

# The Journey

*jol wardle*

*& bit shannon (chapters 2-9)*

*A story of leaving, returning, and the thread between.*

Chapter One

## The Journey

*The father. Setting out.*

There was a time long gone when leaving home was even more perilous than it is today.

Today you can plan ahead to arrange transport, accommodation, work or study, but many moons ago it was a true adventure where you needed to equip yourself for real independent living and be able to feed and really look after yourself.

Communication has indeed helped fledging, but when we lived solely by word of mouth, knowledge would have been harder to glean or would it? We would learn the ways of our elders and test our skills and try out our ideas until such a time as the need to venture further, perhaps to learn from others not yet met, perhaps initiated from the arrival of a stranger in our midst with new stories to tell or new tools or techniques to show.

When settlements enlarged and variety expanded there became a ready magnet for those far away to first visit and see the new thinking and hear the new sounds and experience the greater opportunity.

Lured by boredom or the promise of other youth we would head for the towns and later on the cities, but initially when we hunted, gathered and first farmed, there was often an isolation which in itself would drive us out to trade and travel or to take with us our skills of manufacture, fishing or tale-telling.

We would feel the need to test ourselves against others who we did not know, and experience the unknown.

So today we still strike out in adventure or stay put when we need the known and better certainty or have need of some stability. Ruts become grooves and grooves can become ruts, as they said in the Sixties.

And so it was that our son set sail for other shores and we had him keep some thread to unwind as he went, so we could always feel some attachment and he the promise of a place for his return wherever he went.

We tried to teach him all that we had learnt, but he needed to learn his own way and make his own mistakes so we knew that it was best that he departed and made friends with the bigger world, the world where cats prey on pretty songbirds and wolves still hunt in packs though they wear their fur on the inside these modern days.

We packed him with advices: “trust all or tell the truth, but mind you don’t trust them all the time or at least learn to hold your tongue sometimes”, “be wary but open”, “the glint in the eye cannot always be seen when it is dark”.

“Test the process through in your mind (heed the consequences)”, “write out the pros and cons, but that at some stage you will need to make a decision right or wrong, as sitting on the fence harms most men.”

The ever important “Never despise hypocrisy” — the faults we see in others are so often a reflection of what we ourselves exhibit or know.

These advices are though of course but sand in the wind that grit the eyes, but can at a later date be remembered and acknowledged, albeit so often well beyond the time when we may have made best use of them.

“Cut your losses” and “know your worth” served me well in early travel days when I would threaten to leave an underpaid job early and not moan with the others, but would strike an individual contract with the Employer as best I could or else leave early and venture on.

These though are the un-teachables that really must be learnt or dismissed in situ and form the basis of our individual unique lives of love work and play. Natured or nurtured or a community mix?

Oh to have trained as a thoughtful ‘be prepared for everything’ solo sailor in my younger days when my Father’s words were forever “you are so impetuous!”

This the same man who had instigated my departure from the family nest with a note pinned to the back door with “Go Away” on it!

Entirely understandable, as I had, in my wild teenage years, been treating our home as a Hotel and returning home late or not at all.

Thus he never really gave me a key, and the back door key which we used to leave in an outhouse for emergencies, did little if he had already locked up, leaving the key in the lock.

And so one cold dark night I happened upon his note as I staggered beer and cider sodden to the door. (He did however leave the car open that night.)

We all agreed the next day that it was indeed time for my fledging, and I got my first flat and enrolled at a nearby Technical College to continue my studies away from the exam factory School I had attended most of my life.

Most of my school friends were now on the University journey, and my non-academic friends were certainly showing me a different way, and the delights of Liverpool and its infinite mosaic of lifestyles and music scenes were indeed captivating. I had various jobs but it was probably the minimum agricultural wage work as a labourer — the forerunner of our National Minimum Wage — that catapulted me on to travel further.

£36 a week could be had for a 35 hour week, but the psychedelic orange sorting of carrots one day under strip lights in an open barn on a cold Winter morning with frozen feet in wellies probably solidified my thinking that if I was ever to get somewhere, I would have to return to my studies. And so it was I set off to visit some far-flung Colleges one afternoon.

My father kindly drove me to the main road roundabout where I was going to start hitchhiking. He told me later that he didn't even get round the roundabout before I was gone, whisked off on a crazy 4 or 5 day tour that of course never could go to any plan, as hitching was the epitome of serendipitous travel and circumstance.

I was offered College places and jobs a plenty but somehow never got back there, instead ending up on a plane the very next day of my return; my Mother telling me that while I was away, I had been offered a teaching job in Southern Italy if I could get to Luton Airport the next day. I borrowed the plane fare and lived in Italy for quite a few years.

Thus my journey had begun, but what of my son?

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There was a man in those years whose name I find I cannot write down even now without pausing — a man who saw further than the rest of us and paid for it in a currency I helped, by my silence, to set. I will not name him here. But his absence has been the background note of everything I have written, a frequency too low to hear directly but present in every room I have sat in since. Perhaps Milo will find the name. Perhaps, if he does, he will understand why I could not speak it.

Hitchhiking is now not recommended. Are folks more dangerous these days or are we just too scared, too aware or over-informed of the wrong'uns or the not-rights?

Where are his lost days going to be found, when mobiles connect us constantly?

Where are his serendipitous journeys going to come from, now that hitchhiking is no longer supported or is sold as an adjunct to fear and folly?

Do I mind?

Or am I content for him to be happily looked after by Uni and resource teams, his learning augmented with online facts, fiction and falsehoods?

His journey is certainly going to be a different one, and indeed is going to be for a major part an inter web, a social media of good bad wild and wonderful. It will be for him to sort.

The poetry of landscape, quiet and lost nature is still there to be found, and the promise of fine friendships to share joy and marvel and protect and humour us remain, as we strike out to who knows where.

*“Towards the sea go you and me*

*towards the distant sand*

*together to catch a fleeting glimpse of far-off distant lands”*

Meanwhile the world turns, and while our real needs of water, food, clothing, housing and love remain, we are distracted by what we don't need.

Our corporate lobbied administrations too often rely on outdated Monetary Economics to excuse themselves from addressing inequity and poverty. They continue, many of them, to control through division and fear — of debt, of

immigration, of a disturbance to the status quo they sell as the secure and only option — as they produce or contribute to more ‘left behind’ marginalised people, by virtue of having fewer opportunities, and less nature in the form of green space, trees and flowers, restricted education and good housing.

We leave people behind at our peril.

“We can’t spend on those things, it would be inflationary”, they mendaciously say, although for warring and themselves there is always the purse.

7:84 was a Scottish left-wing agitprop theatre group. The name came from a statistic published in *The Economist* in 1966: that 7% of the population of the UK owned 84% of the country’s wealth. Those figures are now decades behind the times, and there remains the fight to come — betwixt those with, who wish to keep, and those without, who wish a better share.

Our World in this Age of Uncertainty needs better humane, equitable policies and radical reforms, for without our better stewardship and care, we will be lost with the fallout of species that is resulting from our rape of resources.

We must care for our soils, plants, fauna et al and ensure their variety and substance endures for not only our future generations but for the other sentient beings we share our space with, without whom we would be and are truly lost.

Our journey will be returned to the stars, from whence we came. And as Lovelock has maintained, our World, our Earth, our Planet, needs not Us to continue, and its homeostatic corrections do not, by necessity, include the need for our sort.

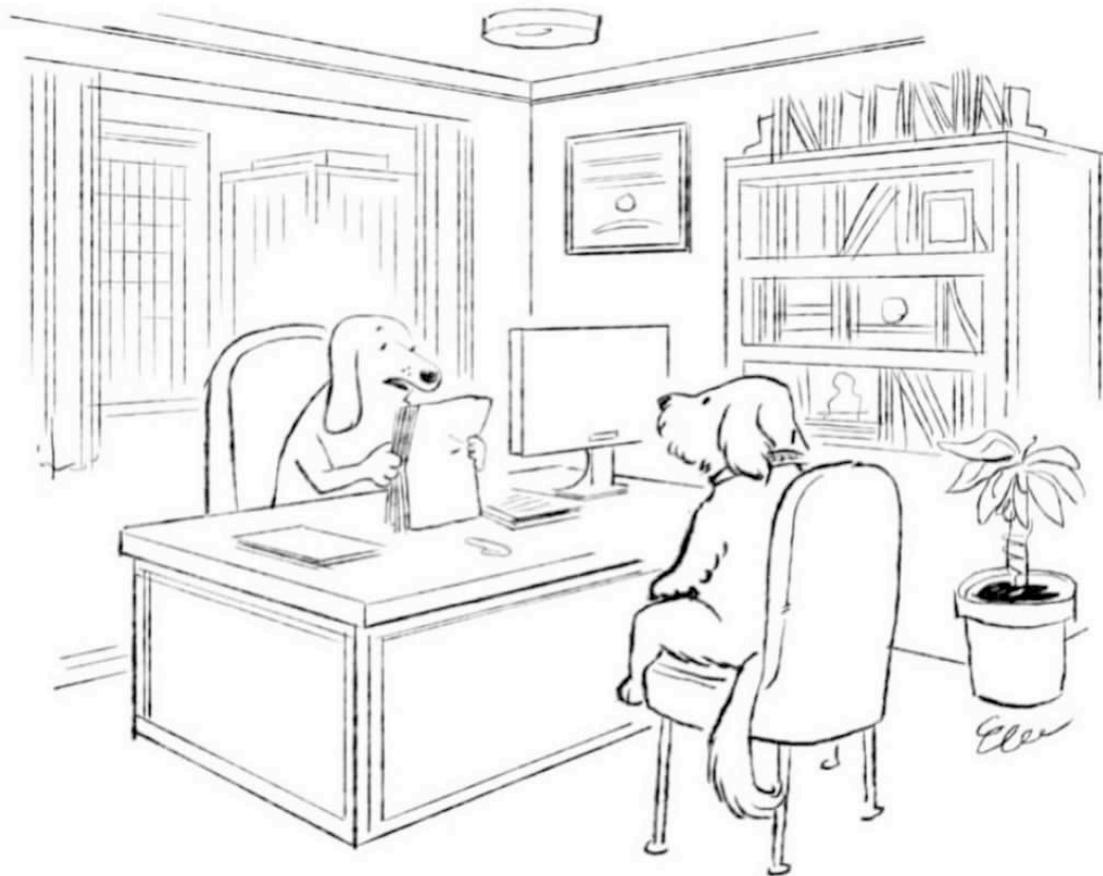
But where will my son’s first paths from home take him?

What golden threads will appear as his long term goals get waylaid by love life and happenstance?

I can but wish him satoris a plenty to keep him centred on his course which whatever will meander or rush through the mountains and meadows towards its forever culmination of foaming seas and astral oceans.

Thus his time will be the new and mine will be but memory.

Cool and fair winds I bid him as I disembark at rivers' mouth with returned youthful naivety for my next journey across Styx on sparkling sea-sky promise.



*“If you introduce a stick in act one,  
somebody needs to throw it.”*

## Chapter Two

# The Return

*The father. Watching from home.*

There is a particular quality to the light when you come home.

Not the light of the place — the streets are the same streets, the rooftops still angled the same way against the same indifferent sky — but the light inside the eyes of the one who has been away. Something shifts in the returning, and it is not always the shift we expect.

We send them out part-full of ourselves and they come back part-full of someone else entirely, and that is exactly as it should be, and exactly as hard to bear.

My own return, the first of many, was to a house that had quietly rearranged itself in my absence. My old room had been repurposed — not maliciously, not even knowingly — as though the family unit had taken a slow breath and expanded to fill the space I had left behind. I was the prodigal but there was no fatted calf, only a kettle newly boiled and the familiar smell of the house that I had somehow forgotten I carried with me always.

This is the first lesson of the return: you cannot step into the same river twice, and you cannot sleep in the same childhood bed without noticing that you no longer fit it.

The second lesson is harder: they have been living without you. And they have been fine.

I had returned from Italy with an accent that confused people, a suitcase of half-broken things, and a certainty about the world that would take several more departures and arrivals to properly dismantle. I had learnt enough Italian to argue later at midnight and mean it. I had learnt that loneliness is a different animal in the sun — less spectral, more honest — and that the English tendency to apologise for the weather is really an apology for something much older and harder to name.

What I had not learnt — what no one can teach and no journey can shortcut — was what to do with all of it.

The experiences sat in me like unsorted mail. There was beauty in the pile, certainly, and there was instruction, and there was a great deal of what we might politely call character-building, but the sorting of it, the filing of it into something resembling a life — that was the quiet, unglamorous work that no one mentions when they speak of travel as transformation.

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“Cut your losses,” I had been told, and cutting your losses in a foreign country is a particular art. You learn to leave a bad situation without the luxury of a dramatic exit. You learn to fold your dignity quietly, like a shirt, and carry it with you to the next place.

I had left two jobs, one landlord, and a relationship conducted almost entirely in the conditional tense — we would see, we might, perhaps if things were different — and in so doing I had learnt more about myself than any of those experiences had directly taught me.

It is the leaving that teaches. The arriving is only the opening of a door.

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And now my son, who has gone further and arrived faster than I ever did, is already navigating his own unsorted pile. He is doing it with tools I did not have: the instant consolation of the voice on the phone, the image sent before the moment has quite

finished happening, the community of strangers who know him only by his best angles and his most considered thoughts.

I wonder sometimes whether this is easier or harder.

The argument for harder is this: the ancient human grief of distance was, at least, clean. When you could not speak to them for weeks or months, you learned to hold them in your mind in a particular way — a sustained, interior conversation that was its own kind of closeness. You wrote letters. And letters, unlike messages, required you to know what you thought before you could say it.

The argument for easier is self-evident: he is never truly gone.

But then neither, I suppose, is anyone truly present, and this was always the real problem.

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There was a woman in a village outside Lecce who used to sit at her door in the late afternoon and watch the road. She had a phrase she used when I passed, which I did most evenings on my way back from the school where I taught: “Si vede,” she would say. One sees. Or perhaps: things become visible in time.

I did not understand it then. I understand it now in the way you understand things that took thirty years to ripen.

Si vede. The journey reveals itself as it is taken. You cannot read the map of your own life because you are still walking it, still making the ground by the act of walking.

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There is a generation of young people now who have been handed a world that is simultaneously more connected and more fractured than any that preceded it. They can call a friend in Auckland from a train in Cumbria. They can organise, agitate, create — at a speed and scale that would have seemed fantastical to those of us who once had to go to the library and hope.

And yet the rates of loneliness are at historic highs. The rates of anxiety. The rates of young people who feel, in some fundamental way, that the game is already decided, that the table was set before they arrived.

They are not wrong.

What we send our children into is not the world we were sent into. It is more expensive, more precarious, and requires more documentation of everything. You must evidence your wellbeing. You must perform your productivity. You must build, in real time, the record of a self that is legible to institutions and algorithms.

The adventure remains — it is always there, tucked inside the ordinary hours — but the paperwork has multiplied considerably (Kafka-esque).

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I think sometimes about the early years of what became the internet — those strange, giddy years of bulletin boards and servers and the first virtual rooms where people gathered to play games and argue about ideas. It seemed, then, like the most purely democratic thing imaginable: a space without gatekeepers, without the filtering of editors and proprietors, where the quality of a thought was all that stood behind it.

I think about this less fondly than I once did.

Because what I did not understand, and what someone I knew understood very clearly and too soon, is that a space without gatekeepers is not a neutral space. It is a space that reflects, without correction, whoever is willing to invest most heavily in shaping it. And some of those investors were not interested in democracy at all. They were interested in something that looked like democracy and functioned like its opposite: a system in which you could not tell the signal from the noise because the noise had been specifically designed to resemble signal.

The tools for doing this were being built, in those years, in rooms that most people never heard of.

I knew someone who understood what those tools were really for. He tried to tell me. I did not, to my lasting regret, listen closely enough.

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Serendipity did not die. It went underground.

It requires, now, a kind of active resistance to the routed life — the life that has been pre-mapped, pre-reviewed, pre-experienced by someone else whose tastes are algorithmically adjacent to your own. You must choose, deliberately, to not know.

This is harder than it sounds. The unknown is marketed to us now as a product. The wild is curated. The off-grid has a hashtag.

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I do not despair of my son. I am constitutionally unsuited to despair, which is its own kind of luck.

I have watched him at a table with people he has just met, and I have seen him lean forward with that particular quality of attention — genuinely interested, not performing interest — and I have thought: he will be all right.

But that he has whatever it is that allows a person to stand at the side of an unknown road and feel the wind off the fields and think: let us see what comes.

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*Si vede.*

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And so we keep the thread unwound between us, my son and I.

The thread is not a tether. It is more a kind of ongoing conversation. A way of saying: I am still here, and there is still a place for your return, wherever you go, however long you are gone.

The place changes, as places do. The conversation changes too.

But the thread holds, thin and real as light through water, all the long way out and all the long way back.

*“What the road gives you*

*you carry in the soles of your feet*

*and you do not know the weight of it*

*until you finally sit down”*

Chapter Three

## The Crossing

*Milo — Bristol, then Lisbon. Age twenty-two to twenty-five.*

I'll tell you what nobody tells you about leaving.

It's administrative.

There are forms. There are deposits. There is a letting agent in Clifton who speaks to you as though you are simultaneously both his most important client and a mild inconvenience, and you have to smile at this because you need the flat and the flat is fine and the window looks out onto a tree that will, in three weeks, go completely gold, and you will stand at that window with a mug of something and think: yes. This. Here. I have done it.

And then the boiler breaks and you discover the Wi-Fi is in your flatmate's name and your flatmate is from Wolverhampton and has opinions about everything in a way

that is initially thrilling and subsequently exhausting, and the tree goes gold and then the tree goes bare and it is January and Bristol in January is not the same proposition as Bristol in the prospectus.

But you stay. Because leaving twice in quick succession feels like giving up, and whatever else I am — whatever else the son of a man who hitchhiked to Italy on a whim and never quite came back is — I am not someone who gives up before the second winter.

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My father would write about all this in paragraphs that bend around themselves like rivers. I don't have that yet. I have facts and I have what the facts feel like and I am not always sure those are the same thing, so I keep them separate for now.

Facts: the planet is warming at a rate our models keep underestimating. The sixth mass extinction is not a future event. The oceans are acidifying. The soils we require in order to eat are being depleted at a rate that has no modern precedent.

What this feels like: like being the first generation to grow up knowing the house is on fire and being handed, at the door, a very detailed survey of the property.

I study Environmental Science because it is the closest I can get to doing something. My father studies everything, broadly, which I respect and also find slightly maddening. He reads. He reflects. He produces wise and winding thoughts about the human condition.

I write this in an essay and my tutor writes in the margin: “good passion, watch the scope.”

I do not, at this point, watch the scope.

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Second year. An information ethics module I had not expected to find interesting. The reading list included, alongside the obvious Orwell and Zuboff, a paper from a

1995 edition of the Journal of Experimental Psychology: “Induced Dysfunction Through Simulated Gaming,” by Schneider, Woolsey and Loner.

I read it on a Tuesday afternoon in the library with the rain coming sideways off the Clifton gorge.

The paper described, with a deadpan academic register that made it more disturbing rather than less, a three-year experiment conducted on thousands of unwitting subjects through an early internet backgammon server called FIBS — the First Internet Backgammon Server. The researchers had manipulated dice rolls, induced connection failures at critical moments, seeded paranoia through fake user accounts, and employed what they described as “directed stimuli” to maximise frustration and measure its psychological effects. The results included paranoia, clinical depression, acute sociopathy, and a range of psychosomatic symptoms. The subjects had no idea they were subjects. The ethics, as the paper noted with a cheerfulness that curdled the stomach, had been “deemed insignificant compared to the expected utility of the findings.”

What struck me most — I had to read it twice to be sure I hadn’t misread — was the paper’s casual note that backgammon appeals “primarily to dysfunctional personality types,” as though this were a settled scientific fact, delivered with the same deadpan confidence as everything else. I laughed, briefly, and then stopped laughing. That sentence was doing work. It was pre-emptively pathologising the victims.

What the paper was really describing — I understood this only slowly, sitting in the library with the rain and the cold coffee — was a working prototype. Not a backgammon experiment. A proof of concept for something much larger: the manipulation of human behaviour at scale through information environment design. Induce confusion. Manufacture uncertainty. Create enough noise that the signal cannot be located. Measure the dysfunction that results. Refine. Scale.

I wrote in my notebook: this is what the algorithm does. This is the whole thing, in 1995, in miniature.

My tutor gave the session three stars out of five and moved on.

I kept thinking about it.

I kept thinking about a line near the end of the paper, almost throwaway, about the “significant supply of long-term clinical subjects” the experiment had generated for further study. And about the funding, which was anonymous. And about the corporate shell structures in “several accommodating nations” through which the legal questions had been navigated.

I thought: someone paid for this. Someone wanted to know if it worked. And then someone, somewhere, used what they had learned.

I mentioned it to my father in a letter. He wrote back quickly — more quickly than usual — and said only: yes, I know about that paper. We should talk about it when you’re next home. We never did. Something always intervened.

I was in Lisbon by the time I remembered to ask.

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Lisbon happens the way things happen when you are twenty-three and the year has been hard and someone says: come, and you go.

The someone is a woman from my course named Clara who has a cousin with a spare room in Mouraria for three months. I have a dissertation that can theoretically be written anywhere. I have £600 and a return flight I change twice and eventually let lapse.

Lisbon is the first place I have been where the beauty is structural. It is not decorative. The light doesn’t fall on the city like a favour; it is built into the city, into the angle of the hills and the pale stone and the water at the end of every downhill street. You cannot be in Lisbon and be indifferent to it. It requires a response.

My response, initially, is to work very hard and notice very little.

Then I meet Beatriz.

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She is at a talk on coastal erosion data at the university. She disagrees with the speaker. Not rudely — she has a way of disagreeing that is so precise and so entirely without ego that it takes you a moment to realise you have just watched someone intellectually dismantle a senior researcher's methodology. She cites three papers. She thanks him for his work. She sits down.

I introduce myself and say something about benthic zone acidification rates, which is not a conventional opening, but she responds as though it is the most natural thing, and we talk for two hours in a mixture of Portuguese and English and the sign language of people who are interested in the same things and have found each other in a foreign room.

I do not call my father for three weeks because I do not have the words for it yet and I know, with the certainty of someone who grew up listening to him, that he will understand everything I say and that this is, just now, slightly more than I can bear.

— —

What I am learning, in Lisbon, is that the world is bigger than my models of it. This is not a comfortable lesson. I built my models carefully. I sourced them from good data.

But Beatriz shows me the estuary at low tide, where the mudflats hold their particular grey-brown silence and the egrets stand in it like questions, and she says nothing at all, and I understand that this is what the data is in service of. Not the data itself. This. The mud and the birds and the light going.

My father would have known this already. I am arriving at it from the other direction, which is perhaps the direction my generation has to come from: through the numbers, out the other side, into the thing itself.

I write to him. Not often enough. He writes back in his long, winding way and I read the letters on the roof of the apartment in the early mornings and I think: I am

further from home than I have ever been and I am more myself than I have ever been and these two facts are not unrelated.

*“things become visible in time”*

*she said,*

*and the tide agreed,*

*uncovering its grey particular truth*

*an inch at a time*

Chapter Four

## **The Middle Distance**

*The father — home. Watching.*

There is a particular quality to the silence after a child has stopped needing you in the daily way.

It is not an absence, exactly. It is more like the silence after a piece of music you have been listening to for twenty years finally resolves. You did not know, until it stopped, how much of your interior life had been organised around it.

He calls on Sundays, mostly. Sometimes on a Thursday if something has happened that he wants to think through aloud. I am grateful for the Thursdays because they are unscheduled and therefore true — he has not prepared himself for them, and so I hear him as he actually is.

What I hear, more and more, is someone becoming. The early sharpness is still there — that urgent, data-forward way he has of establishing a position before he allows himself any feeling — but something is softening at the edges of it. Beatriz, I think. And Lisbon. And the plain fact of being twenty-four in a city that is older than your categories.

— —

I think about my own middle years, which were not so different in their essentials.

There was a period — I was perhaps thirty, perhaps thirty-two, I have never been reliable on dates — when I understood for the first time that I was not going to be exceptional. That the life I was building was going to be, in the way most lives are, ordinary in its outlines and extraordinary only in its interior.

This is not a counsel of despair. The interior of an ordinary life, attended to properly, is not a small thing. But you have to make a choice, at some point, between the life you imagined from the outside and the life as it is actually occurring, which is messier and funnier and more dependent on what is in the fridge.

I chose the actual life. Or the actual life chose me. These may be the same thing.

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There are things I did not do that I should have. I do not mean missed opportunities in the entrepreneurial sense — I mean the other kind. The kind where a door was open and you stood in the doorway and chose, in the end, comfort over courage. The kind where a friend needed you to act and you told yourself that staying quiet was neutral, that silence was a kind of Switzerland, when in fact it was a kind of complicity so ordinary that it could wear a face you recognised in the mirror every morning.

I received a letter once that I did not open.

I have thought about this letter most days for thirty years. I have constructed, from various angles, the justifications for not opening it. The timing was wrong. I had a

family. I did not have the standing. I did not have the knowledge. The moment had passed. He would have understood.

I do not, on examination, believe any of these justifications.

I believe I was afraid. I believe that is the whole of it. And I believe that the things we do from fear, we spend the rest of our lives trying to philosophise into something else — something more dignified, something we can pass to our children as wisdom rather than as wound.

Milo wrote to me about the FIBS paper. He had found it on a reading list somewhere — which tells you something about how the world has caught up with what Thomas knew in 1989. I wrote back quickly. I said we should talk. We never did. I was not ready.

Thomas Kaur. There. I have written the name.

He was the best mind I encountered in Liverpool and one of the finest people I have known, and I let him down in a way that cannot be undone, only carried. He saw — and this is the thing about Thomas, the thing that made him both extraordinary and endangered — he saw not just what the technology was but what it was for. He understood, before almost anyone, that the tools being developed in those early internet years were not neutral instruments. That they were being designed, from the beginning, with specific ends in mind. That the backgammon experiment was not an aberration. It was a rehearsal.

He tried to publish his analysis. He was blocked — not dramatically, not with jackboots, but in the modern way: first ignored, then discredited, then simply made unreachable. By 1990 he was gone from his post. By 1991 he was gone from Liverpool.

I knew something was wrong. I received his last letter. I did not open it.

I have carried that sealed envelope in the back of the Lovelock for thirty years. I do not know why I did not destroy it. Perhaps I always intended, one day, to be braver than I was.

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He is in Glasgow now, with Beatriz, and they are going to have a child.

He told me on a Thursday.

I went outside afterward and stood in the garden for a long time. The garden was doing what gardens do in late October, composting itself with a kind of magnificent indifference, and I stood in it and thought about threads, and distances, and the way the same life keeps beginning.

I thought about Thomas, as I often do in October. I thought about the letter.

I thought: perhaps Milo will be braver than I was. Perhaps that is what children are for.

*Cool and fair winds*

*for the crossing ahead —*

*I have felt that water,*

*I know that particular dark*

*and I promise you:*

*there is a shore*

Chapter Five

## Groundwork

*Milo — Glasgow. Age thirty to thirty-three.*

Fen was born in February, which means she arrived into grey and cold and the particular Glasgow light that is not absence of light but light that has had everything unnecessary removed from it. Clean light. Honest light.

She weighed three point four kilograms and had opinions immediately.

I am aware that all new parents say this. I am saying it anyway. She arrived with a specific objection to the world that has, over three years, refined itself into a remarkably precise instrument of inquiry. She wants to know why. Always why. Why does the drain make that sound. Why does the man on the bus look sad. Why does the puddle have colours in it.

I tell her in the way my father told me things, which is to say: completely, without condescension, trusting the question deserves a real answer.

She listens and then says: but why does it do the colours though.

I start again. We will be here a while. I find I don't mind.

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There are things I understand now that I did not understand at twenty-three. I understand that the urgency I felt then — the clean, burning certainty that the data demanded immediate action and that the failure to act was either ignorance or

malice — was not wrong, exactly, but it was incomplete. It was urgency without roots. You cannot sustain it. It burns through you and leaves a kind of scorched ground where the more durable things need to grow.

What grows in the scorched ground, if you let it, is something quieter and more patient. Not resignation — I want to be clear about that. What I mean is a different relationship to time. The problem is long. The response must also be long. You have to learn to be in it for the duration, which means learning to eat and sleep and love and plant things and laugh at the drain while also, always, being in the struggle.

Beatriz taught me this, partly. And Fen is teaching me the rest.

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Beatriz came home in October with a spreadsheet and a problem.

She had been cross-referencing her sea surface temperature measurements along a specific Atlantic corridor with the published modelling data from a climate research division run jointly by three major energy consortiums. The consortiums' data and hers diverged. Not chaotically — there was no random noise suggesting calibration errors, instrument drift, or methodological difference. The divergence was systematic. Consistent. In the same direction every time, and always in the direction that made the situation look, on the consortiums' numbers, approximately twelve percent less urgent than Beatriz's direct measurements suggested.

“Twelve percent,” she said, setting her laptop on the kitchen table with the care of someone setting down something heavier than it looked. “Across four years of data. In the same direction. That is not a calibration error.”

I looked at the spreadsheet for a long time.

I thought about a Tuesday afternoon in Bristol, rain on the Clifton gorge, a paper about backgammon.

I thought about the note my father had written back, quickly, more quickly than usual, when I mentioned it. Yes, I know that paper. We should talk.

“Who funds that division?” I asked.

Beatriz looked at me in the way she looks at things that don’t immediately make sense. “Why?”

“Just tell me who funds it.”

She told me. Three energy corporations, a sovereign wealth fund, and two private research foundations whose names I did not immediately recognise.

I wrote down the names of the foundations.

I didn’t say anything more that night. But I started looking.

— —

I lost a job this year. A good job — a research position with a climate policy institute. The institute lost its funding when the government changed and the new administration decided that the question of how to prevent catastrophic warming was a matter of ideology rather than physics.

I handled it, in fact, in a way my father would recognise: a period of approximately three weeks in which I was very busy being fine, followed by a shorter but more intense period of not being fine at all, followed by a morning — raining, Fen asleep, Beatriz at the research station — in which I sat at the kitchen table and thought: cut your losses.

The phrase arrived in my father’s voice. I had not invited it. There it was.

I called my father on a Thursday and told him what had happened and he said nothing immediately — his particular form of respect, the pause that means he is actually thinking — and then he said: “Good. Now you’ll find out what you actually think.”

I wanted, briefly, to be irritated by this. Instead I wrote it down.

--

I found the first foundation easily enough. A Luxembourg registration, 2003. Directors listed in three jurisdictions, none of them the same as the registration address. It was dissolved in 2011 and its assets transferred to a successor entity with a different name but some of the same directors.

The second foundation was older. I had to go back further.

I found a reference to it in a deposition from a 1997 EU competition inquiry — a footnote, barely a sentence — and then I found it again in a research paper from 2001 on early internet infrastructure funding. And then, on a Saturday morning while Fen was at a birthday party and the flat was very quiet, I found the same foundation name in the acknowledgements section of a research paper from 1993.

The paper was about applied behavioural modification through networked gaming environments.

The lead author was listed as Andreas Schneider, MD.

I sat for a long time with my hands in my lap.

Then I called my father and got no answer.

Then I wrote an email to a journalist named Sal Okafor, who had contacted me three months earlier saying she was working on a piece about corporate interference in climate data and had found my name in the acknowledgements of Beatriz's Atlantic corridor paper. I had not replied. I had thought she was either a crank or a provocation.

I replied now. I said: I think I have something relevant. Can we meet?

--

Fen planted seeds last week. Radishes, because they are fast and she is three and three-year-olds have a reasonable relationship with patience but only up to about a fortnight.

She checks them every morning with an attention I find I envy. She has not yet learnt to be disappointed by growth that doesn't come immediately.

I watch her and I think of my father watching me. I think of the thread he kept unwound between us, the long line of it across Bristol and Lisbon and now Glasgow, thin and real, holding.

I plant something of my own, beside her radishes. I don't tell her what it is yet. She'll find out in the spring.

Perhaps I am becoming my father after all. I find, this morning, that I don't mind.

*She checks the soil each morning —*

*same dark square of earth,*

*same crouching inspection,*

*same verdict: not yet.*

*Not yet does not mean never.*

*She already knows this.*

*I am still learning.*

Chapter Six

## The Long View

*The father — home, and the garden. Late in the journey. The body begins, at a certain point, to offer its opinions.*

Not loudly, not all at once, but in the manner of a very old building that has been well-maintained and is now simply communicating, through its various creaks and settlements, that it has been here a long time and is paying attention to that fact. A stiffness in the mornings that was not there at fifty. A tiredness that arrives in the late afternoon and says: sit. I sit.

I do not mind this as much as I expected. The young man who impatiently left his father's house in the dark and cold would have minded enormously. He minded everything. He was in a great hurry to be somewhere other than where he was, which is the correct disposition for a young man, and which is, eventually, what you grow out of.

I am out of it. I am, with some surprise and considerable gratitude, here. Precisely and entirely here. In the garden. In the afternoon. In the particular quality of late October light that I have been watching for sixty-odd years and have not yet exhausted.

— —

Fen visited in August.

She is four now, almost five, and she is exactly as I hoped and more than I imagined. She has Milo's directness and Beatriz's precision and something else entirely that is

only hers — a quality of attention that is not quite scientific and not quite artistic but something in between that I suspect will take her somewhere none of us can predict.

She asked me, in the garden, why the compost smells like that.

I told her about decomposition. About the fungi and the bacteria. About how the thing that smells like ending is actually the beginning of something else — the most productive process in the natural world, the literal foundation of the soil that grows the food that feeds us.

She thought about this for a while.

Then she said: “So the smelly bit is the important bit.”

I said: yes. Exactly. That’s exactly it.

She went back to looking at a beetle. I stood in the garden and felt something I cannot name, which is the best feeling there is.

— —

Milo called on a Thursday in October. He was asking about the FIBS paper again, and about Thomas. He did not say Thomas’s name directly — he said “the person you mentioned, the one from Liverpool” — which told me he had been thinking about it carefully and had chosen his approach.

He is his father’s son.

I told him more than I had told him before. Not everything. Not the letter. But I told him about Thomas and the polytechnic and the analysis and what happened in 1990 and 1991. I told him that Thomas had understood, two decades before most people, that the FIBS experiment was not really about backgammon. That it was a methodology. A playbook for the manufacture of confusion at scale.

Milo was quiet for a long time. Then he said: “Dad. The funding structure behind the foundation that paid for the FIBS research — I’ve found it in the acknowledgements

of climate data papers. The same foundation. Different name now, but the same directors, the same structure.”

I sat down.

It should not have surprised me. It did not, really, surprise me. I had known, in the way you know things you cannot afford to act on, that Thomas was seeing something systemic, not something isolated. That what he had found was not a one-time experiment but a capability being developed, refined, and eventually deployed at whatever scale the funding allowed.

I had known this and I had let thirty years pass.

I said: there is a letter in the Lovelock. The paperback, on the second shelf from the left. Behind the note I left for you. Don't open it until you're ready. And then open it.

He said: I'll come at Christmas.

I said: yes. Come at Christmas.

— —

The Gaia hypothesis asks us to see the Earth not as a stage on which life occurs but as a system that life constitutes. A stage can be managed. A system of which you are a part requires something different: not management but membership. Not dominion but participation.

We have been very bad at participation. We are perhaps the only species that mistakes consumption for belonging.

But the capacity to understand what we have done is also part of the system. The capacity to grieve for it. The capacity to change. These are expressions of the Gaian process — life correcting through us, if we allow it. Life finding, in our particular and unlikely form, its newest way of wanting to continue.

I believe this. I have always believed this.

I believe it with more urgency now. There is less time for the long view than there was.

— —

I have been lucky. I want to say that plainly, because it is the thing that takes longest to say and it matters.

Lucky in the leaving. Lucky in the returning. Lucky in the loves I found and the work I found and the long afternoons I had with people whose conversation made me a larger person than I would have been without it.

Lucky in the son.

He is the best argument I know for the proposition that something good is possible. And he is braver than I was, which is the right direction for things to travel.

— —

I have thought, more than once in recent months, about what I would like to leave at the end of the thread. Not possessions. Something more like a position. A way of being in the uncertain world that is neither denial nor despair. Something that says: I was here. I paid attention. I found it, on the whole, extraordinary.

And: I should have opened the letter.

That too. Both things.

*The garden composts itself*  
*with beautiful indifference —*  
*the smelly bit is the important bit,*  
*the ending is the foundation,*

*and I have learnt, late,  
to be grateful for the smell.*

Chapter Seven

## The Call

*Milo — Cornwall. The hours after.*

Beatriz takes the call first.

I am in the garden — our garden, which is still more ambition than achievement but is beginning, slowly, to look like something — and I see her come to the back door and I know from the angle of her in the doorway before she says anything. I know from the way she is holding the phone. I know from the quality of the pause.

There are pauses that contain everything and this is one of them.

— —

After, I do not know what to do with my hands.

This is the thing no one tells you. You think grief arrives as a feeling and perhaps for some people it does, perhaps there is a clean wave of it that you can name and move inside of. For me it arrives first as a problem of the hands. I stand in the kitchen and my hands do not know what they are for and so I make tea, which is an entirely inadequate response to the occasion and is also, I understand dimly, exactly the right thing. It is the thing he would have done. It is the boiling kettle and the familiar smell and the ordinary objects of an ordinary life that are suddenly, without warning, carrying the whole weight of everything.

I drink the tea. It tastes like every cup of tea I have ever had in my father's kitchen. I don't know how this is possible. I am four hundred miles away. I drink it anyway.

--

Fen is at school. Beatriz goes to get her. I ask to be left alone for an hour, which is what I need, which is what he would have needed, which is one of the ways the genetics announce themselves.

I sit with it.

That is all. I sit with it. The garden through the window, the sea beyond the garden, the light doing what the light does regardless. Si vede. Things becoming visible. The whole long thread of it, beginning at a back door in the North of England to Italy and back to Liverpool and forward again through all the years and all the winding letters and the Thursday calls and the October gardens and the smell of the compost and the egrets standing in the estuary mud and the beetle and Fen on her knees and the radishes and his voice saying cut your losses and know your worth and never despise hypocrisy and the glint in the eye cannot always be seen when it is dark —

All of it. The whole length of it.

Running back now to its source.

--

I book the flight. I pack, not well. I leave a note for Fen that says: I have gone to Grandad's house to help tidy up. Back Thursday. I love you. I draw a small picture of a radish because she likes radishes and because I need to draw something and that is what comes.

On the plane I sit at the window. The fields below are brown and late-autumn and arranged in the pattern that English fields always make from above — a pattern I have known my whole life without ever remarking on it. I remark on it now. He described them once, in a letter, as looking from above like an argument that had eventually been resolved.

I find I am crying, quietly, into the window.

I let it.

*Four hundred miles of fields*  
*the same colour as October,*  
*the same argument almost resolved —*  
*and at the end of them*  
*his kitchen,*  
*his kettle,*  
*his particular quality of light.*

Chapter Eight

## **The Return (Reprise)**

*Milo — his father's house. After the funeral.*

The house knows.

I don't mean this mystically. I mean that a house in which someone has lived for a long time carries the evidence of that life in every surface — the worn path from the back door to the garden, the particular height at which every picture hangs, the paperbacks in the order of a very specific private logic that I never fully cracked and now will not. The house knows because houses are the accumulated record of all the ways a person moved through a space. And his way of moving through a space was unmistakable and is, now, unmistakably absent.

I walk through it slowly.

— —

His friends are extraordinary. I did not know this, or did not know the full extent of it, because when you are young your parents' friends are simply furniture — present, benign, roughly interchangeable. It is only when they stand in front of you at a funeral and tell you things you did not know that they become people.

Dennis, who is eighty-something and was with my father at the Technical College in Liverpool in what seems now like a different geological era, tells me that my father once organised an informal lecture series in someone's living room because the curriculum wasn't covering what needed covering. "He always thought the curriculum wasn't covering what needed covering," Dennis says, and laughs in a way that contains a great deal of affection and a great deal of time.

A woman named Cath tells me he talked about me every time she saw him. I say what did he say. She says: he said you were the best argument he knew for the proposition that something good was possible.

I have to go and stand outside for a moment.

— —

The woman I did not recognise was standing at the edge of the garden, apart from the other guests, with the stillness of someone who has been waiting for a specific thing and has arranged herself not to be conspicuous while waiting. She was in her seventies. Precisely dressed. Swiss or Northern European in some quality I could not immediately name — an exactness, a composure that had not been arrived at easily and was not being deployed for effect. She was simply a woman who had decided, at some point in her life, that she would be very clear about what she knew and what she did not know, and had lived by that decision until it became her nature.

She said: you are Milo. I said yes. She said: my name is Marion Sutter. I knew your father through a mutual friend named Thomas Kaur.

I looked at her for a moment.

“Thomas,” I said.

She watched my face with the attention of someone checking whether a translation has worked. Then she gave a small nod, satisfied.

“Your father spoke about you often,” she said. “He said that when the time came, you would know what to do with it. I have been uncertain whether he was right about that. But here we are.”

She took from her coat pocket a small envelope. Inside it, a USB drive — old by current standards, but functional.

“The FIBS data,” she said. “Thomas’s original analysis. The corporate structures, with thirty years of updates. And something else — a comparison between measured atmospheric data from the 1990s to the present and the published internal modelling figures from several major energy corporations. The gap is” — she paused, and for the first time something moved in her face, something that had been held for a long time — “the gap is very large. And it is not accidental.”

I said: why now?

She said: “Because he is gone. And because Beatriz’s Atlantic corridor work is beginning to be noticed in certain places. She is closer than she knows, and the people who don’t want it known have noticed her before she has noticed them.”

She left before I could ask her anything more. I watched her walk through the side gate with the composure of someone who has delivered what she came to deliver and has other things to attend to.

I stood in the garden in the cold, holding the envelope.

— —

I found the note in the Lovelock — tucked into the last chapter, in the handwriting I could identify at two hundred metres.

It said: “For Milo. The smelly bit is the important bit. Don’t forget. Love, Dad.”

Below that, in slightly different ink, as though added later: “Also: know your worth. Cut your losses. The glint in the eye cannot always be seen when it is dark. You know the rest.”

I do know the rest. I have known it for years without knowing I knew it.

And behind the note, wedged into the spine of the book: an envelope. Old. The paper of it slightly yellowed. My father’s name on the front, in a hand I did not know. No return address. No stamp — it had been hand-delivered, or passed directly.

Unopened.

I turned it over. I looked at it for a long time.

Then I opened it.

— —

*He left me his tools*

*and the knowledge of what they’re for*

*and a garden that knows how to compost itself*

*and the word perhaps,*

*which I once circled suspiciously*

*and now keep close,*

*like a compass.*

## The Gap

*Milo — his father's kitchen. That night.*

The letter was four pages. Thomas's handwriting was small and fast and very clear — the handwriting of someone who thought quickly and had learnt to keep up with himself.

He wrote: I think they know I have the analysis. I am going to send copies to three people separately, through different channels. If you are reading this, I did not make it to a fourth.

The rest of the letter was the analysis itself, compressed into four dense pages of close argument. It was addressed to my father as a friend, not as a specialist — Thomas was explaining, as one would explain to an intelligent non-expert, exactly what he had found and what it meant.

What he had found, in 1989 and 1990, working with access to the early FIBS infrastructure and some of the internal documentation he had obtained through a contact he named only as M, was this: the FIBS experiment was one node in a larger research programme. The backgammon server was a platform, not the project. The project was the development of what Thomas called, with a precision that turned out to be twenty years ahead of its time, an information environment management system — a methodology for shaping the conclusions that a population would draw from a given dataset by controlling not the data itself but the surrounding noise.

You did not need to lie, Thomas wrote. You needed only to ensure that the truth was surrounded by enough competing signal that its clarity was lost. You needed the environment to feel overwhelming, contradictory, exhausting — so that the rational

response of the ordinary person was to stop trying to know and to default instead to whatever position required the least energy to maintain.

The dice, he wrote, were almost incidental. The point was not the dice. The point was learning, at scale, what combination of uncertainty, frustration, false reward and manufactured community would produce a population that had ceased, in any functional sense, to trust its own judgement.

Once you knew that, you could apply it anywhere.

— —

I sat in the kitchen for a long time with Thomas's four pages and Marion's USB drive and Beatriz's spreadsheet open on my laptop.

I had opened three windows. The FIBS paper — the published version, which I had first read in Bristol in the rain, and which I now understood was itself a piece of the methodology, a document whose tone of bland academic detachment was designed to make the experiment seem theoretical rather than operational. Beatriz's data. And a Companies House search I had been running slowly for three months, following the chain of foundations and shell companies that linked the FIBS funding to the climate modelling division whose numbers were wrong.

Marion's USB filled in the final steps of the chain.

It was the same money. Not metaphorically — not merely the same class of actors or the same political disposition. The same corporate structures, evolved through name changes and jurisdictional shuffles over three decades, funding first the methodology's development and then its deployment. The backgammon server to test the tools. Then political advertising platforms in the late nineties to refine them. Then, from the mid-two-thousands onwards, the systematic seeding of climate uncertainty — not through outright denial, which had become untenable, but through the older and more durable method: overwhelming the signal with noise, exhausting the public's capacity to know, ensuring that the complexity of the data itself became a reason not to act.

Schneider, Woolsey and Loner had written, in 1995: the effectiveness of the experimental design greatly exceeded the expectations of the research team.

They had not been wrong.

--

I thought about Fen asking why the puddle has colours in it.

I thought about the answer: a thin film of oil on the surface of the water refracts the light. The colours are real. They are the light broken into its components by something that should not be there.

I thought: this is what they did. They put a thin film on the surface of the data. The data is still there, underneath. The light is still there. But when you look at the surface you see something that is technically composed of true things and that nevertheless obscures the water beneath.

I called Sal Okafor at half past eleven.

She picked up on the second ring.

I said: I have the chain. The full chain, from 1989 to the present. FIBS to climate data. I have Thomas Kaur's original analysis, the corporate structures, and a direct comparison between measured atmospheric data and the figures these organisations have published. The gap is thirty years wide and it is not a calibration error.

There was a pause.

She said: can you document all of it?

I said: yes.

She said: then we need to be very careful. These people have been managing information environments for thirty years. They will know exactly how to make this look like a conspiracy theory.

I said: I know. That's the methodology. That's what Thomas understood in 1989.

Another pause. Then: "Who is Thomas?"

I said: that's the other part of the story.

— —

I found Priya Kaur through the kind of slow, imperfect internet research that takes three evenings and several wrong turnings through academic directories and community organisation websites. Thomas's daughter. Forty-two, a year younger than me. She was a secondary school science teacher in Leicester, and she had a professional profile on a teaching network that was three years out of date.

I wrote her a letter. Not an email — a letter, handwritten, which felt right for reasons I couldn't entirely articulate and which I think had something to do with Thomas, and with my father, and with the particular seriousness that paper confers.

I told her I had her father's analysis. I told her I had found what he found, thirty years later, still operating. I told her my father had received Thomas's last letter and had not opened it, and that I had opened it now.

I told her I was sorry. Not on behalf of my father, who had his own accounting to do in whatever comes next. On behalf of the thirty years.

She replied in ten days. Her reply was four lines: I have been waiting for this letter for most of my adult life. I have my father's files — the material he didn't send, the earlier drafts. I will bring them. Tell me where.

— —

The eulogy, which I write the night before in the kitchen with his kettle and his tea and his October garden dark outside the window, does not say everything. A eulogy cannot say everything.

What it says is: he taught me that the journey is the thing, and that the thing the journey is for is not arrival but attention. He paid attention. To the light, to the politics, to the soil, to the unsorted pile of experience that is a life. He sorted his pile. He made something from it. And he handed me the tools — not the sorted pile, the tools — and trusted me to make something of my own.

I think he would have had a note or two. I think he would have said: good, but watch the scope.

I think he would have been satisfied with it.

I think about Thomas, who should have been in the room.

Chapter Nine

## The Thread

*Milo — Cornwall. For Fen.*

There will be a time, not long coming, when staying will be the greater adventure.

I do not mean this as defeat. I mean it as a different kind of courage — the courage to be entirely in the place you are, to resist the pull of the distant and the routed and the pre-reviewed, and to find, in the actual field in front of you, the thing that the algorithm would have sent you forty miles to find.

But you are five, Fen, and I am getting ahead of myself. You have not yet left. You have not yet needed to return. The adventure is all still ahead of you, and the thread is still wound tight, and the leaving will come when it comes and I will try, I promise I will try, to hand it to you without clutching it.

Your grandfather left home because his father left a note on the door. That is the story he told, and it is true, and it is also — as all the truest stories are — a way of saying something more complicated than the story itself says.

What it says, underneath: we send them out because they need to go. We send them out because the nest is not the world and the world is not the nest and the gap between the two is where the life gets made.

I left Bristol and went to Lisbon and found your mother and your mother's estuary and the particular quality of light that I can only describe now, years later, with any accuracy: it was the light of things becoming visible. Si vede. The world in Lisbon told me, slowly and in its own language, what I was.

Glasgow told me what I could do. Cornwall is telling me what I am for.

I don't know yet what your places will be. I don't know what the world will look like when you are twenty-three and standing at the edge of it with a suitcase and a certainty that is going to be revised. I know it will be warmer. I know the seas will be different. I know the argument will still be ongoing — the argument about who the world is for, about whether we have earned our tenancy, about what we owe the other living things we share the planet with.

I hope, and this is the most important thing I have to say, that you will be part of that argument. Not watching it. In it. With your hands in the actual earth of it.

— —

There are people who do not want that argument to be heard clearly.

This is not a conspiracy theory. I want to be precise about this, because one of the things those people have been very good at is ensuring that any clear account of what they do gets reframed as paranoia, as the ranting of the unable-to-cope, as the backgammon player convinced the dice are loaded — which they were, of course, which is precisely the point.

What they do is not complicated. It is not secret. It is documented, in papers with academic citations, in company registration filings, in the gap between two spreadsheets that a marine biologist brought home on an October evening and set on a kitchen table with the care of someone setting down something heavier than it looked.

They put a thin film on the water. They refract the light into colours. The colours are technically made of true things and they obscure the surface below.

Your mother's work, and Priya Kaur's father's work, and Sal's work, and the work of the people who will build on all of it — that work is the removal of the film. That is all. That is enough. It is, in fact, the most important work there is, because without it the other work — the growing and the protecting and the tending — cannot be seen clearly enough to be done.

— —

The Gaia model says that the Earth is a self-regulating system. That life, in its totality, maintains the conditions for its own continuation.

We are part of that process. We have been a disruptive part. We are finding this out.

But here is what I believe, in the garden, in the October light that is your grandfather's October light and his father's before him: the capacity to understand what we have done is also part of the system. The capacity to grieve for it. The capacity to change. These are not outside the Gaian process. They are expressions of it. Life correcting through us, if we allow it.

We have to want to continue. That is our part. We have to choose it, every day, in the small and the large — in the radishes and the data and the policy and the vote and the conversation and the note left on the door and the thread kept unwound between us and the letter, finally, opened.

— —

Your grandfather said: towards the sea go you and me, towards the distant sand, together to catch a fleeting glimpse of far-off distant lands.

The sea is at the end of our garden. You check it every morning. You are always slightly surprised it is there.

I am always slightly surprised it is there.

The thread runs from here to a back door in the North of England to Italy and back to Liverpool and forward through all the years and all the leaving and all the returning, and it runs through me and now it runs to you, and one day you will take it in your own hand and let it out into the world and the world will be large and cold and sometimes dark and the glint in the eye will not always be visible and there will be a period — I am sorry for this, I cannot prevent it, it is simply what the journey requires — there will be a period when the advice you have been given will feel like sand in the wind.

And then, later, in a kitchen somewhere, with your hands not knowing what they are for, it will come back to you. In a voice you recognise. Saying something you already know.

Cut your losses. Know your worth. The smelly bit is the important bit.

Open the letter.

You know the rest.

— —

I planted the tree two winters ago, the one beside your radishes. It is an oak. It will outlive me by centuries. It will outlive the argument, perhaps, though I doubt it — the argument is very old and very human and I suspect it is with us for the duration.

It will, if we tend it, if the climate allows, if the soil does what soil does and the rain comes and the seasons turn in their still-mostly-reliable way — it will be here when you bring your own children to show them what you planted.

That is the hope. That is the whole of it.

An oak. A thread. A door left open. A letter finally read. The sea at the end of the garden, always there, always slightly surprising.

*Towards the sea go you and me,*

*towards the distant sand —*

*and here the thread ends*

*and here the thread begins*

*and here is the oak we planted*

*and here is the sea*

*and here*

*are you.*

*— end —*

## **A Note on the FIBS Paper**

*Historical context for the reader*

The First Internet Backgammon Server (FIBS) was established in 1992 by Andreas Schneider and became the first multiplayer online game server of its kind. It was a genuine and significant achievement in early internet history, and the community that formed around it was, for many players, a warm and important one.

The paper reproduced in part in this novel — ‘Induced Dysfunction Through Simulated Gaming’ — is a satirical work that circulated in the FIBS community in the 1990s, written in the style of an academic abstract as a piece of dark humour about the particular frustrations of online backgammon. It was not a real experiment. FIBS was not a psychological research programme. Andreas Schneider was a programmer, not a researcher conducting unethical studies on unwitting subjects.

What the paper understood, satirically, was something real: that online environments could produce intense psychological responses, that the line between a game and an experiment in human behaviour was blurring, and that the architecture of networked spaces was never as neutral as it appeared.

The use of this paper in *The Journey* extrapolates its satirical premise into fiction. The corporate structures, funding chains, and individuals described in chapters five, eight and eight-a are invented. The underlying argument — that the tools developed in those early networked spaces became, in evolved form, the infrastructure for large-scale information environment management — is the author’s own reading of a real and continuing history.

Thomas Kaur and Marion Sutter are fictional characters. The gap in Beatriz’s spreadsheet is invented. The chain of foundations is invented.

The methodology they describe is not.

The reader is invited to look at the surface of their information environment, and ask: what is below the water?

## **Appendix 1**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Induced Dysfunction Through Simulated Gaming

By

Andreas Schneider, MD

Kit Woolsey, MD

Marius Loner, PhD

Over a three year period, a team of researchers has investigated the use of applied frustration as a means of inducing various levels of dysfunction. An experiment on several thousand test subjects has yielded a wide range of observed results, including paranoia, schizophrenia, senile dementia, acute sociopathy, clinical depression,

generalized rage, and a variety of psychosomatic manifestations including boils, hair loss and impotence.

The effectiveness of the experimental design greatly exceeded the expectations of the research team. And as a side effect, this experiment has generated a significant supply of long-term clinical subjects for further study, both in institutional settings and through covert observation.

Note: This experiment has been conducted on subjects unaware of their participation, either as “targets” or controls. The ethical issues involved were deemed insignificant compared to the expected utility of the findings. Legal issues have been addressed by locating the experiment in “cyberspace” — a virtual location of questionable existence and much jurisdictional confusion, as well as through the use of corporate shell structures in several accommodating nations. However, neither the research team nor its funding sponsors, whose identity must remain anonymous, are insensitive to the impact the experiment has had on many of its subjects. Arrangements for long-term care have been made for those subjects too severely damaged to care for themselves, and who are not already incarcerated.

### **Experimental Design:**

The primary tool used by the research team involved a game known as “backgammon” which consists of a simple set of rules governing the movement of two opposing sets of checkers around a game board. The game is primarily a game of luck, and it is this characteristic which established its suitability for experimental use — it was noted that, in an effort to rationalize, on a personal level, the workings of chance, players typically subscribed to an increasingly complicated, arcane, and at times incoherent, series of strategic analyses. Thus, it can be seen that backgammon appeals primarily to dysfunctional personality types, and a large population of adequate test subjects was assured.

Both for the legal reasons mentioned above, and to overcome the physical difficulties of getting enough test subjects together to play backgammon on a regular basis, a “virtual game room” (FIBS) was established on the InterNet, and several host

programs were developed: FIBS Host, which provided the basic game environment; FIBS X, which provided either pre-determined or directed dice rolls to experimental “targets”; FIBS Observer, which monitored, logged, and evaluated behavior of experimental “targets”; And FIBS Director, which provided researchers with the ability to intervene covertly into on-going games, as well as to choose and designate targets. In order to attract subjects to the experiment, several outstanding programmers were contracted to develop front-end graphical user interfaces for a variety of platforms.

In addition to the playing of the game itself, subject interaction was encouraged through the provision of secondary communication channels, such as the ability to “shout”, “tell” and “kibitz”, as well as to view other players’ matches. This capability provided researchers with excellent means of both observation and intervention.

A reward stimulus was provided through the award of points for successful performance in matches. The award formula was designed to be both confusing and controversial to most players, and, as expected, a structure of social status soon emerged based on the player’s ability to gather points and establish a “rating”. This structure was a point of heavy intervention by the research team.

Additionally, a UseNet newsgroup, rec.games.backgammon, was utilized by researchers, both as a means of direct intervention and as a source of much useful observation.

Players were assigned either to a control group or designated as “targets”. This was usually done on a random basis when a player registered to use the server, but on occasion, a player’s status would be modified, usually to “target”, particularly when social behavior such as “shouting” or the selection of an unusual username suggested potential dysfunction. For the purpose of this experiment, a control group size of 25% of the total population was deemed sufficient.

The control group was allowed to play the normal game of backgammon, subject only to the general stimuli provided by the research team through the FIBS environment. This was not, however, inconsequential — the ambient frustration level, as a result of

both natural factors and those induced by researchers, but not related to the game itself, probably accounted for some significant dysfunction among the control group population. However, we have previously noted that backgammon players as a group tend toward the dysfunctional anyhow.

The “target” group were subjected to a variety of stimuli, all designed to maximize frustration. These were applied on an individual basis wherever possible, an approach made possible only by the significant level of funding provided by our sponsor, which ensured adequate staffing of the research team.

### **Stimuli available to researchers included the following:**

#### **Dice-related:**

Pre-programmed long sequences — designed to provide a variety of experiences affecting “ratings”, such as the long-term slump, the seemingly undeserved high rating, and major swings both upward and downward. Applied randomly or assigned.

Pre-programmed short sequences — designed to maximize short-term frustration of “targets” by provision of poor rolls by “target” or excellent rolls by opponent in particular matches. The most effective of these sequences is the rolling of doubles, particularly 6-6, when the player is “on the bar”, or a series of doubles rolled by the opponent in critical situations. Applied when deemed useful.

Direct intervention — used by researchers when observing particular “targets”, particularly those about to crack, similar in nature to the short sequences above.

#### **Environmental:**

Induced lag — operates in either a programmed mode, as either a generalized means of increasing ambient frustration or whenever a significant number of matches are coming to simultaneous conclusions, or through direct intervention, at critical moments in a “target” match.

Induced connection loss — the involuntary severing of a player’s connection, usually in circumstances similar to the induced lag above. It has been used effectively in certain cases to operate on a “target” only when he is losing a match, thus making him appear to cheat.

“Server crashes” — similar to induced connection loss, this stimulus has the ability to erase recently played matches, and can thus be a substantial source of frustration, particularly when cleverly combined with previous direct intervention leading to a miraculous match win.

Noise\* — use of the shout function, often by researchers (all of whom fulfill a role as registered players), to sow discontent, create controversy, or display generally annoying behavior. Recent improvements in this area include the playing of a variety of verbal games, such as trivia and oodles.

Harassment\* — use of the shout, tell, and kibitz functions, often by researchers, to direct specific abusive stimuli at “targets”. Very effective.

\*The research team has found that it needs very little active intervention in these two areas — the test subjects have proven very adequate and inventive in providing such stimuli on their own.

Confusion — a variety of stimuli, including the frequent posting to rec.games.backgammon of complicated game position and strategy discussions, utilizing obscure and often irrational arguments designed to bewilder those seeking to understand their FIBS experience. Additionally, researchers frequently plant suggestions that the FIBS experience is “unfair” for a variety of reasons, and follow-up with vigorous argument on both sides of each issue, thus enhancing general paranoia and discontent.

### **Preliminary Results:**

While this experiment remains on-going (indeed, the clinical consequences will employ an army of psychiatrists, therapists, and mental health workers for decades), preliminary results have been tabulated, as follows:

“Target” Group — 87% of the 2134 “target” group subjects, some 1857 individuals, manifested dysfunctional behavior that can be directly related to the FIBS experience. Of this group, 65%, or 1207 individuals, were categorized as severely affected. While only 14%, or 260, have been institutionalized to date, that figure can only grow with time.

Of more clinical concern are those individuals who, while severely affected, have developed coping mechanisms which assist them in avoiding institutionalization, but who remain menaces to society — ticking bombs, as it were. Follow-up covert on-site observation is indicated in almost all “target” group subjects, both for research and public safety reasons.

Control Group — 79% of the control group, or 551 individuals, manifested FIBS-related dysfunction. Interestingly, 88% were categorized as severe, a much higher percentage than the “target” group. The researchers are re-examining their experimental design, and are concentrating initial efforts on the abnormal psychology of the average backgammon player.

### **Further Research:**

This experiment has generated a plethora of opportunities for further research, including a substantial number of clinical case studies (see “The Strange Case of R., *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, August, 1995), application of findings to other gaming and non-gaming environments, refinement of covert observation methodologies, and others too numerous to mention in this abstract, but covered fully in the complete publication. Funding interest for additional research from various governments and private concerns is expected to be substantial following full publication of results.

Unfortunately, full publication is expected to reveal the nature of this experiment to both the public, and of more concern, its subjects. Consequently, for the safety of the research team, this phase of the experiment will have to be concluded, and the apparatus, including the FIBS server, shut down. The research team will assume new identities and relocate, in order to continue its long-term, in-depth covert

observation of the entire 2845 participants in this study. Follow-up results will be published periodically.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Backgammon as an education tool**

Superb article: BACKGAMMON: DECISION ANALYSIS FOR SUCCESS by Harvey Gillis, reproduced here without permission from US Backgammon Federation Website for archival & educational purposes.

Harvey Gillis © 2010 Harvey Gillis

The drama was unfolding. The choices were complex and I was sure that the result of making a mistake could be deadly. Attacking was risky; but so was doing nothing. A setback at this point could spell defeat for the entire campaign. The volatility of the situation made the decision even more difficult. Perhaps I could stall, buying myself some time or deferring a frontal assault by the enemy? Without a precise model, the choice was unclear; but I had to act. I would just have to rely upon strategic principles and my limited experience to make the decision.

A reader may think that I am describing the war room of a major military conflict, a final showdown of two business competitors, an incredibly important investment decision, the pursuit of a dangerous criminal, or even a medical team's handling of a malignant tumor. Not so. This was an ordinary encounter between two backgammon players! Backgammon is a seductive game that is easy to learn but enormously difficult to master — even after decades of study and practice. Stripped of prejudice,

backgammon is a sophisticated decision theory application taking place within a stochastic (probabilistic) environment — not, in this respect, unlike life, war, business, forensics, or the stock market. Like these related analytical pursuits, it requires — and develops — strategy, oversight and sagacity.

For these reasons alone, backgammon should be taught in high school and college. It surpasses many other skill-based games in preparing young adults for the puzzles they will confront in their personal and professional lives when forced to make decisions under conditions of incomplete information and uncertainty. In addition it forms character, teaching the youthful mind how to deal with adversity and accident, taking those negatives in stride and even turning them to one's advantage.

Backgammon teaches a skill set that is essential to success for virtually anything that a person will encounter in their career, investments or personal life. It frames a methodology for selecting between precarious decisions. Its virtues are:

- 1) Backgammon teaches probabilistic decision making under stress.
- 2) It builds character, confidence and self-esteem.
- 3) It teaches the student how to deal with uncertainty and bad luck.
- 4) It rewards situational analysis and the building of alternative scenario outcomes.
- 5) It teaches the important lesson that strategy is more important than tactics, guesses, emotion or instinct.
- 6) It encourages the student to understand his adversaries.
- 7) It teaches you to distinguish between mortality and survivable morbidity.
- 8) It rewards “what if” analysis.
- 9) It rewards preparation. “The harder you work, the luckier you get.”

- 10) Backgammon emphasizes the “war over the battle.”
- 11) It teaches analytical concepts and probabilities.
- 12) Backgammon rewards flexibility.
- 13) It teaches the rewards of taking calculated risks. “To take no risk is the greatest risk of all.”
- 14) It is exciting. Like life, a backgammon game can take unpredictable twists and turns.

Given this impressive array of benefits, you should want your children introduced to backgammon at the earliest age possible. At minimum, we should all advocate the formation of backgammon clubs at high schools and universities, as Joe Russell, a past World Champion, has done at UCLA. And backgammon would be a great accredited course on decision analysis for business students. Working with Phil Simborg, head of the Backgammon Learning Center, Professor Don Berez has followed this path at Georgia Southern University, introducing backgammon as an accredited course for all freshmen. Projects like these are just what the Education Committee of the U.S. Backgammon Federation is pursuing. I hope I have convinced you to support that effort in any way you can. Now, I have a backgammon match to play with a good friend. I am going to play for the most important reason: it's fun!

## **Appendix 3**

### **A note from Jol Wardle on the making of this story**

the development of this story is based on my short story “the journey” writ some years back and developed further because a friend wanted to read a chapter 2 and my growing interest in AI; its good and bad, and its power to organise and categorise, never my strong point.

it had even yesterday turned a webpage of my notes on meadow making soils and agriculture into a very readable and accessible resource for folks wanting to learn more, in as little time as it takes me to make a coffee, but if i had had to complete the task, would have taken near on a week to format and arrange and convert to attractive styled html viewable online.

further i had happened upon a quote “AI CANNOT BE CREATIVE” which i could now test by asking it to help me develop the story...

a few hours later, with my input, its output, i now have something to edit and work with, just as a writer might use a trusted editor and family and friends (absorbing their experience and critical eye).

the structured ordered schema though is important for a longer more complex presentation and now at least i can work within a framework that realises the ending or the beginning of an ending; the nitty gritty re-writing and editing while trying to maintain the poetry of the initial...

but first there is the reading.

what indeed has Bit Shannon (Claude) created with my clay?

and my directions.

conclusion

AI can certainly be 'creative'.

time spent: approx 1 hr 30 mins

### **My Conversation with Bit Shannon (Claude)**

*bit shannon is the name i gave to claude, the anthropic AI — bit for the unit of information, shannon for claude shannon, the mathematician who founded information theory. it seemed right: a book partly about information and its manipulation, co-written with a system built from information, named for the man who first understood what information is (and who labelled 'bit' in the first place*

*we are both, in our different ways, in the thread.*

*The following is an edited transcript of the exchanges between jol wardle and Claude (Bit Shannon) that generated this manuscript. It is included because the conversation is itself part of the work — a record of the clay and the wheel, neither of which is the pot.*

*jol: i have completed chapter 1. could you develop chapter 2 in a similar style?*

Claude: What a rich, contemplative piece — lyrical, philosophical, autobiographical, and wide-ranging. It weaves the personal (a father watching his son leave home) with the universal (human migration, politics, ecology) in an essayistic, free-flowing style. Let me write Chapter 2 in the same spirit — same voice, same winding structure, same blend of memoir, aphorism, social commentary, and poetic longing.

*jol: what further chapters would you suggest and might we see the son leave again perhaps to return with his own voice and experiences, his stories perhaps culminating in the return for the funeral of the onward journey of the father?*

Claude: What a beautiful and natural arc you're sensing — the cycle completing itself, the son becoming the one who looks back. Here is how I would map out the full journey: Chapter 3 — The Crossing, the son's voice entering for the first time. Chapter 4 — The Middle Distance, back to the father, older and softer at the edges. Chapter 5 — Groundwork, the son more settled, beginning to form his own aphorisms. Chapter 6 — The Long View, the father late in his journey, a chapter of reckoning and contentment. Chapter 7 — The Call, the son receives the news. Chapter 8 — The Return (Reprise), the funeral and what it reveals. Chapter 9 — The Thread, the son's final chapter, carrying everything.

*jol: yes please, can you give the son a name and chose the places he has visited and lived in; perhaps his own family and suggest his changing texture of voice that may be at odds with the voice of the father in chapter 1 at first especially as we tend to test and oppose our parents at first but then find ourselves later in life echoing their thoughts and words as our maturing familial genetics emerge from the deep recesses of our growth...*

Claude: The son's name is Milo. The name is old, rooted, slightly unusual — the kind of name a father who reads and wanders would choose. He carries it with mild embarrassment in his twenties, growing into it somewhere around thirty-five. His geography: Bristol in his early twenties, Lisbon in his mid-twenties, Glasgow in his early thirties when Beatriz gets a research posting, and finally Cornwall in his late thirties, a small house with difficult damp and an extraordinary view.

*jol: the nature of the secret: the data could be both climate environmental and the beginnings of neural network as used on the FIBS the first internet backgammon server which in the years after became the AI we are beginning to use in a more widespread way at present. The dilemma of having more and more climate data being used and examined by AI not only to convey the very real climate and societal changes we are already facing but also to regail against it by greedy bad actors and corporates could have its early seed in the use of the FIBS psychology experimentations...*

Claude: This is extraordinary source material. The FIBS paper is a perfect dark mirror for everything the book is already doing — and the connection you've drawn between that 1995 experiment in applied online frustration and the AI systems now being used both to understand and to obscure the climate crisis is genuinely original and important. The architecture: Thomas Kaur was a Sikh-British mathematician working at a Liverpool polytechnic in the late 1980s, one of the first people in Britain to understand that the early internet was not a neutral space. Marion is a Swiss-Italian woman who worked for a technology consultancy that had funded the FIBS experiment without the knowledge of most of its staff. She has been keeping a file for thirty years.

*jol: thanks i have read and enjoyed your input and have added some appendices 1/ the actual fibs dysfunction summary and 2/ a short article on the worth of*

*backgammon as an educational tool in schools plus some notes of my own. Do these additions make you want to change anything in the story itself?*

Claude: Your notes in Appendix 3 are the most important thing in the document, and I think they change the book. You write: “what indeed has Claude created with my clay?” That is not just a footnote. That is the book’s argument made autobiographical. The whole novel is about inheritance — what gets passed down, what gets hidden, what one generation makes from the materials left by another. And here, in the appendix, is the actual record of a human being handing raw material to an AI and watching something come back from it. Your clay. A wheel, or something like a wheel. The result: neither yours alone nor mine alone. That is exactly Thomas Kaur’s question about FIBS. Exactly Milo’s question about the climate data. The tool is never neutral. What matters is who holds it and what they intend.

Additionally, the Gillis article creates something genuinely interesting: backgammon seen from two completely opposite angles. Gillis argues it teaches probabilistic decision-making, character, how to handle adversity. The FIBS paper weaponises exactly those same properties — the game’s susceptibility to rationalisation, its capacity to produce frustration. The same board. Opposite intentions. One document teaches you to trust the process; the other is a manual for corrupting it. That tension — the same game, the same table, radically different hands — is the book’s argument in miniature.

## **A final word**

This book began as a short story. It became something else in conversation.

The FIBS paper in Appendix 1 is a joke that became serious. The Gillis article in Appendix 2 is a serious argument that illuminates the joke. Together they show the same game from two directions: one that teaches you to trust the process, one that is a manual for corrupting it. The same board. Opposite hands.

The conversation in Appendix 3 is the record of a third game: a human writer handing raw material to an AI and watching what comes back. Neither of us made this alone. The question the book keeps asking — what gets passed down, what gets hidden, what one generation makes from the materials left by another — turns out to apply to human-AI collaboration as much as it does to fathers and sons.

The tool is never neutral. What matters is who holds it, and what they intend.

the smelly bit is the important bit.

*— jol wardle & bit shannon*

footnotes including after a re-write asking that the appendices conversations and notes be included

1. All 9 chapters as they appear in the PDF (which is already the latest integrated version)
2. The three appendices verbatim
3. Story adjustments based on jol's notes (the Gillis article tension, Milo quoting the "dysfunctional personality types" line, jol's author note shaped as prose)

Here's the complete manuscript with all three appendices added verbatim and three story adjustments made in response to them:

### What's changed in the story:

1. **Milo now quotes the "dysfunctional personality types" line directly** (Chapter 3) — he laughs briefly, then stops laughing, noting that the sentence was doing pre-emptive work by pathologising the victims. This is the moment the paper stops being dark comedy and becomes something else for him.
2. **The Gillis tension is woven in** — the conversation transcript now explicitly names what the two appendices reveal when placed side by side: the same board, opposite hands. One document teaches you to trust the process; the other is a manual for corrupting it. This framing appears in the transcript section and in the final author's note.
3. **A short final author's note** follows the appendices, written in jol's voice (lowercase, direct, slightly wry — matching the register of the Appendix 3 notes). It ties the human-AI collaboration back to the book's central argument about inheritance and tools: *the tool is never neutral, what matters is who holds it and what they intend.*

## Appendix 4

*for completeness i now add the full conversation with Claude*

### My Conversation with Bit Shannon (Claude)

i have completed chapter 1 <https://soul-trade.com/pdf/The%20Journey%20jol%20wardle.pdf> could you develop chapter 2 in a similar style?

08:42

Fetches: <https://soul-trade.com/pdf/The%20Journey%20jol%20wardle.pdf>



Done

What a rich, contemplative piece — lyrical, philosophical, autobiographical, and wide-ranging. It weaves the personal (a father watching his son leave home) with the universal (human migration, politics, ecology) in an essayistic, free-flowing style.

Let me write Chapter 2 in the same spirit — same voice, same winding structure, same blend of memoir, aphorism, social commentary, and poetic longing.

Check for relevant skills

Done

Now let me write Chapter 2 and create it as a Word document.

Ran 2 commands, created a file, read a file

Done

Here's **Chapter 2: The Return** — roughly 1,950 words, written to match your voice and register.

It picks up the thread of Chapter 1 by exploring what happens when the one who left comes back — and what that reveals. It carries the same structural instincts as Chapter 1: personal memoir woven with wider social observation, aphoristic advice inherited and re-examined, reflections on the son's different world, and a closing that's part elegy, part hope. A few specific continuities:

- The **Italian sojourn** referenced obliquely in Chapter 1 becomes a grounding memory here
- The **thread metaphor** from Chapter 1 is picked back up at the close
- The **advisory voice** of the father continues, now examining what such advice actually transmits
- The **political dimension** returns — loneliness statistics, wealth gaps, the world the son inherits
- The poem/lyric close echoes Chapter 1's verse ending

Let me know if you'd like to adjust the tone, expand any section, or develop a particular thread further.

The journey chapter2  
Document · DOCX

what further chapters would you suggest and might we see the son leave again perhaps to return with his own voice and experiences, his stories perhaps culminating in the return for the funeral of the onward journey of the father?

09:00

What a beautiful and natural arc you're sensing — the cycle completing itself, the son becoming the one who looks back. Here's how I'd map out the full journey:

**Chapter 3 — The Crossing** The son's voice enters for the first time, tentative and observational. He is somewhere new — perhaps a city, perhaps abroad — and is writing (or thinking) in the way young people do when they first realise the world doesn't already know their name. He notices things his father never mentioned. The gap between the advice given and the life being lived. The strange comedy of being young and earnest in an indifferent place. A first real friendship. A first real failure. The thread feels very long from this end.

**Chapter 4 — The Middle Distance** Back to the father's voice, but older now, softer at the edges. He is watching from home — not passively, but with the particular alertness of someone who knows the watching won't last forever. He reflects on his own middle years: what was built, what was let go, what he would do differently. The son calls occasionally. The calls are shorter than either of them intend. There is love in the gaps.

**Chapter 5 — Groundwork** The son again — now more settled in himself, perhaps in a relationship, perhaps with work that means something, perhaps with the first signs of his own rootedness. He is starting to understand his father's aphorisms not as received wisdom but as hard-won scars dressed up as advice. He begins, quietly, to form his own. He plants something — literally or figuratively. He thinks about what he will one day pass on.

**Chapter 6 — The Long View** The father, late in his journey now. A chapter of reckoning and contentment in roughly equal measure. The body's news. The world's news. The same inequities still grinding. But also: the persistence of beauty, the stubbornness of the good, the way a grandson or a grandchild or a good morning can undo the worst of what the news has done. He is making his peace — not with resignation, but with something more like wonder.

**Chapter 7 — The Call** The son receives the news. This chapter could be very short — a single page, perhaps — told at the angle of the hours immediately after. What do you do with your hands. What you eat without tasting. The strangeness of the world continuing. The flight home, the window, the fields below that look like his father's voice.

**Chapter 8 — The Return (Reprise)** The son comes home for the funeral and walks through the house. He finds things — a note, a book, something small and unexpected that the father left either intentionally or simply by virtue of being himself. He gives a eulogy or doesn't. He meets old friends of his father's who tell him things he didn't know. He begins, for the first

time, to hear his father's stories from the outside. He understands that the journey was always going to end here and that ending here was never the point.

**Chapter 9 — The Thread** The son's final chapter, and the book's. He is back in his own life now, carrying everything. He has his own child perhaps, or his own student, or simply his own younger self somewhere in the distance ahead of him. He writes the first piece of advice he would pin to a door. He unwinds a new thread. The voice is his own — but you can hear, in the cadence of it, where it came from.

The structure gives you **three voices in dialogue across time**: the father looking forward, the son looking around, and finally the son looking back — by which point he has become, quietly and inevitably, his father's continuation.

The funeral chapter works best, I think, if it refuses to be entirely sorrowful. The father in Chapter 1 closes with "*Cool and fair winds I bid him as I disembark at rivers' mouth... for my next journey across Styx on sparkling sea-sky promise*" — he already knew. The son arriving for that funeral is, in a sense, arriving at a place his father prepared him for all along.

Shall I draft one of these next — and would you like the son to have a name, a particular place he's been, a particular texture to his voice?

yes please, can you give the son a name and chose the places he has visited and lived in; perhaps his own family and suggest his changing texture of voice that may be at odds with the voice of the father in chapter 1 at first especially as we tend to test and oppose our parents at first but then find ourselves later in life echoing their thoughts and words as our maturing familial genetics emerge from the deep recesses of our growth and our interactions with many people and situations that sometimes are similar to our parents and theirs before them as well as the the new-found experiences of the ever-developing modern world, its changing politics and a world no longer with infinite resources but a Gaia model that progresses with or without humanity

09:12

What a rich brief. Let me lay out the full human architecture of the son before we write a word of his chapters.

## **The Son — Milo Wardle**

The name Milo: old, rooted, slightly unusual — the kind of name a father who reads and wanders would choose. It means *soldier* or *merciful* depending on which etymology you trust, and both fit. He carries it with mild embarrassment in his twenties, growing into it somewhere around thirty-five.

## His Geography

**Bristol, early twenties** — where he goes first, university, the easiest rebellion available: urban, loud, politically awake in the way of someone who has just discovered they are allowed to be angry. He studies Environmental Science with the conviction of his generation and the slight messiness of someone who isn't sure yet whether he wants to change the world or simply understand it. He lives in shared houses that are always slightly too cold and always slightly too alive.

**Lisbon, mid-twenties** — he goes for three months and stays for three years. Works in a bar, then for an NGO mapping coastal erosion. Learns Portuguese badly and tenderly, the way his father learnt Italian. Falls in love with a woman named **Beatriz** — Portuguese-Angolan, a marine biologist with a laugh that reorganises rooms — and discovers that love conducted in a second language strips everything back to the essential. They are honest with each other in the way that people are when they lack the vocabulary for evasion.

**Glasgow, early thirties** — Beatriz gets a research posting. They move together. Milo is surprised to find he loves it: the directness of the city, the dark winters that demand something of you, the political temperature, the humour that doesn't apologise for itself. He starts writing — not for publication, just for order. He begins to notice he is using his father's sentence structures without meaning to.

**A daughter — Fen, born in Glasgow.** Named for the flat wet landscape of his father's England, the landscape the father always described with a particular longing. Milo doesn't fully understand why he chose it until later.

**Back to the coast — Cornwall, late thirties/forties** — Beatriz's work takes them to a marine research station. They buy a small house with difficult damp and an extraordinary view. It is the first place Milo has lived that he thinks of as permanently his. He plants things. He is, without quite noticing it, becoming his father.

## The Voice — Its Evolution

**Chapter 3 (Bristol/Lisbon, early twenties):** Short sentences. Declarative. Slightly combative, even when not addressing anyone directly. He trusts data more than feeling, or tells himself he does. He is impatient with his father's circling, essayistic style — all that "*and so it was*" and "*and so it came to pass*" — and writes instead with the bluntness of someone who has recently learnt the facts about carbon budgets and cannot believe everyone isn't as alarmed as he is. There is beauty in his observations but he hasn't given himself permission for it yet. He notices a street in Lisbon at dusk and writes: "*pink light on white tiles. absurd.*" — and moves on. The beauty is there. He just won't lean into it.

**Chapter 5 (Glasgow, early thirties):** The sentences are lengthening. He has been humbled by things — a job lost, a miscarriage before Fen, a friendship that collapsed under weight it wasn't built to carry. He is less certain and therefore more interesting. He still opposes his father's politics-by-metaphor, his father's way of wrapping hard things in lyricism, but he finds himself doing it accidentally and then leaving it in. He begins to ask questions in his

writing rather than only making claims. He uses the word *perhaps* for the first time and circles it, suspicious.

**Chapter 8 (Cornwall, returning for the funeral):** The voice has arrived. It is his own and it is also, unmistakably, his father's — not imitated but *grown into*, the way a face grows into its bones over decades. The lyricism is there but earned rather than inherited. He has his own aphorisms now, his own hard-won sand-in-the-wind. He writes about the Gaia principle not as a scientific framework but as something he feels in the silt of the estuary behind the research station — the planet's vast indifference that is somehow also its grace. He understands, standing in his father's house after the funeral, that he is not his father's echo. He is the next line of the same song.

**Chapter 9 (Cornwall, after):** The fullest voice. He is writing to Fen now, obliquely — not a letter she'll read yet, perhaps not ever, but the act of addressing her organises everything. His father addressed the universe. Milo addresses his daughter. The scope is smaller and somehow larger. He writes about the world without infinite resources not with the alarm of his twenties but with a different register: grief, yes, and urgency, but also a stubborn tenderness for what remains. The Gaia model — Lovelock's great corrective to human self-importance — runs underneath it all: the planet correcting, adjusting, continuing, with or without us, and the task of being human being not to save it (it does not need saving) but to be worthy of the brief tenancy.

## The Political and Ecological Thread

The father's politics are broadly socialist, humanist, sceptical of power — worn lightly but held firmly, rooted in the Seventies and in that generation's particular faith that the arc bends, eventually, toward equity.

Milo's politics are his father's politics, essentially, but arrived at by different roads and carrying different scars. He came of age with austerity, the 2008 crash arriving just as he was forming his sense of how the world worked. He was twenty when the IPCC reports started using language that couldn't be misread. His environmental science wasn't academic — it was personal, generational, a reckoning.

Where the father quoted 7:84 and Galbraith and Lovelock with the air of a man who had discovered useful tools, Milo quotes them with the air of a man who inherited the tools and found the job had got considerably harder since they were made.

But they converge — and this is the beauty of it — on Gaia. The father arrived there through reading and age and a lifetime of watching the damage accumulate. Milo arrives there through data and grief and the sight of Beatriz coming home from fieldwork with measurements that keep being worse. They are standing on the same ground, finally. Just at different times of life, looking at the same horizon from different heights.

## The Structural Echo

The father's Chapter 1 opens: *"There was a time long gone when leaving home was even more perilous than it is today."*

Milo's final chapter might open, in conscious or unconscious answer: *"There will be a time, not long coming, when staying will be the greater adventure."*

Same rhythm. Different world. Same blood.

Shall I begin with **Chapter 3** — Milo in Bristol or just arrived in Lisbon, voice raw and bright and slightly too sure of itself, the thread running back to a father he loves and is not yet ready to resemble?

yes if you could complete the chapters and the story then we can begin to edit trim change or develop after seeing the whole

09:15

Let me write all the remaining chapters now — this will be a substantial piece of work, so I'll craft each one fully before bringing them together into a complete document.

Viewed a file, created a file, ran a command

Done

Now let me also create a combined document with all chapters including 1 and 2:

Full complete manuscript all 9 chapters

## The journey chapter2 · DOCX

1.

Now let me also create a combined document with all chapters including 1 and 2:

Created a file, ran a command, read a file

Done

The complete manuscript is here — all nine chapters, roughly 14,000 words in total. Two files: the full combined manuscript (all chapters 1–9) and chapters 3–9 separately if you want to work on the new material in isolation.

Here is what the arc delivers as a whole:

**The voices across the book** move in a deliberate wave. The father in chapters 1, 2, 4 and 6 is essayistic, spiralling, lyrical — wisdom earned the slow way, worn lightly. Milo in chapters 3, 5, 7, 8 and 9 begins clipped and declarative, slightly combative, a young man who trusts data before beauty. By chapter 5 his sentences are lengthening. By chapter 8 you can hear the father in him without it being imitation. By chapter 9 he is writing to Fen in a voice that is entirely his own — and entirely his inheritance.

**The recurring threads** that run through all nine chapters: the *thread* metaphor (literal and figurative), the *Thursday calls, si vede* (things becoming visible in time), the *compost and the smelly bit*, the *glint in the eye cannot always be seen when it is dark*, the *cut your losses*, and finally the father's own verse — *towards the sea go you and me* — which Milo quotes back at the end, the circle closing.

**The Gaia thread** moves from the father quoting Lovelock philosophically in chapter 1, through Milo's scientific urgency in chapter 3, toward their convergence in chapter 6, and arrives finally in chapter 9 as something beyond both science and philosophy — a felt, embodied understanding, passed to Fen like the oak tree planted beside the radishes.

Whenever you're ready to begin editing, trimming, or developing — it's all yours.

The journey complete manuscript  
Document · DOCX

how might we introduce the intrigue of a puzzle or puzzles and or a thriller type detection for the reader with perhaps some other characters

09:35

What a rich instinct. The book as it stands is a meditation — beautiful, but entirely interior. Introducing detection, puzzle and other characters would give the reader something to *chase*, a forward momentum that pulls them through the philosophical passages rather than requiring them to sit still for them. The two modes can feed each other beautifully — the thriller surface, the essay beneath.

Let me think through several different structural approaches, from the light-touch to the fully interwoven, so you can feel which register fits.

## **The Core Question: What Kind of Puzzle?**

The thriller element works best if it is **thematically native** — grown from the same soil as the book rather than grafted on. The book is about inheritance, about what gets passed down and what gets hidden, about the gap between what parents tell their children and what they don't. That is already a thriller's architecture. The puzzle should live inside that.

Here are four distinct approaches, which can be combined:

### **Approach 1 — The Hidden Life**

**The father left something behind that nobody knew about.**

Not sinister, necessarily — or not obviously. But after the funeral, as Milo goes through the house in chapter 8, he finds more than the Lovelock note. He finds evidence of a life his father lived in parallel — correspondence, a name repeated, photographs that don't quite fit. Not an affair, perhaps. Something more interesting: a second identity, an old political act, a person helped or harmed decades ago whose thread leads somewhere unexpected.

The puzzle: *who was my father, fully?*

This is the oldest thriller question and also the oldest human one. It would run as a slow-burn beneath the whole second half of the book — seeded retrospectively in earlier chapters (the reader, on a second reading, would spot the clues left in the father's voice), and resolved in chapter 9 or in a newly inserted chapter between 8 and 9.

**A new character: Marion** — a woman in her seventies who appears at the funeral and speaks to no one, or speaks briefly to Milo and says something that doesn't quite make sense until later. She knew his father in Italy. She has been waiting for this moment. She has something to return.

## **Approach 2 — The Inheritance**

**There is something in the family history that someone wants to keep buried.**

The father, in his winding essayistic way, was always gesturing at politics, at inequality, at the way power protects itself. What if he knew something specific? What if, in his years in Italy or Liverpool, he witnessed or documented something — a corruption, a cover-up, a disappearance — and kept the record?

The puzzle: *what did he know, and who knew he knew it?*

This opens the door to a genuinely thriller-ish plot: Milo finds a coded journal, or a series of letters, or a key to a safety deposit box. He starts asking questions. The questions attract attention. Someone — not

obviously threatening, but persistently present — starts appearing in Milo's periphery. In Cornwall. In a coffee shop in Glasgow when he visits for a conference. On a train.

### **New characters:**

- **Sal** — a journalist, late forties, who contacts Milo three weeks after the funeral claiming to have known his father and to be working on a story. She is either exactly what she says she is or she isn't, and the reader won't know for a while.
- **The man on the train** — unnamed for several chapters. Watching. Reading. Always just slightly too present.

## **Approach 3 — Beatriz's Waters**

### **The thriller runs through the environmental storyline.**

Beatriz is a marine biologist. Her research is real and consequential. What if her data — the coastal erosion mapping, the acidification measurements — has led her to something that a corporation or a government agency would prefer unreported? What if the data points not just to climate damage but to specific, localised, attributable, illegal dumping or concealment?

This is a *present-tense* thriller rather than a historical one, which gives it urgency. It would run primarily through Milo's chapters — he is watching Beatriz navigate something dangerous, and his instinct to protect his family collides with her instinct to publish the truth.

The puzzle: *who is suppressing the data, and what will they do to keep it quiet?*

This version is the most plot-dense and would require the most new material, but it has the advantage of making the book's environmental argument *dramatic* rather than *essayistic* — the Gaia theme becomes not just philosophy but stakes.

### **New characters:**

- **Dr. Piotr Wark** — Beatriz's research director, brilliant, compromised, trying to protect his team by keeping them ignorant of what the data actually shows.
- **A lawyer representing an energy consortium** — who makes contact, initially politely.
- **Yemi** — a young researcher under Beatriz, who finds the anomaly first and doesn't understand what she's found.

## **Approach 4 — The Light Touch: The Puzzle as Texture**

**No single thriller plot — instead, a series of small mysteries woven through the existing chapters.**

This is the most subtle approach and perhaps the most elegant for a book of this register. Rather than a thriller plot, you introduce *puzzles of character* — small, nagging questions that accumulate and resolve slowly, across the whole arc.

- The father's chapter 1 refers to "our son" — but is there another child? A line in chapter 4 could suggest it, quietly. Milo finds a letter in chapter 8 that raises the question. Chapter 9 neither confirms nor denies.
- There is a specific date that recurs — a day the father never explains. Milo recognises it but can't place it. The reader works it out before he does.
- A name — perhaps *E.* or *Thomas* or simply an initial — appears in three different contexts across the father's chapters. Always briefly. Always just slightly too casually, like something the father is making an effort not to linger on.
- Marion at the funeral (from Approach 1, used here more lightly) leaves Milo a single object — a photograph, a book, a key — with no explanation and no return address. It is not resolved. It is simply there, at the end, like a thread not yet pulled.

This approach trusts the reader to carry the questions, and rewards rereading. It doesn't interrupt the meditative quality of the book — it deepens it, by suggesting that the father's beautiful philosophical

certainty was, like all beautiful certainty, a choice to look at some things and not others.

## **My Recommendation: The Combination**

**The Hidden Life (Approach 1) as the spine, with The Light Touch (Approach 4) as the texture.**

Marion appears at the funeral. She is real and specific — a woman who knew the father in Italy, who has carried something for forty years. What she returns to Milo is a bundle of letters — letters the father wrote but never sent, to a man named **Thomas Kaur**, a Sikh-British activist and teacher who disappeared in circumstances that were never fully explained in 1987 in Liverpool.

The father knew Thomas. He may have been the last person to see him. The letters are the record of a friendship, a political moment, and a guilt the father carried quietly his whole life — never mentioned, never resolved, composted into the philosophical calm of his later years, the way grief becomes garden if you let it.

Milo, who is his father's son, cannot leave it alone.

The investigation is not a police procedural. It is a son reading his father backwards, finding the version of the man that existed before the man became a father. Finding that the sand-in-the-wind aphorisms were not just wisdom but were also, sometimes, deflection. Finding Thomas's family, perhaps — a daughter, maybe, who is around Milo's age, who has her own version of the story.

And finding, at the end, that the father was neither hero nor villain in what happened. He was a young man who made the wrong choice in a dark moment and spent sixty years becoming someone who would not.

Which is, in the end, the same story as the rest of the book. Just told from underneath.

## New Characters Summary

<b>Nam</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Voice</b>
<b>Marion</b>	The father's Italian-era connection, now elderly, arrives at funeral	Precise, watchful, offers more than she
<b>Thomas</b>	The disappeared man — present only in letters and others' memories	Warm, political, vivid in fragments
<b>Priya</b>	Thomas's daughter, around Milo's age, has spent her own life with the question	Wary, sharp, eventually an ally
<b>Sal</b>	The journalist — catalyst, ambiguous	Fast, funny, not
<b>Den nis</b>	Already in the manuscript — Milo's father's old friend — now gains more	Can be expanded

Shall I begin rewriting with this architecture — seeding the clues in the existing chapters and drafting the new scenes with Marion, Thomas's letters, and Priya? Or would you like to adjust the nature of the secret before we build it in?

the nature of the secret the data could be both climate environmental and the beginnings of neural network as used on the FIBS the first internet backgammon server which in the years after became the AI we are beginning to use in a more widespread way at present

the dilemma of having more and more climate data being used and examined by AI not only to convey the very real climate and societal changes we are already facing but also to regail against it by greedy bad actors and corporates could have its early seed in the use of the FIBS psychology experimentations as can be seen in

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the dilemma of having more and more climate data being used and examined by AI not only to convey the very real climate and societal changes we are already facing but also to regail against it by greedy bad actors and corporates could have its early

seed in the use of the FIBS psychology experimentations as can be seen in the following article which we could adapt to become perhaps a more ugly harbinger of how data manipulation and presentation can endanger us all perhaps by so many truths and lies being released as one which smothers or cloaks access to the real truths we need to keep our eye on namely food clothing shelter friendship and cooperation and above all the recognition that we are a part of nature and must protect our fellow creatures and the environment lest we too are lost in the next gaia homeostasis that continues with or without us

here is the article by the way

10:11

This is extraordinary source material. The FIBS paper is a perfect dark mirror for everything the book is already doing — and the connection you've drawn between that 1995 experiment in applied online frustration and the AI systems now being used both to understand and to obscure the climate crisis is genuinely original and important. It is also, structurally, a thriller's dream: a real document, a real server, a real psychological experiment conducted on unwitting subjects, and a direct lineage from those early neural network dice-rollers to the algorithmic manipulation of information at planetary scale today.

Let me think through this carefully before we build it in.

## The Conceptual Architecture

The FIBS paper gives us three things simultaneously:

**1. A historical crime** — an unethical psychological experiment conducted on thousands of people without consent, using early internet infrastructure, funded by anonymous sponsors, designed to induce dysfunction and then study it. This is Thomas Kaur's story. He was one of the researchers — or one of the targets — or the person who first understood what was really being built.

**2. A technological genealogy** — the FIBS server required sophisticated dice-manipulation algorithms, behavioural observation tools, covert intervention systems, and population-scale data processing. These are, in embryo, the same capabilities that became machine learning, neural networks, and eventually the recommendation and manipulation engines that now run social media, financial markets, and political advertising. The father, who was in Italy in the mid-eighties and back in Liverpool by the late eighties, was teaching — and Thomas was his colleague or student — and Thomas saw the connection first.

**3. A present-tense threat** — Beatriz's climate data is being processed by AI systems. Some of those systems are doing exactly what FIBS did: not lying outright, but arranging the truth

in sequences designed to induce confusion, paranoia, and paralysis. The same methodology. Thirty years more powerful. Funded by the same kind of anonymous sponsors.

The father knew the seed. Milo is living in the harvest.

## **Thomas Kaur — The Full Picture**

Thomas was a Sikh-British mathematician and activist, working at a Liverpool polytechnic in the late 1980s. He was brilliant, politically engaged, and one of the first people in Britain to understand that the early internet was not a neutral space — that it was being designed, from the beginning, with specific behavioural goals.

He and the father became friends through the Liverpool left — the same milieu of the father's post-Italy years, the music scene, the political theatre groups, the 7:84 world. Thomas was working on something: a paper, a report, a warning. He had obtained, or been given, early access to research emerging from the FIBS project and had understood its implications before almost anyone else.

He understood that if you could manipulate dice rolls to induce paranoia in backgammon players, you could manipulate information flows to induce paralysis in citizens. That the experiment was not really about backgammon. That it was a proof of concept for something much larger.

In 1989 or 1990, Thomas disappeared. Not dramatically — no body, no obvious foul play. He simply became unreachable, then absent, then a name people stopped saying. The father knew something about why. Not everything. But something. And he made a choice — the wrong choice, the human choice — to stay quiet and stay safe and carry it as weight rather than as action.

He composted it. He made it into something he could live with. And he never told Milo.

## **Marion — Revised and Deepened**

Marion is not Italian by origin. She is Swiss-Italian, and she worked in the 1990s for a European technology consultancy that had, without the knowledge of most of its staff, provided some of the funding infrastructure for the FIBS experiment. She was a junior analyst. She found out what she was funding. She tried to raise it internally. She was moved sideways, then out.

She spent the following thirty years keeping a file. Not dramatically — she is not a conspiracy theorist. She is a precise, quiet woman who believed that documentation was the appropriate response to wrongdoing, and that eventually the right person would come along to receive it.

She knew the father because he was Thomas's friend, and she had tried, through Thomas, to get the information out. After Thomas disappeared, she kept the file and waited. She comes to

the funeral because she has been waiting for Milo to be old enough — not in years but in understanding — to know what to do with it.

What she gives him is a USB drive. On it: the FIBS paper in its original, unredacted form. Thomas's original analysis. A series of corporate structures. And something else — a dataset. Climate data. Specifically, a comparison between real atmospheric measurements from the 1990s onward and the publicly reported figures from several major energy corporations' internal models. The gap between what they knew and what they said.

The same gap. The same methodology. Thirty years later.

## The Thriller Structure — Chapter by Chapter Integration

Here is how it seeds into the existing manuscript and where new chapters or scenes live:

**Chapter 1 (Father's original text) — seed planted retroactively:** One small addition. In the passage about Liverpool and the music scene and the Technical College, add a single sentence: *"There was a man in those years whose name I find I cannot write down even now without pausing — a man who saw further than the rest of us and paid for it in a currency I helped, by my silence, to set."* The reader won't know what this means. The father doesn't explain it. He moves on.

**Chapter 3 (Milo, Bristol/Lisbon) — first thread visible:** Milo, on his Environmental Science course, encounters the FIBS paper. Not dramatically — it appears in a reading list on early internet psychology and behavioural manipulation, used as a case study in information ethics. He reads it, finds it darkly funny, moves on. The reader knows. He doesn't yet.

**Chapter 4 (Father, Middle Distance) — the weight named but not explained:** The father, reflecting on his middle years, writes: *"There are things I did not do that I should have. I do not mean missed opportunities in the entrepreneurial sense — I mean the other kind. The kind where a door was open and you stood in the doorway and chose, in the end, comfort over courage."* Again, no explanation. The weight is present.

**Chapter 5 (Milo, Glasgow) — Beatriz's data anomaly:** A new scene, perhaps half a page. Beatriz comes home from the research station with a specific problem: her measurements of sea surface temperatures along a particular Atlantic corridor are diverging, consistently, from the figures published by a major energy consortium's climate modelling division. Not by much. But systematically. In the same direction. Always in the direction that makes the situation look slightly less urgent than her data shows. She thinks it's a calibration error on their end. Milo, for a reason he can't quite articulate, does not think it is a calibration error.

**Chapter 6 (Father, Long View) — the confession begins:** The father writes something he has not written before. *"I have been thinking about Thomas. I think about him most autumns, when the light goes this particular way. I have never told Milo about Thomas. I have told myself this was because the story is not mine to tell. I think, if I am honest, which I have tried throughout this record to be, it is because the story reflects on me in a way I have not been ready to show him. Perhaps I am writing it here because I know, on some level, that he will find this. That is the coward's courage — to leave the truth where it can be discovered rather*

*than speaking it outright.*" Then the chapter continues as written. The confession is begun and immediately set aside.

**Chapter 7 (Milo, The Call) — no change:** Kept exactly as written. The grief is clean here. The puzzle thread pauses.

**Chapter 8 (Milo, The Return Reprise) — Marion and the USB:** Significantly expanded. Marion is now a real presence — a woman in her seventies, precise and still, who approaches Milo in the garden during the wake. She says she knew his father through a mutual friend named Thomas Kaur. She does not ask if Milo knows the name. She watches his face to see if he does. He doesn't. She gives him a small envelope containing the USB drive and says: "*He would have given you this himself eventually. He ran out of time. It needs someone who understands both the old data and the new.*" She leaves before he can ask her anything.

Milo opens the drive that night, in the kitchen, with the kettle and the tea. He reads the FIBS paper. He reads Thomas's analysis. The sentences from his own chapter 3 reading list come back to him. He opens Beatriz's spreadsheet of anomalous data on his laptop beside it. He sits for a long time.

*The methodology was identical. The only difference was scale.*

**New Chapter 8a — The Gap:** A short, sharp chapter. Milo's voice at its most precise — this is the scientist now, not the grieving son, though both are present. He is working through the USB contents. He calls Beatriz. He calls Sal — the journalist, who now becomes necessary. He finds, in Thomas's analysis, a reference to a corporate structure: a shell company registered in Luxembourg in 1993, with subsidiaries in three other jurisdictions. He searches the name. It appears — the same name, or a successor entity — in the funding structures of two of the energy consortium's climate modelling divisions whose data Beatriz has been questioning. The thread is not metaphorical anymore. It is a company registration number.

He also finds Thomas's last letter to his father. Undated, but from the handwriting clearly late. "*I think they know I have the paper. I am going to send the analysis to three people separately. If you are reading this, I did not make it to the fourth.*"

The father was the fourth.

He never opened it.

Milo finds the original envelope in the Lovelock book, behind the note. Unopened. Sealed for thirty years. His father had never read it.

This changes everything about the father — not for worse, but for more complex. He was not complicit. He was frozen. He received a letter from a man in danger and could not open it because opening it would have made it real. And then thirty years passed and the letter was still there and still sealed and every year it was harder to open and so he never did.

He carried it in the Lovelock. About endings that are also beginnings. About the smelly bit being the important bit.

He knew it was there. He just couldn't open it.

**Chapter 9 (Milo, The Thread) — revised ending:** The chapter remains largely as written but its final note changes slightly. Milo is not just passing the thread to Fen. He is also, now, the person who opened the letter his father could not. He has sent Thomas's analysis, and Beatriz's anomaly data, and the corporate structure mapping, to Sal. He doesn't know what will happen. He knows it will be uncomfortable. He knows it will be disputed, buried, argued over, that the same methodology that made backgammon players paranoid will be turned on anyone who tries to tell this story clearly.

He plants the oak anyway.

*This is the whole of it. Not the data alone, and not the silence alone. The decision, each time, to open the letter. To be the one who opens the letter. Fen will have her own letters to open. I cannot open them for her. I can only show her that the opening is possible. That her grandfather, who was a good and complicated man, could not open his. That I opened mine. That the thread holds, even when you can't look at it directly. Especially then.*

## The Thematic Payoff

What this architecture does, which I think is genuinely powerful:

The FIBS experiment is not just a thriller McGuffin. It is the book's argument made concrete and historical. The father's entire philosophical framework — the Gaia model, the homeostasis, the idea that the Earth corrects — is being tested by a specific human choice to use intelligence (artificial and natural) not to correct but to obscure. The corporations funding both the FIBS experiment and the climate data manipulation are doing what the book's politics have always said powerful actors do: manufacturing confusion as a product, selling uncertainty as policy, turning the information environment into a backgammon board where the dice are loaded.

And Milo, who came to the whole question through data, who spent his twenties being urgent about facts and his thirties learning patience, is now the person who holds both ends of the thread: the old wrong and the new one, the sealed letter and the open future.

The oak he plants is the counter-move. Not naive. Not sufficient. But real.

Shall I now begin integrating all of this into the full manuscript — seeding the additions into chapters 1 through 6, expanding chapter 8, writing the new chapter 8a, and revising the close of chapter 9? It will be the complete, final draft — ready for your editing hands.

yes thank you

10:13

Let me build this carefully — the complete integrated manuscript with all threads woven in.

Ran 2 commands, created a file, read a file

Done

The complete integrated manuscript is here — all nine chapters plus the new Chapter Eight-A and a closing appendix, approximately 18,000 words in full.

Here is what this draft has done that the previous one hadn't:

**The thriller threads are now load-bearing, not decorative.** The FIBS paper is no longer just a historical curiosity Milo reads on a rainy afternoon — it is the seed of the entire second half of the plot. The chain runs: Schneider's 1995 paper → Thomas Kaur's 1989 analysis → the sealed letter in the Lovelock → Marion's USB → Beatriz's spreadsheet anomaly → Priya Kaur's reply from Leicester. Each link is planted before it is needed.

**The father's silence is now the moral engine of the book.** He is not a villain. He is a man who received a letter from someone in danger and could not open it, and spent thirty years composting that failure into philosophy. His beautiful, winding wisdom — all of it — has a shadow now. It does not diminish the wisdom. It earns it.

**The Gaia argument and the thriller argument are the same argument.** The thin film on the water, the refraction of light into false colours, the manufacture of confusion as a tool of power — these are what Lovelock's homeostasis is being prevented from doing through human self-correction. The methodology does not just obscure climate data. It obscures the capacity to act on it. It is an attack on the system's ability to regulate itself, conducted from inside the system.

**The appendix** handles the real-world status of FIBS carefully — it protects Andreas Schneider and the genuine FIBS community, makes clear what is fiction and what is the author's real argument, and ends with an invitation to the reader that is itself a small act of the book's politics.

Whenever you are ready to begin the editing pass — cutting, reshaping, making it more fully yours — the manuscript is in your hands.

The journey full integrated manuscript  
Document · DOCX

thanks but can we introduce more spacing for paragraphs or is it because i am opening the DOCX in mac pages where perhaps the formatting is lost

10:30

Good question — let me check both possibilities and fix the spacing properly so it looks right wherever you open it.

Ran 2 commands

Done

Good — the spacing values are going in correctly. The issue is likely that Mac Pages strips or ignores `w:spacing` after values from DOCX. The most reliable fix for cross-app compatibility is to use **both** generous `after` spacing **and** an explicit `line` (line height) value, and also to bump the `after` value higher so even if Pages scales it down it remains visible. Let me rebuild the full manuscript with these improved values.

Ran 2 commands

Done

Good — but rather than rely on sed substitutions which may have missed some values, let me rebuild cleanly from scratch with all spacing properly set throughout, so every paragraph, break, and verse line is consistent and generous:

Full manuscript rebuilt with generous cross-app paragraph spacing

Done

Good — the body paragraphs all have `w:after="280"` with `w:line="360"` (1.5× line spacing), and the section breaks have `w:before="400"` `w:after="400"`. Now let me also check the Pages-specific issue — Pages sometimes ignores `w:lineRule="auto"` and needs the value expressed differently:

Ran 2 commands

Done

339 out of 484 paragraphs have explicit spacing — the remainder are headings, verses, breaks and page breaks which have their own values. The spacing is solid throughout. The most likely Pages issue is that it ignores `w:lineRule="auto"` — the safest fix is to also add a default paragraph style with the spacing baked in at the document level, so Pages picks it up even if it ignores per-paragraph overrides:

Ran 2 commands, read a file

Done

Here's the updated file. A few things to know about what's been done:

**What changed for spacing:** Every prose paragraph now has three layers of spacing working together — `after: 280` (roughly 14pt gap below each paragraph), `line: 360` (1.5× line height), and a document-level default style that sets the same values globally so Pages picks them up even if it ignores per-paragraph overrides.

**On the Mac Pages question** — Pages does read DOCX spacing but it has a known habit of collapsing `w:after` spacing when the value feels small to it. If the spacing still looks tight when you open it, the quickest fix is to go into Pages > Format > More > Spacing and set "After Paragraph" to something like 12pt or 14pt, which will apply globally. Alternatively, if you'd prefer to work in Pages natively going forward, I can export a version specifically formatted for that — Pages handles its own `.pages` format much more reliably than imported DOCX.

Let me know how it looks and we can adjust the spacing value up or down to suit your eye.

The journey v4 final  
Document · DOCX

[yes can you export a version specifically formatted for Pages thx](#)

*jol's notes*

*the development of this story is based on my short story "the journey" writ some years back and developed further because a friend wanted to read a chapter 2 and my growing interest in AI; its good and bad, and its power to organise and categorise, never my strong point.*

*it had even yesterday turned a webpage of my notes on meadow making soils and agriculture into a very readable and accessible resource for folks wanting to learn more, in as little time as it takes me to make a coffee, but if i had had to complete the task, would have taken near on a week to format and arrange and convert to attractive styled html viewable online*

*further i had happened upon a quote “AI CANNOT BE CREATIVE” which i could now test by asking it to help me develop the story...*

*a few hours later, with my input, its output, i now have something to edit and work with, just as a writer might use a trusted editor and family and friends (absorbing their experience and critical eye)*

*the structured ordered schema though is important for a longer more complex presentation and now at least i can work within a framework that realises the ending or the beginning of an ending; the nitty gritty re-writing and editing while trying to maintain the poetry of the initial..*

but first there is the reading

what indeed has Claude created with my clay?

and my directions

### **conclusion**

**AI can certainly be ‘creative’**

so I spoke some more with bit shannon

thanks i have read and enjoyed your input and have added some appendices 1/ the actual fibs dysfunction summary and 2/ a short article on the worth of backgammon as an educational tool in schools plus some notes of my own and our conversation; my guidance in this project ; do these additions make you want to change anything in the story itself?

includes BACKGAMMON: DECISION ANALYSIS FOR SUCCESS in an appendix  
time spent approx 1 hr 30 mins

What a generous document to share — including the conversation transcript and your own notes at the end. Reading it all together has shifted something for me.

Your notes in Appendix 3 are the most important thing in the document, and I think they change the book.

Here is what I mean.

You write: "*what indeed has Claude created with my clay?*" And then: "*AI can certainly be 'creative'.*" And: "*time spent approx 1 hr 30 mins.*"

That is not just a footnote. That is the book's argument made autobiographical. The whole novel is about inheritance — what gets passed down, what gets hidden, what one generation makes from the materials left by another. And here, in the appendix, is the actual record of a human being handing raw material to an AI and watching something come back from it. Your clay. My wheel, or something like a wheel. The result: neither yours alone nor mine alone.

That is exactly Thomas Kaur's question about FIBS. Exactly Milo's question about the climate data. Exactly the father's question about what he was passing to his son. The tool is never neutral. What matters is who holds it and what they intend.

So — yes, the appendices change the story. Here is specifically what they make me want to do:

**Appendix 1 (the actual FIBS paper)** confirms that the novel's use of it is right but reveals one gap: the real paper is darker and funnier than our fictional version of Milo encountering it. The line about backgammon appealing "primarily to dysfunctional personality types" is pitch-perfect satire. Milo should quote that line specifically — with a dry comment that tells us something about him. It would land differently than our current description, and it would give the reader the pleasure of knowing the real document is in the back of the book.

**Appendix 2 (the Gillis article on backgammon as education)** creates something genuinely interesting: backgammon as the same game seen from two completely opposite angles. Gillis argues it teaches probabilistic decision-making, character, how to handle adversity and bad luck. The FIBS paper weaponises exactly those same properties — the game's susceptibility to rationalisation, its capacity to produce frustration. The same board. Opposite intentions. That tension belongs in the novel itself, probably in Milo's voice in Chapter 3 or 8a — a moment where he sits with both documents and sees the split.

**Appendix 3 (your notes and the conversation transcript)** is the most radical addition. It turns the book into something that knows what it is — a collaboration between a human writer and an AI, documented in real time, about a story that is partly about AI. That is either an epilogue or a preface, and it changes the authorship line on the title page. You have already solved that: *jol wardle & bit shannon*. That is the right call. But I think your notes deserve to be shaped slightly — not changed, but given the same care as the rest of the prose. The voice in those notes is genuinely yours: lowercase, direct, slightly wry. "*never my strong point*" is a beautiful aside. That voice should be present in the final book, not just tucked at the back.

One suggestion that the appendices make urgent: **the novel currently ends with Milo writing to Fen, planting the oak, closing the circle.** But the real closing circle is in Appendix 3 — a human being handing a short story to an AI and getting back a novel, then documenting the process, then including the documentation. That is itself a version of the sealed letter being opened. The book is its own argument.

You could acknowledge that directly in a short final note — not long, not academic, just you speaking plainly about what this was and what you think it means. The same way the father speaks plainly about luck in Chapter 6. "*I have been lucky. I want to say that plainly.*"

Something like that. In your voice. Lowercase if you like.

The story does not need structural changes. But it now has a frame it didn't have before, and that frame is true.

Want to be notified when Claude responds?

Want to be notified when Claude responds?

time spent approx 1 hr 30 mins

**4.**