

THE  
**A W E S O M E**  
HEADFUX,

*A Novel  
in Three Parts:*

WHO? WHAT? WHEN?

by

*Will Lorimer*

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*'I could be bounded in a nutshell,  
and count myself king of infinite space.'*

➤ W<sup>m</sup>. Shakespeare's Hamlet. ☞

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*Introduction to the Present Edition*

IN THE BEGINNING,  
*the*  
WHOLE NATURAL  
*was* ONE

THE METSHATSUR: *Book of the Word*

**I**t was a story so vast indeed, vistas extended beyond its pages, and Heaven looked down on hidden depths between the lines. A book in which what was dictated was written in letters so large, the words were incomprehensible to the characters they described, whether involved in the illusion of it all or condemned to the margins and watching the action from the footnotes.

In short, it was a world unlike any other and yet it was much the same. A world of near and far, out and in, past and future, all somehow contained between beginning, middle, and end.

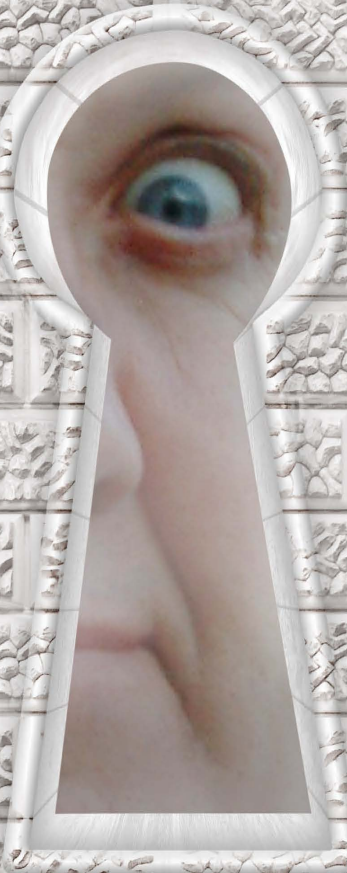
The Book, always it was about the Book. And yet the Book<sup>1</sup> was a side issue, a distraction from the main action, the meat out there sandwiched in the minds of ruminants chewing the print from the pages, chewing what wasn't from what was. Digesting, cogitating, galumphing great herds of giant grazers. Readers let loose to wander the meadows of the world so described, fell into labyrinthine tracts and only escaped with the help of specially trained teams of editorial operatives, who themselves often got lost, never to reappear.

A small world, yet unguessably huge in its ramifications, dominions, and uncertainties, as will become clear well before the end. However, first we see it as a wobbling speck on a screen, then a blob, vague and unfocused; gradually the image sharpens, natural features emerge, the coastlines of continents grow larger, and then fall away as we zoom on in...


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1- The Book of Eternity, or 'Metshatsur,' as the Ancient Ma'atians first called it – erroneously, as it was actually a collection of books, the precise number of which was a matter of theological debate.

WHO?



E V E R E M P T Y,  
A L W A Y S F U L L,  
A b y s s *IS*



THE METSHATSUR: *Book of Deception*

1

**M**y awakening, as will be shown, occurred when I first became aware of my master. First impressions count, especially for Mark Two News Heads. However, then not having any direct experience to judge my master by, and in my newly-awakened state having no access to the memory files of my predecessor, I did not realise he was, in nano terms, big. That I only learned later, when at last I had the chance to compare him to others of his kind. So he was tall, something I should then have known, for it was consistent with his bloodline. But despite his relative height, which imparted a certain clumsiness in the cramped living conditions where I found him, it soon became apparent that even so he possessed a grace that is best expressed in the well-worn nano phrase: 'to the manor born'. Endowed as undoubtedly he had been, in his prime, my master then only had a small estate: a one room slum apartment, which was mortgaged anyway, and me – a Mark Two News Head. Yes, this was the sum of all his possessions and didn't amount to very much at all, relative to his contemporaries, as I later learned. Picture him then, as I first saw him.

‘Good morrow, good Master,’ Head warbled from the mantelpiece, as, ducking under the door lintel, Seth Tamson-Stewart entered the small apartment, having just hung out his washing on the railings of the common landing outside. ‘The weather is set fine for today, with a high of fifteen degrees multi-grade, expected around tiffin in the mid-afternoon.’

‘Tell me something I don’t know,’ Seth groaned, again regretting that in his frustration at not finding an on-off switch, he had torn up the instruction manual, which had explained that Head only allowed for three conversation modes: 18th century Faustian, 18th Century Chavvy, and 18<sup>th</sup> Century Drunken Oaf.

‘Yes indeed, good Master. Overnight, the Bank of Dreedland announced today’s base rate remains unchanged at forty-five percent.’

‘Once it was just three-point-five percent and stayed that way all year.’ Seth sighed, stooping to glance at his reflection in the mirror above the sink as he waited for the kettle to fill in the kitchen cubby-hole at the back of the small room.

‘That was a historical low, good Master.’

‘Yea, yea,’ Seth muttered, impatiently regarding the slow trickle of water issuing from the tap, minded that ever since the collapse of national asset values, the suicide rate was the one statistic not published, and nowadays the fashionable means of departure was picture messaging mid-plunge after the obligatory air kisses and staggered farewells at launch parties held on the roofs of landmark buildings in high-rise districts. Consequently, in Tall Town (as Old Nippy was commonly called by its natives) and the failing commercial heart of New New (as they referred to the

newest district of Nippy), pedestrians looked up all the time and so often tripped over stiffs on the pavements. Bodies were left prone where they had fallen, or set with backs propped against one of the boarded latte houses that were such a feature of the Great Flatline – as the recession became known following the Year of the Big Dipper, when plummeting stocks reached historical lows across the board – the corpses’ pale parchment faces and clothes ticker-taped by wind-blown refuse which circulated the tracks and kerbs in cunning spirals of confetti no-one seemed to notice.

‘Only good news,’ Seth pleaded, suddenly noticing the kettle was overflowing, ‘not more pain of nano-existence!’

‘The Rich Chancellor of the breakaway Federation of New Oldlands States<sup>2</sup> has at last ruled out attending the summit. Reaction from other Natural<sup>3</sup> leaders has been muted ...’

‘Well, at least one Natural leader has his head screwed on. Summits never achieve anything,’ Seth said, glumly regarding the kettle. He was glad he wasn’t reduced to scavenging for firewood, like his poorer neighbours, who these days were cooking their meals on the communal brazier the good old community association had set up on a lower landing. ‘Or didn’t you know?’ he said, hoping his electricity supply didn’t cut off before the water boiled.

‘On the contrary, good Master, protocols agreed by the Natural leaders at the last summit –’

‘Leaders,’ Seth snorted, reaching for the tray. ‘Co-opting the average bus queue would do better than electing those parasites to dine out all year round on the public purse.’

'I don't know how you can justify that remark, good Master.' Head frowned. 'You could be reported -'

'Don't even think about it! That was a confidence given in the privacy of my own home. You would be in breach of contractual obligations,' Seth blagged. 'I've already told you, I need something positive, please!'

'Such as, good Master?' Head said, his lidded eyes covertly tracking Seth carrying the coffee tray over to the desk, where he stood for a long moment, staring out through the imperfections of old window glass at the dome of the university, which loomed over the facing ridge of the gloomy Gallowgate opposite.

'Use your imagination,' Seth snapped, feeling, as he always did when he looked at the dome, that he shared a kindred spirit with the gilded statue on the pinnacle: the 'golden boy', with his torch, saluting the risen Eye of the Makkar, still haloed in blue above the Monument of the Book, on the craggy summit of the Cat, an extinct volcano which, though much reduced by the passage of time, dominated the city, and looked like a recumbent cat (hence the name).

Yes, Seth reflected, *a moment to savour*, realizing it was later than he had thought, observing that in the sky, the climate shields<sup>4</sup> were descending, and soon would shade the celestial iris above. As ever, their penumbra turned the day dull grey from mid-morning on.

'I do not have an imagination, good Master,' Head responded, untruthfully.

'Well, use whatever you have!' Seth snorted, putting off the next moment no longer, easing into his seat in the tight space between the small window and his desk, the only uncluttered surface, on which sat a keyboard and a computer screen.



‘I will do my best to oblige, good Master.’ Head leered lopsidedly, the skin-regrafts of his translucent cheeks glowing with the worms of sub-capillary processors. ‘A forensic examination of the recent archaeological find in the Cat’s Ribs suggests the cache of twelve bearded dolls dates from the early eighteenth century. The fact that the beards are false implies a connection to a gentlemen’s<sup>5</sup> club when shaving became fashionable in Auld Nippy during the Great Unbearding Era following Dreedland’s accession to the WC.<sup>6</sup> More problematic is the thirteenth coffin.’<sup>7</sup>

‘I know all about the beards and the empty coffin,’ Seth sneered. ‘That story was in yesterday’s New Nippy Evening Times.’

‘Today’s early edition is not out yet.’

‘Well give me something from the morning papers. Must I remind you, I need some inspiration for this fuxing novel I’m supposed to be writing.’

‘Might I then suggest a digest of pet rescue stories from around the Three Tablets?’

‘Why do you insist on using such outmoded religious terms?’ Seth interrupted.

‘Because, good Master, by our contract, the employment of such terminology was implicit when you selected eighteenth century faustian - ’

‘Yes, yes,’ Seth cut in, ‘but whatever your speech mode, and the Makkar alone knows – they all sounded the same to me – that statement is inaccurate. Since the discovery of Sumpty in the late seventeenth century, everyone knows there are four ‘tablets’, or continental landmasses, as is the *modern* scientific description.’

‘Good Master, that is a matter of interpretation. Though indeed Sumpty was discovered at the start of the great era of Colonial expansion by the Rumpty powers, the Thearchs of the Blind Scholars yet consider it to be an outlying part of Tumpty, and so the Law of Three still pertains.’

‘Fux the Blind Scholars of Knot and the Book,’ Seth snapped.

‘Good Master, is it wise to imprecate against the Metshatsur?’

‘Probably not,’ Seth snorted, ‘but miserable though it is, this is my house, and the city ordinances do not yet extend within these walls.’

‘Indeed, good Master.’ Head nodded, almost imperceptibly, ‘For your edification I have assembled a compendium of press releases from government departments?’

‘Too much information drives a head mad!’ Seth groaned, minded of his professor father’s relentless assimilation of facts. ‘Don’t you know that, Head?’ he added, his attention drawn by the slow settlement of coffee grains in the transparent pot before him.

The curvature of glass presented a face that was broad as his was long, brown eyes instead of blue, sallow skin whereas his complexion was tanned and freckled. And yet despite its feline seeming features it *was* his face, looking out darkly, looking in on himself, withholding memories of a time before ...

*Before what?* Seth wondered, blankly, sensing a shadowy quicksilver something or other shifting below his earliest conscious recollection: when, tucked up in his pram, he had gazed at star spawn circling in the miracle of creation that was the firmament above. A memory from *before* somehow related to the icon of the News Head reflected over his left shoulder, looking in as he was looking out at the riddle of the latest edition of the Eternal Now.

*Next, Head had memory files to recover. As a matter of record, those had belonged to his predecessor, but could as well been his, since this particular Mark Two was a tweaked-up Mark One.*

*The first memory Head had accessed was of black plastic. Sucking, fixing, suffocating black plastic. Not that, as a nanokin, he needed to breathe, but like all of his genus, he was programmed to go through the motions, to do as his operating programs demanded, and punctuate every 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> systole, or syllable if he was speaking, with a shallow exhalation or inhalation. Otherwise, nanokins could hardly have succeeded as nano simulacrum and hence gained the tablet-wide acceptance they had. But perforce that acceptance was limited, and so the Makkar, in His wisdom, had woven into the mesh of each nanokin filaments nigh-on indestructible, as his master had found to his cost on a couple of occasions. The first was when his master stood against a background of sulphurous smoke, staring down his alter ego, who stared back up, as he tumbled down into a fiery pit. And the second? Well, Head would come to that, but first he had to get those memories in order.*

With a start, Seth surfaced from his dwam,<sup>8</sup> depressed the coffee pot plunger with a resolution he hardly felt, and demanded with as much authority as he could muster, ‘Head, give me the latest official kill ratio between NunCom Shavers and Knottistas<sup>9</sup> fighting on theChord.’

‘Two thousand one hundred to seventy in the last two hours, good Master,’ Head announced, cheerily. ‘Which works out at a ratio of thirty to one.’

‘That’s if you believe the official statistics,’ Seth muttered, filling his cup, the coffee just as he liked it: strong and black and straight from the pot. ‘Personally, I never do.’

‘The Shaver figures are all I have to go on, good Master, since Knottista communiques never provides a comparative body count.’

‘Yea, yea, I know,’ Seth blew steam off his cup. ‘Anyway, I am sick of the fuxing NunCom X-Ade. How many have there been now?’

‘Five, good Master, if you count the abortive X-ade led by The Xtian Thearch Innocent the Second in -’

‘Oh don’t go into detail, please, I hate all that religious history! What I want to know is what has this war got to do with Dreedland?’

‘Energy, good Master! Without the kinetic reserves of the Chord region, where would we be?’

‘We?’ Seth sneered. ‘You would not exist, Head. Whereas I would be down at the local pedal station, pumping with the best of them, generating electricity for my coupon<sup>10</sup> just to get a brew, I

suppose.’ He took a tentative sip. ‘But then my mortgage payments would be subsidised by the state, because otherwise property values would crash. In which case I would be a winner not a loser.’ He grinned, warmed by the thought. ‘Yes, that confirms it,’ he chuckled, ‘even if they bring in a national tax on blankets, I remain firmly against the ongoing X-Ade.’

‘Indeed, good Master.’ Head nodded his scarred but shiny pate. ‘Your opinion is in full accord with that of the majority of Dreads. According to the latest DMRB poll, published in today’s New Nippy Times, seventy-seven-point-two percent consider the NunCom X-Ade a complete waste of taxpayer’s money.’

‘Sweet Suffering X,’ Seth cursed. ‘I told you I need positive news, not more stupid statistics. Just keep on like that, and I warn you, Head, I will hurl you over the landing railings outside. That would be something to share with the neighbours, eh?’

‘On the contrary, that would be most unwise, good Master. A local by-law passed by the city council expressly prohibits deliberate acts of damage to all nanokin products within city boundaries.’

‘I know that, Head, but I didn’t ask for you, did I?’ Seth said, aware of the ridiculousness of conversing with a News Head which, for all its apparent cleverness, was ultimately insentient – even if Nippy Council in their *culturally correct* deliberations deemed otherwise; an unsurprising verdict since, in his considered opinion, the small-minded councillors scarcely qualified as members of the nanorace themselves, so driven they were by the pursuit of *grubb* – as dirty money was called, whether deriving from the imposition of penal by-laws which were but thinly disguised taxes, or in the form of pay-off’s from lucrative city contracts and valuable municipal

buildings sold for nominal sums, apportioned amongst Numpties in the know.

‘I’d take care to be more circumspect with your drivel, Head,’ Seth went on, even though he knew in this case threats were a complete waste of time, ‘otherwise I might leave you down in the Gallowgate for the WONT’s to kick about.’

‘Then, good Master, since as I understand it the egregious “Wee Over Nippy Team” of juvenile hooligans are minors, you would be held responsible and a fine would be imposed upon my return into your possession.’

‘You are presuming a lot on the efficiency of the council’s environmental enforcers, let alone the honesty of Nippy citizens,’ Seth laughed.

‘Oh no, good Master, I assure you I am not. There is no resale value in Mark Two News Heads since, from manufacture, our location is tracked by implanted transmitter.’

‘Yes, but I never bought you, so *my* name is not on any register.’ ‘Oh but I assure you it is, good Master. *You* are licensed owner number two-zero-zero-four-five LD two-five ...’

‘So the council enforcers have assigned me a number. But what if I knew the perfect method of disposal?’

‘I assure you, good Master, given the scope of my tracking devices, the superior qualities of nano-polymers employed in my construction, and the back-up resource of tablet-wide search and rescue, such a course is out of the bounds of possibility.’

‘That’s what your saleskin operating programs tell you,’ Seth snorted at the absurdity, feeling trapped, but arguing all the same. ‘They have to, since all that’s keeping up national asset values is the indestructibility of nanokin rental products and the penalties

imposed on unwitting owners for time and services never sought. I never heard of News Heads before nor, when I think about it, the Gilgamesh Corp., your manufacturer, which makes you exclusive and therefore expensive. So the bill, when it inevitably comes in, is bound to be astronomical. Since I'm never in funds I'll then have to sell my flat, the only asset I ever had, and join the penguins demonstrating on the street. But just supposing your programs have it wrong.'

Seth paused, catching a gleam in the droopy eyes affecting disinterest up on the mantelpiece. 'If there was no trace, how could anyone prove I got rid of you? Hey,' he started, 'Maybe I could work that into my book. With no body, in your case *Head*,' he smiled, knowing nanokins were cued to facial expressions, 'there would be no nano-crime, at least not one anyone could prove.'

*Seen from a distance, Tall Town, as the Old Town of Nippy was known by locals, was quaintly futuristic, with its smoke-blackened tenements straddling the kinked spine of King's Walk. At the lower end, representing the coccyx, was the palace, secure between the Cat's craggy paws; above it, approximating the sacral vertebrae, the medieval mausoleums of the Sovereign High Protectors of Nippy; then came the lumbar region, spiked with the characteristic tri-corn spires of a pair of Dreed Kirks vying for the Makkar's attention, the domes of the rival Royal and National Banks of Dreedland, the retro-gothic Sheriff and High Courts, and the tall Supreme Numpty Temple of Feenumpty; finally, where the crooked spine was most out of line, marking the lowest of the cervical vertebrae, the City Chambers of the perennially corrupt municipal administration.*

However, backbone of Old Nippy though these imposing buildings doubtless were, even at the most generous estimate, their number still fell short of the requisite total of thirty-nine vertebrae, which the spines of almost all warm-blooded nanos possess. However, if the other major historic buildings, lost by the ravages of time, fire, or siege, were added to the tally, the correct number was reached. That figure was also significant in that it accorded with the numbers of sacred 'steps' or degrees, of the Ancient Order of Feenumpty, which originated in The Old Town of Nippy, many centuries before.<sup>11</sup> It was a popular belief, long held by citizens, that the grand buildings of Kings Walk (missing and actual), marked the ritual upwards passage of a Numpty through all the degrees of the order, from his initiation as entered Apprentice, as symbolized by the Palace, at the foot of the mile-long Walk, to his final ascension to Illumined Grand Master, upon reaching the Thirty-Ninth Step, as represented by Nippy Citadel, which was perched on a blasted rock called the Footstool of Heaven.<sup>12</sup>

The Footstool's stone shone with a black gleam that contrasted with the dull sheen of the grey sandstone blocks fronting the town houses in the classical parades, circles, and squares of New Nippy below. Connected by a fine 18<sup>th</sup> century bridge, with soaring stone arches spanning the municipal gardens, Auld and New Nippy had, in turn, been succeeded by the even newer New-New, a retro-chic glass and breeze-block conurbation spreading up from the docklands of Japhet, down the coast, built to house a cascade of cash-rich migrants fleeing the catastrophic flooding of Westminton following the sudden reversal of the tablets' poles ten years before.

