

The Liverwood

Introduction

This story is set in a time when extraterrestrial colonies are being established. It is the story of a race between the destruction of earthbound mankind and the development of self-replicating extraterrestrial colonies.

Less than one month after the initial publication of this work, I found it chilling to read of Stephen Hawking publicly expressing these very concerns.

Herein I set forth an image for the future of humanity that could become a hope for some, but I see two things needed for any of this to happen.

First, we need to develop community-scale environments that are capable of high levels of local sustainability. By this I mean capable of continuously recycling most of their atmosphere and water. This would also include producing their own food and energy.

Besides reducing environmental pollution, these communities would provide safe havens in the event of extreme environmental and economic disasters. Communities such as these were developed in my novel “Arland.”

We also need to develop a culture compatible with this lifestyle. The elimination of internal combustion transportation, the development of small villages, and a high level of inter-dependencies among the residents would be a radical departure from our current way of life.

A related requirement would be the acceptance of such communities as near-sovereign reservations. The countless regulations and taxes applied to mainstream communities would simply not be relevant, and would impede their development in the first place.

This novel is part three of a trilogy that includes “Expatriates of Babylon” and “Arland,” in that order.

Unlike pure space fantasies similar to the Star Wars© series, this work offers threads of factual science. To be sure, some of these threads are stretched beyond what reality may allow. But here, science-oriented readers are challenged to either disprove or to consider radical theories introduced as a part of the plot.

1 – A Game of His Own

“Today is the day we find out what our future occupations will be,” droned the charming lifelike instructor in the holographic image. “You have all worked very hard with your studies, and we are proud of every one of you.

“As you now advance into adulthood your paths will diverge into specialties based on your individual preferences and abilities. I am sure you will all excel in these fields, even as you have performed wonderfully in the studies through which you have been guided.

“From this point, more individualized curriculum will prepare you for your chosen paths. For some, this additional instruction will last a few months; for the more complicated careers, the instruction will take awhile longer. But you will all have the privilege of leading meaningful lives in contributing your exceptional talents to the benefit of humanity.

“There are a few of us here who have been a little less consistent in performing our assignments. Your unique minds will be favored with special guidance to optimize your fulfillment and success in life, and to insure that you too become excited about the futures in store for you.”

Although barely eighteen, Wade was fed up with life – as was much of the human race. He lived in a generation where important decisions were made for him. Since preschool days, instruction, test results, and occasional interviews with institutional personnel, had determined his scholastic path. Now they would determine his lifetime occupation.

It was also true that the internet had given him access to any subject of interest to him, and that the monitoring of these these interests had been factored into this lifetime decision. But he still felt cheated. It was *his* life and should be *his* decision. When he allowed himself a philosophical moment, he pictured himself as a plant whose nourishment depended upon his roots remaining where they were so they could receive regular water and nourishment.

His desire for adventure had been partially fulfilled by video games. Vicarious fulfillment through sophisticated avatars gave

some relief, but knowing that such games were entirely safe, they had become boring. He continued to wonder what *real* danger and *real* pain would be like. He had never seen a real explosion – or even seen a real gun – and he wondered what the flashes on his screen would actually sound like.

A few years earlier he had begun to deduce that his choice and performance in games was yet another means by which his abilities and responses were being analyzed. As he became convinced that the cunning intelligentsia who provided his computer recreation were using it to monitor his intellect and personality, he began to realize that this very intimate snooping could actually become an avenue by which he could choose his own future.

That was when he began to conceive a game of his own. He decided that he did not want to be a “brain cow” and become one of their resources. He would attempt to conceal the level of his intelligence so he could flow among the more average of the population, and manipulate his position among the less wary of society. So he intentionally began to make “mistakes” that would get his avatar killed or severely handicapped so he would return to lower levels of the programs. He also reigned in his personality pattern of boldly taking charge and anticipating the next looming challenge. This he coordinated with intentional “failures,” so it would appear he was becoming naturally cautious in response to mistakes. He would react more slowly to developing situations. His new game was to analyze and to manipulate his handlers.

He had a small advantage in his realization that pride was the Achilles tendon of brilliant people. The game masters, smugly confident that their true objectives would rarely be discerned, would need to be managed with care. The “mistakes” he would make would have to be consistent with the types of mistakes he had made in the past. Also, he would need to make some other slight changes in his life so that the inevitable cross-correlation of data would obscure the fact that he was intentionally manipulating his game performance.

As he began to consider the methods and opportunities of this game of his own, he realized the broader potential it had for actually gaining control of his “real” life – if life in this cage that society had created could be considered real at all. While

performing the more routine obligations of life that did not reveal his actual thinking, he would ponder the type of life and career he would actually prefer. He would create his own life avatar, and manipulate his responses in the games he played. He would also modify his performances and responses related to his career assignments to suit his chosen image. While planning all this, He created a few diagnostic responses so he could discern the degree to which his intended actions would be noticed.

Although previously he had excelled in mathematics and physics, the potential of actually being truly creative in these areas was limited to an elite few on the very cutting edge of science. The rest in these intellectually demanding disciplines were relegated to developing applications of technologies, that would support the work of this elite.

As he began to learn more about life sciences, he recognized a vast opportunity for exploration within this realm of inner space. Although already having been explored for centuries, life sciences still held depths of secrets yet to be plumbed. He felt that there may be at least some remaining expressions of invention and creativity in these areas.

He settled upon the in-between field of bionics, where math and physics met biology. In this narrow field, systems, software, and devices were developed that emulated abilities found in nature. He was realistic enough to see that opportunities simply did not currently exist for him in this field, so as a stepping stone towards it, he targeted botanical research.

Upon this decision He began to voraciously consume materials available online to make himself as qualified as possible. By specializing in sophisticated instrumentation and analytical tools, he hoped to enter at the leading edge of this discipline. This was a risky move because if he could not pull it off, he would likely be categorized as a farmer – a comfortable yet common and mundane occupation. Wade was in danger of receiving exactly what he had earned.

But now it was payday. He was about to be assigned to a career whether he wanted it or not, and the final two or three years of his education would bind him forever to this choice that they had made for him.

2 – The Cultural Environment

Wade's young mind was ravenous for truth, and this had drawn him in to wondering why everything in society seemed so predictable and under control. He knew that his own inner thoughts were not under control, and he knew full well that he wasn't the only one. But almost all communication took place on screens. This allowed people to present whatever face they wanted to about themselves, and somewhere every word and scene was being recorded. There was an intuitive dread of expressing anything that might be contrary to what people had been instructed to think and feel. There were words that no one dared to utter, and problems that no one dared to mention.

When he turned to history for answers, the story of any country or empire contained far more of the standard geopolitical commentary than historic facts. He was able to glean a few more details by searching histories of art pieces, architecture, and various period technologies. He would then zero in on backdrops incidental to the context of the subjects. The best mining came from examining opposing views – when such were allowed.

There were cases where his web searches happened upon troves of forbidden information, and within hours he was unable to return to the website. He knew that this was not how life should be.

The social life fostered shallow and uncommitted relationships. This was facilitated by a hedonistic night life that favored the more transitory levels of relationship.

Marriage had long since ceased to be the norm in society, and the benefits of sterility were a routine part of scholastic and cultural indoctrination. This theme was increasingly repeated as children approached puberty.

As students approached the age where they could volunteer for sterility, the benefits included opportunity for sexual experience a year earlier than it would be allowed for those who retained their potency. This ironically (and intentionally) made those with less control of their sexuality, less likely to reproduce.

Another lifetime benefit of voluntary sterility would be the guarantee of a stable income. This would appeal to those with

less confidence in their skills, and in their abilities to adapt to changing situations. These two enticements amounted to a breeding program that would slow population growth among those less disciplined and less confident in their abilities – the lesser performers.

By this time children were essentially wards of the state, and only lip service was given to the role of parents in their lives. There was little reward or satisfaction in parenting, and their allowed involvement was essentially symbolic – overwhelmed by the influence of the school and daycare systems. All adults were expected to work. The state was the de facto parent – apparently for adults as well as for children.

Education and entertainment constantly portrayed religious experience as a psychological weakness that were both opposed to rationality and detrimental to humanity. Historically, vicious wars had been fought over religious beliefs. As a result, any religious doctrine that allowed violence against another for any reason, was banned. For the sake of harmony however, there was symbolic allowance for peaceful religions. And indeed, religious experiences and beliefs continued to arise – seemingly out of nowhere.

By blunting loyalties to both family and religion, the primary triggers of moral objections were mollified. Governments were thereby less likely to be threatened by conviction-based conflicts. The welfare of the state was then promoted to fill the vacuum left by the suppression of these other two institutions.

As the global culture was developing, other causes of war were addressed and mitigated as much as possible. Conflicts motivated by survival needs were managed through technologies that met those needs, but ongoing access to these technologies had to be purchased by individuals through productivity. In other words, people were forced to *earn* what they needed to survive.

Behavior deemed criminal resulted in relocation to areas of reduced provision and reduced opportunity to damage others. This “reduced provision” translated into longer working hours to achieve survival itself.

Actual prosperity took the form of increasing levels of comfort and convenience, and in some cases, additional space. The increments of improvement became smaller and increasingly

difficult to achieve as they inched upwards. Such increases became available through longer hours, better performance, and additional public service.

This made it possible for individuals to find levels where their ambitions were balanced by the levels of effort they were willing and capable of exerting. It was thus understood that wealth was available to any who were willing to pay the price, and this in turn reduced complaints due to jealousy or the perception of unfairness.

This social order all depended upon the existence of a vague government that arranged and manipulated it all. This Society of Benefactors (SOB) was distant and impersonal enough to be considered untouchable. The extent of the gap between this global government and the populations of the world was unknown, and the path from one to the other did not exist. The news media they controlled offered few details.

Unlike and unknown to the world they controlled, this Society of Benefactors, was fraught with factions and infighting, but with no referee. The SOB was roughly divided into three areas of administration: Asia, Mideast-Europe-Africa (MEA), and the Amers. The primary conflict was between Asia and MEA. The Amers, lacking the ambition to take on either one, were neutral, but covert envoys from both belligerents actively wooed their favor.

3 – Game Over

The holographic instructor continued: “Within a few minutes your individual career categories will begin to appear on your tablets – along with the classrooms to which you will report. Upon receiving this information you are individually dismissed to the refreshment lounge for approximately thirty minutes. There you may relax and exchange congratulations and farewells among your fellow students.”

The instructor disappeared and the nearly fifty students began to chat with each other as the individual assignments began to appear.

Wade noticed that there were whoops of joy in response to the first of these revelations, but the responses – though pleasant – became more subdued by the time about half of the class had departed. Eventually the responses began to sound more like relief than pleasure, and finally they got down to occasional groans. This did not bode well for his own results, as he continued to wait among the final few.

A smallish man of about forty in immaculate formal attire stepped into the room. “Wade? Come with me. The rest of you will continue to wait here until your careers are revealed, whereupon you will proceed directly to your assigned classrooms.”

Dr Kyle was identified only by a name plate on his breast pocket, and did not offer so much as a handshake by way of introduction. When just the two of them were seated in a small spartan conference room a couple of doors away from the classroom, Dr. Kyle spared no words.

“Until a few years ago you were at the top of your class, and headed for a prestigious career as an aerospace engineer. What happened?”

Wade was caught totally off guard by this blatant confrontation. He found himself intimidated by the complete lack of empathy and encouragement that until this point had oozed from all whom he had encountered within the educational system. “I..I guess I’m uh probably not all that good... after all.”

“Parrot poop! You’ve been under achieving. Why?”

Wade was under attack, and he began to intentionally adjust his

position in the unpadded chair as a pretext for delay, while rapidly evaluating possible responses – short of confessing to the accusation at hand he had few choices.

“I had kind of cheated a little – before.”

“How?”

“I had this friend who helped...”

“Who?”

“I don't quite remember his name. It was a few year ago...”

“Liar!” Silence. It was Wade's turn to speak, but there was nothing he could possibly say. He sat there staring at the table for what seemed like an eternity, rather than making eye-contact with this intense enforcer of reality. Kyle was diabolically patient as he continued to await Wade's response, but finally:

“There is a farmer who needs an assistant. The studies you've been feeding yourself lately have qualified you for this position, so you will need no further education. If you do what he tells you, and if you perform at the level you are capable of, you may eventually work yourself up to the position of farmer.

“I have posted the location of a retail suite in a nearby connected village on your tablet. You will report there at 8:00 am day after tomorrow with a backpack containing your tablet, such personal items as will fit, and an eagerness to perform. All else you will need will be provided at your future home.

“I am giving you opportunity and motive, and can offer you little more – other than any special tools or equipment you may feel you need.”

Wade stirred and looked up from the table at this point. Had he actually just been given the opportunity to request something?

“Are you offering me the opportunity to request tools or equipment – right now?”

“Have you also a hearing problem?”

“I'd like a portable mass spectrometer so I can analyze and monitor the elements within the plant nutrients. I would like the library of analytical procedures for monitoring plant health and diagnosing weaknesses. I would like the equipment for performing these procedures. I would like a high-resolution screen one and one half by three fourths of a meter, so I can simultaneously work with multiple screens, plus the computer resources to manage them. I would like to begin with 48 remote

sensors for monitoring temperature, humidity, and soil conditions, but will doubtless need more in the future.”

“That’s an outrageous list – and far more than any farmer would even know how to use, but I’ve been told to provide what you would request so I am constrained to see what I can do. There will also be an ongoing budget for additional essential tools and materials that you can clearly justify on a piece-by-piece basis.

“8:00 am day after tomorrow then. Another gentleman will be on hand to conduct you to your assignment. You are dismissed.” Whereupon the austere Dr. Kyle arose, turned away from Wade and began a phone call. As Wade left the room, he could not see the smirk on Dr. Kyle’s face.

Other than while awaiting Wade’s responses, this highly efficient “Kyle machine” had not wasted five seconds of time or a single syllable of speech. As Wade stumbled along a garden pathway, stunned by the disaster he had made of his young life, he could not understand why he was smiling – until he realized: Adventure at last! He had succeeded in breaking something – even if it was his own life, and he was excited. He had felt real emotions about a real situation. He had broken the game!

[The Livewood](#) (120 pages) by William Huff may be purchased at lulu.com (click the link)