hillary her shot. Her moment had arrived to be coronated now; the globalists would want see to that. However, with her loss, rest assured they would not, and have not made the same mistake again - since they underestimated the populist turnout for Trump back in 2016. Hmm."

"That's right, Father. I recall one of Bill O'Reilly's interviews with Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the House, when Gingrich stated, 'Bill you have to remember, Trump has not been initiated, he

is not a member of the Secret Society.”

Father tilted his head to the side, raised an eyebrow while nodding his head with a knowing smirk on his face; then he took another swig of his Guinness. “And Joe, do you remember on the Rachel Maddow Show when Chuck Schumer threatened Trump with the CIA saying, ‘...they have six ways from Sunday at getting back at you’; a veiled reference to what happened to JFK.”

“That’s right Father, I almost forgot.”

“It gets better Joe. An old buddy of mine, Kevin Shipp, who was a former counterintelligence officer with the CIA, has turned whistleblower. I attended one of his connect the dots lectures. The CIA was formed post World War II.”

“Yeah, I know that.”

“But do you know who created it?”

I just gave Father a doltish stare, while shaking my head no.

“The CIA was created by none other than the CFR - Council on Foreign Relations.”

My mouth dropped open as Father continued.

“And the CFR was formed in 1921 by the major banking families - the Morgans, the Rothchilds, etc.”

I just sat there still shaking my head.

“My friend Kevin explains in his talks that at least 21 Directors of the CIA were also members of the CFR. That’s one to check out on YouTube, if you don’t believe me.”

I was still in a daze, speechless and dumbfounded, thinking of these globalists.

CHAPTER EIGHT

KEY TO THE FUTURE

Father Ed has great foresight and vision. It was during the Nixon administration that Father saw the writing on the wall for the United States and the world, when Nixon closed the gold window and our government began to print un-backed paper. Father Ed saw Reagan as an anomaly. There were too many liberals and progressives gaining control in seats of power, whether it be in government, education, the media complex, or even the churches. He knew the only way he could make a difference was at a foundational level.

Day by day the nation was drifting further away from its roots, which our Founding Fathers had planted almost 250 years ago. Our public schools and public university system had been co-opted by the liberals many decades ago. Even many of the Christian and Catholic colleges and universities had become acolytes of the progressives, socialists, secularist, humanists—which are all just communism lite. He explained all this to me one hot autumn afternoon as we walked under a canopy of red maples that lined both sides of our path on his new campus of Immaculate Conception College (ICC). I had just started to teach there several weeks earlier, with

Father's influence and encouragement. The tree colors had just peaked, and the autumn reds were incredibly vibrant that year. The mountains in the distance were displaying a radiant rainbow of their fall foliage.

"He alone, who owns the youth, gains the future," Father Ed stated, quoting Hitler who understood very well that the youth are the key to the future. "The Hitler jugend, or youth, that Hitler had carefully fostered in the pre-war years became his most fanatical followers once World War II commenced," Father Ed continued as he pulled his handkerchief from his back pocket to wipe a bead of sweat that had started to drip from his forehead. "If one can train youth for evil, why not for good. As the Good Book says, 'Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.' Seems ol' Hitler understood the Bible better than most Christians," he added as we entered the student center, which had vending machines, on the ICC campus. I sprung for some bottled water; and as I was putting my dollars in the machine, I turned and asked "Proverbs?"

"22:6, Solomon was no slouch," he immediately responded as he reached for the bottle I was handing him.

"I recall he was also quite the stud muffin, with what . . . seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines?"

Father didn't reply.

CHAPTER NINE

THE MONKS

I continued my packing. The books were finished. Next I had to pack the DVDs, and then the tedious job of wrapping all the delicate fossils, which I was not looking forward to. As I worked I reflected back to how Father Ed had come to start Immaculate Conception College.

He had great reverence for the Blessed Mother. It was her Basilica he was drawn to those many years ago before he became a priest. He often prayed to her to intercede for him when he was in some tough spot.

“Who do we run to first when we are in a jam?” he once asked me. As he answered his own question: “Your mom, she will always listen to you.” He recounted the times he would approach his own birth mother when he really needed something or had a peccadillo to answer for. “Better me mamm than me tad, who meted out the more rigorous discipline if needed. We were required to go out in the field and cut our own switch from a shrub or tree.”

I remembered it had been Father Ed’s goal to save the country by helping the youth. He had been praying to the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM) for what seemed like an eternity with no answer in sight. He had decided to get in his car and just drive. “Hey, it worked well another time and I became a priest,” he confessed at another

of our mastermind meetings over beer. He swore that a Guinness actually helped the brain to think better. Now I know that alcohol is a vasodilator, but think better?

He headed out on Interstate 66 driving west out of D.C. As he approached Front Royal, he decided to turn off and head into the Blue Ridge Mountains since it was such a beautiful calm day with just a hint of a mild breeze. Not caring what country roads he was taking, he had the windows down and the radio off and was just soaking in God's creation.

It was getting late and the sun was just above the crest of the ridges when he came upon what appeared to be a complex of old stone buildings, probably from the late 1800s. He drove through the entrance, which had an old, faded wooden sign identifying an abbey. He recalled he initially didn't even take close note of the name, as the paint was almost completely flaked off anyway.

The entrance took him to the main building, which was sorely in need of repair, as were the other buildings. Before he reached the top step an elderly thin monk, Brother Stanislaus, opened the main front doors, which were made of solid oak and massive by any standard.

Contrary to being quiet and sullen, Brother Stanislaus had a big smile on his face and greeted Father Ed with a big bear hug, which set him mentally off balance for a moment. Then Brother Stanislaus grabbed Father Ed's arm and virtually dragged him inside before

Father knew what was happening.

The friendly old monk pulled a long, heavy, knotted rope that ran up into the tower, apparently attached to a large bell which was out of sight. The clanging that echoed off the stone walls was deafening and almost disorientating. Father Ed had to cover his ears. Several monks came running from different directions, appearing out of nowhere. They ran directly to the old man vigorously pealing the bell like there was a fire to be extinguished. Everyone was shouting at him and one another, wanting to know what the emergency was all about, totally ignoring Father Ed.

Once the calamity had settled down, Father Ed was invited to dinner. The monks wanted information as to what was happening in the outside world almost more than they wanted to know about their guest. These were Carmelite Monks and had a special devotion to the BVM. Their heads were shaved, save a small ring of hair that appeared like a halo on their heads called, a tonsure. They wore the classic tunic (habit) of brown wool with an attached cowl or capuche and leather cincture in lieu of a belt. On their chest was a large wooden cross with a metal corpus of the crucified body of Christ. Their feet were shod with sandals.

The food was excellent, grown by hand in their own gardens.

No pesticides, no herbicides, no insecticides and no GMOs, either.

I remember Father Ed chuckling that he didn't think they even knew what Roundup was. The various vegetable and fruit flavors

virtually exploded on your taste buds, and he wanted to savor every morsel. There wasn't a course that he didn't relish, and he ate each one heartily.

These monks knew how to eat. But they also knew how to work.

There wasn't a fat one in the lot. No junk food was consumed here.

I remember Father Ed mentioned in passing that the monks brewed an excellent dark lager.

From sunup to sundown they were either praying or working the land or doing both. This sacrifice was a true labor of love, and it showed on their faces; they were by and large a happy lot. Relating this story to me, over his usual pint of Guinness and a very large corned beef sandwich, we both agreed that at the end of a work day, these monks had absolutely no problem sleeping—no need for a sleeping pill.

Contrary to many of my patients who do not work other than lift a bottle of booze to their lips or to snort some cocaine up their nose, and need a pharmacy of pills to function daily and still can't sleep at night. These are the same bad habits that put them on government disability and welfare programs in the first place. Only now they are using tax dollars, instead of their own money, to continue to feed their same destructive lifestyles. What a deal!

The head prior did most of the talking with Father Ed. It seemed that the main monastery for the order was located in the Rocky Mountains of Wyoming. This abbey was a branch of

that Carmelite Order and was struggling financially. Ever since the government truly became secular, all religions were in effect outlawed.

The first amendment became “freedom of worship,” rather than “freedom of religion.” The difference being that one could practice their religion all they wanted, sing all they wanted, praise and worship all they wanted—but only within the confines of government approved buildings, facilities, or complexes, but not beyond them. Use of private homes as churches or for Bible study was expressly forbidden by law. To add insult to injury, all churches and religious institutions had lost their tax-exempt status.

Evangelizing, therefore, was taboo. Anyone caught proselytizing outside the bounds of designated worship centers was subject to immediate and indefinite detainment. The government was careful not to use the term “arrest.” No trial, no legal representation, no judge, and no jury. The word on the street was you were processed directly to a FEMA camp; you do not pass GO, you do not collect \$200. You were not heard from again. People had forgotten about the updated National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which was signed into law by President Obama in 2016, authorizing all of this.

As a result, contributions to many charitable causes went begging, the abbey being one of them. Yes, they were able to sustain themselves by growing their own food and fostering husbandry of

livestock; however, land taxes for large properties and estates had increased dramatically. The government was constantly looking for ways to fill their empty coffers since the dollar and all fiat paper currencies worldwide had become essentially worthless.

The lapdog press that supported the government's decisions at every turn always bought into the "soak the rich" mentality.

However, not all large estates belong to wealthy people. The abbey and many small farmers were hit hard. The small farmer had now reverted back to becoming a sixteenth century serf for the large agricorporations that had gobbled them up.

CHAPTER TEN

A DREAM AND A PLAN

Father Ed listened very attentively to the prior as he laid out his woes. When he was finished, Father Ed presented a possible solution. "Let's create a college with the abbey being the central focal point of the enterprise." The name came to him instantly. "We can call it Immaculate Conception College."

"Student tuition will cover the operating funds. We'll find investors whose initial seed money will fund the restoration of the buildings and upgrades to the property. The operation would be small but sustainable enough to get it off the ground.

The college could expand as net profits permitted. We could add additional buildings as we grow and prosper. St. John's University

in New York, on Long Island, is a great example of how this will work.”

The prior and other monks sitting around that rustic wooden dinner table were ecstatic and could barely contain themselves. They all admitted they had been praying to the Blessed Mother, their patroness, for a miracle. This was to be their last year, and they were mentally preparing themselves to close shop and sell off the abbey and its property. The name of the college, the name that Father Ed had proposed was perfect because it honored her as well.

The prior, being a bit more level headed than the younger monks, asked Father Ed with whom he expected to develop such fiduciary relationships to underwrite this project to get it started. Father Ed, his mind racing with solutions, was already two steps ahead of the prior. He explained to all the monks that he had made many contacts throughout the years. He knew many men of integrity who despised what the government had devolved into and who would jump at the chance of establishing a biblical college.

They were not stupid people who would just fork over money willynilly and watch it go down the drain. The time was ripe for this kind of investment. With every crisis comes opportunity—the yin and yang concept. Pagans had also been created by God and came up with some very profound concepts and ideas at times. Confucius had always maintained his popularity for sound reasons.

The rest is history, to use the hackneyed expression for what

then transpired quickly. Father Ed was focused like a laser beam from then on. He plowed through all his contacts and sold his vision to the majority of them. He was pleasantly surprised by how many wanted a piece of the action. Other associates and investors of his were able to cut through the maze and morass of red tape to get the permits, licenses, charters, and a fog of other concessions that were necessary for the project to succeed. Father Ed didn't want to know the details of how they accomplished it; he just wanted to expedite the creation of the college. Within four years it was a reality way beyond his initial expectations. The entire abbey and property transformed into a beautiful campus, with a couple of new additional buildings designed to blend with the original European monastic ones. The grounds, walkways, and gardens all manicured with flora indigenous to the Blue Ridge. It felt natural and not overdone.

The students felt at home in this lush setting; sitting on the grass, others under shade trees, and some on benches that occasionally lined the paths and walkways.

The jewel at the center of it all was the abbey. Totally restored and refurbished inside and out, it was a beautiful place for the monks to continue to live and pray. A section of the land was set aside for them and the agricultural students to continue to labor.

The local Bishop dedicated the chapel, which needed to be

almost totally rebuilt, to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception on commencement day. Father Ed could have done without the pomp and circumstance put on by the numerous religious actors who were present that day. He would have preferred something more staid, solemn, and reverent. His dream was fulfilled, but not totally complete. The icing was not yet on the cake. He was on the board of directors, the executive committee, the course selection and approval committee, taught some courses, and worked alongside the monks and students in the fields to stay in shape. By then he was pushing ninety. Little did I know, but I was to be that icing on the cake.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE JOB OFFER

The sneaky dog invited me out to the campus the spring before I was to begin the fall semester. Father Ed had been giving me progress reports regarding the remodeling and alterations to the abbey, chapel, and grounds. He deliberately timed our meeting on campus when everything was in full bloom: the forsythias, mountain laurel, daffodils, rhododendrons, azaleas, and the Bartlett pear trees with their delicate white blossoms floating down on us like a gentle rain. It was a veritable Garden of Eden. The infinite spectrum of colors and fragrances just overwhelmed ones senses. The tour couldn't have been planned better. He must have placed

an advance order for the picture perfect weather, which just added to the overall aura and ambiance of the entire setting. Talk about setting one up for the kill.

As we were walking along one of the pathways through the campus complex, he asked me straight out, “Joe, have you ever thought about teaching college?”

Now Father Ed knew I had taught high school science decades ago, prior to my going to medical school. I didn’t answer him directly, other than to request he elaborate. I believe I simply said, “Why do you ask?”

By now we had entered the campus’ main quadrangle, a large wide-open area of beautiful rosé colored paving stones. The quadrangle was like the hub of a wheel, with walkways radiating out from its center. One could turn in almost any direction and get a snapshot of the entire campus. At the very center of the quadrangle was a massive forty-foot gleaming white flagpole, the base of which was surrounded by a charming colorful bed of flowers encased by a circular stone wall of paving stones about two feet high. The bed compassed out about twelve feet or so from the pole’s cement platform. The monks asked to be engaged in caring for the flower bed, as well as many of the landscaping projects.

The top of the pole was capped off with a golden globe and an eagle mounted on it. This golden eagle was positioned with its wings swept back in a dive attack mode. Old Glory was fluttering

intermittently when a gust of wind would hit it.

“I have never seen an eagle on a flagpole like it Father,” I commented. “Who designed it, who made it?”

“Great little story behind it,” responded Father Ed, and he went on to unfold the tale. “One of our investors is former Air Force, as well as a design engineer. He is the one who came up with the idea. We found an artisan in fine metal work right here in Front Royal who actually fabricated it,” he beamed proudly as he placed one foot on the ledge of the wall and lit up a Camacho Ecuador cigar, one of his few immoderate vices that he allowed himself.

He persevered with his little saga.

“Which direction to place the eagle? Facing down the path toward the abbey, down the walkway looking upon the chapel, toward the social sciences building, or gazing forth at the mountains? After some minor bickering, the squabble was settled. It would face down the path to the abbey.”

“A myth was concocted, no one knows by whom, which spread like wildfire the first year. It was said that if ever one of the brothers performed a nefarious deed, the eagle would come alive, swoop down upon the errant monk, and carry him away to God knows where.” Father Ed then gave a hearty laugh as he produced a perfect smoke ring.

To one side, on the edge of the quadrangle, a magnificent new pearly white marble statue of the Blessed Virgin had been placed

on a pedestal surrounded by clusters of knockout rose bushes in a semi-circle behind her. The roses directly behind the statue seemed much taller and were attached to a trellis of sorts, which appeared to almost frame the statue. The statue, standing on a half hemisphere of the earth, including its stanchion, must have been about eight to nine feet high. She was standing in a simple prayerful pose, head slightly bent, and her hands together close to her chest and pointed toward heaven. We stopped momentarily to admire it.

I turned to Father and conjectured as I looked him straight in the eye, "I'll bet dollars to donuts that you were the prime instrument of having this statue commissioned to be carved and placed in this exact location."

All he could say is, "you win," as he smiled, chuckled, and gave me a wink. "Let's grab a cup of coffee and talk about your future," he said tilting his head in the direction we were to go.

In short order we arrived at the coffee shop, appropriately called Holy Grounds. Decorated as a medieval castle eating hall, the coffee shop was complete with heavy wooden straight-backed chairs and hefty tables. The windows were faux stained glass with heavy draperies. Coffee was appropriately served in ale-style tankards. The waiters and waitresses (working students) were clothed in period attire. The coffee was excellent, but not cheap.

Our conversation went on for what seemed like hours. I was developing quite a caffeine buzz after a couple of tankards of the

rich brew. Father Ed learned to drink his cup of joe strong and black. When he was in Korea they didn't have the luxuries of cream and sugar most times. Little did I realize that this café would be where Father and I would spend many an afternoon after my class was over for the day.

His pitch for me to teach at ICC was straightforward, as I expected no less of him. We had many times before discussed the state of the nation and the world. We both came to the realization that we needed a grassroots effort, one that started with the youth. Our nation was pumping out little Marxists year after year from the socialist universities. Was our country magically expected to get back to its Judeo-Christian roots; and somehow, miraculously these young men and women would vote for conservative constitutionalists? We both knew what the definition of insanity is: doing the same thing over and over while expecting different results. He planned to set up an appointment for me to meet with Dean Avery, so he could get me on the fall docket as soon as possible.

Before we parted ways, I asked him, "What should I call the course that I'm going to teach?"

"Faith and begorrah me lad, you'll come up with something catchy that will appeal to the kids, Joe." We were both standing by this time. He took his arm and put it around my shoulder and squeezed. No one would doubt Father Ed was still in good shape. Then he downed the last of his tankard and thumped the empty

vessel on the heavy wood table.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE MATRIX EXPOSED

I called Emily when I reached my car and gave her a heads up on when I would get home. Upon arrival, the sun had already set.

There was just a remnant of afterglow in the mountains behind our home. I pulled “the tank,” what I called my car, into the garage. The dang thing had more mileage on it than Methuselah, and you couldn’t kill the beast.

A new car was not in our plans. I was happy the darn thing still worked properly. With the dollar’s demise as the world’s reserve currency, interest rates had skyrocketed, as well as the prices of vehicles and everything else under the sun. Apart from that, for almost two decades there had been a fight for the dashboard. The major electronic players—Sony, Google, Apple, Microsoft—wanted to control the flow of information on vehicle dashboards.

The government also saw this as a source of invading and amassing additional private info for their National Security Agency (NSA) computers. Things had come a long way since 2014 when it was revealed that Samsung’s new “smart TV” could watch you as you were watching it. All TVs had advanced microphones similar to the noise and wind reduction ones that motorcycles riders use to communicate. Some viewers erroneously thought that by raising the

volume, the NSA would not be able to hear if they wished to discuss something privately. The government selectively granted consent, like a king bestowing knighthood, on only those corporations who would comply with government “requests.”

The newer dashboard monitor displays fed the government real time location of your vehicle whether you had the map feature turned on or not. And all the late model vehicles had a LoJack chip installed that the government could use to govern and slow your car to a stop if it wanted to. And most new car owners didn’t realize that the onboard computers can also be remotely hacked to totally take control of the vehicle away from the driver.

Bluetooth devices incorporate the perfect mike and receiver that the various agencies tune into to listen to people’s conversations live. All speech in your vehicle, as well as your travel destinations, are being fed and logged into the massive NSA computers in Maryland, Utah, or other undisclosed facilities, to be used against drivers and their passengers.

The public begged for this monitoring because they still could use their cell phones to call their carrier to unlock the car door if they had left the keys inside. They also could notify authorities if their car was stolen so they could activate the LoJack system and retrieve the vehicle.

During our dinner, which was ravioli with meatballs —what more could one of Italian extraction want—Emily and I spoke at

length about Father Ed's proposal. She was all for it.

"You've put in over thirty years into the emergency room," her eyes dead-focused on me, "and it's taken its toll on you. This sounds like a great opportunity, take it!" she said.

Chewing on a meatball, it took me a couple seconds to respond.

"Yeah, I like the idea, but—"

"But what?" she interjected.

"Okay, but I haven't taught in years," I replied still masticating my meatball. "Besides, I don't know what title to give the dumb course." I was getting frustrated with her, and a bit with Father Ed.

"I'll help you develop the name. Okay?" Her voice was sweet, and she looked at me lovingly, meaning what she said.

I avoided the topic for a while and asked her how her day went.

She said she was worried about her raised-bed vegetable garden that she had just recently finished putting in.

"All I saw today were chemtrails crisscrossing the sky, pumping out their trailing clouds of heavy metals. How many more dead plants will I have this year? And the deer and raccoons seem to eat the good ones just as they ripen before I can pick them," she stated in a very frustrated voice.

"Crisscrossed?" I repeated.

"Yes, crisscrossed . . ." As she pronounced the second syllable slowly, she looked at me. I was still looking at her as we both smiled

at each other, clinked our wine glasses and said at the same time: The Matrix. We promptly proceeded to give each other a quick kiss as we laughed.

Over the next half hour we worked out the particulars, calling the course The Matrix Exposed 101 and 102, for the fall and spring semesters. The Matrix Exposed 101 would be a required pre-requisite before a student could take 102 in the spring. It would be a three credit course per semester. We'd meet three times a week—Monday, Wednesday, and Friday—for an hour each of those days. In the course, I would detail the how and why the Matrix we currently live in was formed. I would explain how science, religion, and politics had created it; and that all three would be needed to unveil and dismantle it.

By then we had almost polished off the bottle of Merlot and were feeling very happy with ourselves. I grabbed for the bottle and looked at the label. “Huh, Yellow Tail from Australia no less. Those Aussies can make a pretty good wine,” as I took my last sip. “Kroger,” my wife added. “And we get the gas points.”

I called Father Ed as soon as we finished dessert, which was a scrumptious chocolate pecan pie with whipped cream on it.

“Well, what do you think?” I asked him after giving him the skinny on what Emily and I had concocted.

“Praise be Mary and the Saints, you've really nailed it, Joe. I believe the topic will be something the kids will gravitate to. The

Matrix film trilogy has always resonated with them. As a matter of fact, the student union showed it last year as part of their classic film festival.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE PLEDGE

I had already printed my name—Dr. Joseph Lucci—on the whiteboard with a blue dry erase marker. As I waited for the students to arrive, I stood behind the long almost black soapstone-covered lab table which was to the right of my standard plain wooden desk. My back was to the whiteboard and the students’ desks were directly in front of me. There was a bank of windows to my right, which looked out on part of the alluring grounds. One bushy poplar tree’s branches almost touched the closest windows; and as I would learn as the semester progressed, would scrape against the windows during heavy winds and storms. We were on the second floor and were also graced with a commanding view of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance.

The wall on the left side of the classroom had a whiteboard with some bulletin boards on it, and a front and rear door that led to the hallway.

Each student had a desk, which had a retractable arm that folded up and down for appropriate writing, note taking, book or tablet placement, etcetera. These desks were actually fairly comfortable. The investors understood that the mind can only absorb what the backside can endure, and were willing to put their money into good quality classroom furniture for the students.

Brother Francis had come into my classroom a day earlier to see if he could help me in any way, and I readily accepted his assistance. He was fairly young, average height and robust from working in the fields. His skin was almost the consistency of tanned leather.

He suggested we arrange the desks in five rows of six chairs in each row. Each desk had to weigh at least seventy pounds, and he proceeded to move them around with ease. If it took him two minutes, that was a lot.

“There, finished,” he exclaimed proudly observing his endeavor as an artist inspects his finished masterpiece. “There is ample room in front of your lab table for you to perambulate up and down in front of the first tier of desks, pontificating to these raw minds that you will mold and develop into critical thinking adults,” he announced with a wide smile on his face.

Brother Francis’ endeavor reminded me of an apologue I heard once about three common brick layers. A passerby asked the first one what he was doing, and he said, “laying bricks.” He proceeded to ask the second what he was doing. “I’m building a wall,” he said.

When he arrived at the third worker, he asked the same of him. The third man stated proudly, "I am a master mason, and I am constructing a cathedral." All three were doing the same work, and all three had an entirely different outlook on life, which was reflected in their attitude and work ethic. I saw the same in Brother Francis. He continued, "Also the margin between rows is appropriate that a student doesn't feel his personal space is being invaded from the student in the row next to them." He then added with a sheepish grin, "It will also make it difficult for them to cheat," he exclaimed with a smirk.

"Could I get an American Flag for the class room?" I politely asked. "One that has a bracket that can be attached to the wall close to the end of the whiteboard near the windows. The flag should be relatively small, probably about two feet by three feet and will hang at an angle from the bracket."

He knew exactly the kind of set up I needed, and it was magically in place when I walked into the classroom that following first day.

Before Brother Francis left he made a very astute observation.

"Would you mind if I grew some plants all along the window ledges? It sure would brighten up the room, as it looks kind of sterile right now."

He was absolutely right. I cheerfully agreed and thanked him.

"You are welcome to come into the class at any time."

It was getting close to 9 AM, and the students were starting to file in. I was getting some butterflies in my stomach. It had been decades since I had taught. Fifteen students had registered for the class—twelve men and three women. I guess that's not bad for starters as the kids had no idea of who I was or exactly what the course was going to be about. In the curriculum guide it was listed under philosophy, but I was teaching the course in St. Albert's Hall, the science building.

I recalled from my old high school teaching days that students tend to select a seat in a room where they feel comfortable, and it revealed a bit about their personality as well. This should prove interesting.

By my watch it was 9 AM sharp, and as I was closing the door, the last student rushed in. I learned shortly afterwards that his name was Tom. He was from Missouri, the doubting Show Me state and was in pre-law, minoring in history. In time, I ascertained that he was an agnostic with atheistic leanings. Tom gravitated to the fourth row from the front door and sat in the third seat back.

“Good morning, my name is Dr. Joseph Lucci,” I greeted the class as I pointed to my name that I had printed on the whiteboard. “You now know my name, and I would like to learn all of yours. But first let us honor our country and say the Pledge of Allegiance.”

You would think that I had asked them to swallow hot coals or

stand on nails.

“Whaaa?” one moaned.

“I haven’t done that since first grade,” said one of the females.

“Man, that’s lame,” came a voice from the back of the room.

The discontent was glaringly obvious.

“Well, I’ll start it off and anyone is welcome to join in or not,”
was my firm retort.

“I refuse and I’m offended,” defiantly stated Simon, a small,
thin black American, with long, black wiry hair tied in the back,
who sat in the first row, second seat. Simon was from Chicago’s
Southside and was taking general studies, as he had not picked a
major yet.

He had a Christian background, but through the influence of
his brother, who had done time in prison, he was converting to
Islam. As a gesture of diversity and tolerance, the prison system was
now permitting radical Imams to be chaplains and counselors.

He had just about jumped up from his seat, and was
standing stiff with his hands straight down at his sides, in a military
style.

“It’s Simon, I believe, and no one is forcing you to participate,”
I said addressing him firmly.

“Don’t call me Simon; call me Ali Saful Islam.”

“Is it okay if I just call you Ali?”

“That would be permissible,” he replied, again answering in a

clipped military tone while still standing rigid.

“Does your name have a meaning?” I gently solicited.

“Absolutely,” he replied soundly and proudly. “It means Greatest Sword of Islam,” and he promptly sat down.

Great, I have a micro-terrorist in training, I thought to myself, and without further hesitation I turned to face the flag, placed my right hand over my heart, and started to recite the Pledge.

For a few seconds mine was the only voice in the room. Then a weak second voice, which was female, accompanied me; it belonged to Maria.

Maria sat in the third row, second seat, almost directly in front of the lab table. She had nearly jet-black hair, soft brown eyes, and olive-colored skin with an angelic face. She reminded me of Natalie Wood who played Maria in West Side Story. I discovered she was a Roman Catholic of Hispanic origin. Her family had well-established roots in Texas; one of her distant relatives actually fought alongside Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie at the Alamo. She was in the BSN nursing program.

Finally, some other voices mumbled along as they stood up. I think most of them couldn't even remember the words; it probably had been years since last they uttered it. Besides, Maria had more than likely shamed most of them into saying it.

That first Pledge of Allegiance was tortuous for me and for them

as well, I'm sure. However, it got easier with each recitation before each class started. I was not backing down. This was their first lesson; they had just poked their head out of the rabbit hole that lead to the Matrix they lived in, little did they realize.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BLUE PILL OR RED PILL

“Why have you chosen to sign up for this class,” I asked to no one student in particular.

“Just curious,” responded Thad. He sat in the second row, fourth seat. Over time I found that Thad was fairly nationalist, a pro-USA libertarian type. He was from a Christian family in Colorado; but when his minister failed to sufficiently answer his questions about why a loving God would permit the death of innocent people, especially children, he converted to Buddhism. Thad was majoring in journalism, with a minor in astronomy of all things. “Figured I might be able to write a series of articles for the Veritas Beacon, regarding what I learn in this class. Anything that smacks of the Matrix is always in vogue with the students.”

Huh, I reflected, possibly a series of positive articles in our school paper.

“I wanted an easy course to cruise through, and picking up three credits was a bonus,” Philip immediately chimed in with an arrogant tone. He was in the back row and was leaning in his

chair so it was resting against the rear wall. He was of Chinese ancestry from San Francisco. Philip was somewhat of a prodigy being a triple major in physics, math, and biochemistry. He was also fluent in both Cantonese and Mandarin dialects. His father was from Beijing where they speak Mandarin, which is the official state language of China. His mother was from Guangzhou where Cantonese is spoken. He was a hard core, but honest, evolutionary atheist.

Maggie sat in the first seat in the second row, right in front of my desk. I got her number in short order. She was strikingly beautiful, and she knew it. Maggie had a full mane of thick, long, wavy blonde hair that had dyed dark streaks of color running through it. Her eyes were a dark green framed with heavy eyeliner and mascara. An old college buddy of mine would have described her as “zaftig.” She certainly would have made it into the Mae West/Dolly Parton club hands down. And she always wore revealing form-fitting apparel. As soon as I saw her, that first day in class, I immediately thought back to the old Hall and Oats song from the early '80s, “She’s a maneater.” Every move was planned and executed like a big cat on the prowl. She kept the guys salivating.

Maggie was from Southern California. Where else? Totally amoral and an agnostic, she wasn’t sure if there was a God, and could care less anyway; but she was anything but stupid. Majoring in women’s studies, she was totally honest though with her response.

“I signed up for the course because I’ve always thought that Keanu Reeves was the bomb. He could put his slippers under my bed anytime.”

With that it was time to move on.

“Like Morpheus in the Matrix, I’m going to give you a choice of the red pill or the blue pill. You take the blue pill, and you can leave the class no questions asked and return to your world of the Matrix, where your destiny is already planned for you. You will continue on with your mundane existence never knowing that the Matrix, not you, really controls everything you think and do.”

I stopped momentarily to take a breath as I studied the faces of the students. Some had banal expressions, some curious, some bored, and some really intrigued.

“If you decide to stay in this class and take the red pill, the lies of the Matrix will be torn down brick by brick. The truth will slowly be revealed to you. Some of you may not like viewing the naked truth, others of you will embrace it—I cannot foretell the future for any of you. This journey will at times be very uncomfortable—veracity can be very painful. It will cut you open and bare the real you down to your core. Which pill will it be?”